



Love by L. Shannon

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*THE VAMPIRE ORACLE:*

*LOVE*

*By*

*L. Shannon*

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**Love**

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## **Dedication**

As always—for my family, including those who raised a wild child, those who tolerate my distracted adulthood and the newest side of my family, the readers and writers who nurtured the tortured author and helped me grow in a whole new direction.

## Chapter One

Jason Sawyer was about to die...*and it was about damn time.*

The Mistress's fangs tore at his throat, sucking his blood down in long, lusty swallows. Thrilling euphoria flooded his mind. The emotional barrage was a complete lie, nothing more than a lure the damn vampires used to tempt and subdue their victims. His mistress didn't love him or even desire him. He knew it, but after twenty years in her ruthless care, the truth didn't matter. He simply had to have it. He hated her and was addicted to the high as badly as any heroin addict ever could be.

And just like that street junky, risking it all for the next fix, he was about to pay for it.

He struggled, clawing at her arms. He didn't want to escape, but a little struggle was quickly rewarded with another burst of sensation. The Mistress liked him to play prey.

Pleasure spiked through his body, pulsing through his veins and lifting his cock into a throbbing erection. *Must have some blood left after all.* His heart raced and he let his eyes fall closed, accepting the coming end, praying she allowed him one final release.

The Mistress pushed him back against the foyer wall. Her petite body writhed over his in a mimic of sexual frenzy.

Even as he felt the weakness seeping from his fingertips up his arms, he couldn't help rolling his hips, rubbing his jeans-covered cock into

her side. The friction was harsh, almost too much, so good he repeated it again and again.

And then the doorbell rang.

The Mistress dropped him, letting him fall to his knees behind her like unwanted trash. She left him there, in a boneless heap, to answer the door. When they were alone again, would she finish him, take his last drop? Lord help him, he'd let her. He'd give anything just so long as she filled him with the Blood Kiss while she killed him.

He blinked hard to clear his blurry vision. There was a man standing at the open door, arguing and pointing at him. Rain poured down behind the stranger like a gray curtain, broken only by the occasional flash of lightning.

The Mistress was unruffled as always. "If the desire to save him is so great then take him. He is nothing to me, a shell emptied of all value. Take him and consider him a tribute."

The strange man stepped forward, in an effort to intimidate the Mistress. Most misjudged her because of her size and this stranger was no different. Though, in truth, the dark haired giant was huge compared to the Mistress. He looked well over six feet tall and built like an ox with thick shoulders. Had he been less muscular, he could be a model with his perfect face and stylish black hair.

But his eyes... the blue depths were like flint, cold and hard, eyes of a killer.

That frozen gaze turned on him. "He's nearly dead already. What good is he to me?"

That was when he knew...the man was a vampire. He'd missed it at first, maybe because of his recent draining, or maybe because the stranger hid it so well. There were no flashing fangs, no glowing eyes, and no waves of hunger or need. He looked human, if perhaps a bit pale for any mortal. Then again, his own tan was probably more than a little wilted at this point.

What if the Mistress did send him away? Would this other vamp take him in, offer him what he needed?

"Take him or leave him to die. He's become weak and clingy. I

don't need a toy who gives in so easily." There was a leashed anger to the Mistress's tone, a violence barely hidden beneath the surface.

The man gave him another assessing look, as if he was judging a horse before buying him. The comparison pricked Jason's pride, driving him to his feet in a slow awkward lurch. He wouldn't kneel before these two while they haggled over which would be forced to "keep" him.

One dark eyebrow rose incrementally at his effort. "Does he have any other skills?"

The Mistress spoke in a quiet, deadly purr. "He has many skills and is also quite well formed. Shall I have him strip for you to judge?"

"No, I can see well enough. Is he more than a bed and blood slave?"

"He is." The Mistress flashed him a demanding look. "This one has tended my household affairs for many years now."

Jason took the hint in the angry depths of the Mistress's eyes. He was to prove himself worthy or be killed on the spot. Obviously, since she was done with him, he was going to be passed on to this male in some diplomatic move. *Damn vampires loved their politics.* He looked around for some way to do as she demanded and his gaze settled on an envelope lying on the floor beside the door.

He forced his body to move, carrying him the five feet to the white envelope with slow careful steps. His vision gained a black frame as a wave of nauseous dizziness hit him. The blood loss was by far the worst he'd ever faced.

She'd meant to drain him.

He settled to the floor, kneeling at the Mistress's feet before he fell. After a couple deep breaths, he picked up the envelope and cradled the elegant stationery to his chest while his vision came back.

"...always drain your people like this?" the male vampire asked.

Jason focused on the words as best he could. The man had just challenged his Mistress by offering insult. Shit, what else had he missed?

The Mistress drew in a gasp of air. The soft sound was harsh in the otherwise silent foyer. Even the thundering storm outside stilled, as if holding its breath for her response. Her fingers brushed over his thick

hair, petting him like a dog. "Do not try my patience, little one. I have done my duty and offered my tribute to you as is proper from a visiting guest." The petting shifted. Her fingers sank into his hair, gripping it painfully. "Take him or not, but do not offer insults which you haven't the age or strength to defend."

A long moment passed between the vampires, during which Jason didn't dare move or even breathe. His sentencing would come from a stranger's lips. Would he live with some new Master or be killed by his current Mistress?

"If he can get to his feet, he goes with me." The words were ended with a crash of deafening thunder.

Dillon watched the female warily while the human staggered slowly to his feet. There was a certain amount of pride to the stiff set of the man's shoulders. The slave might be half dead but he was still unbroken. Despite his ragged breath and fast pulse, the man stayed on his feet. The wound at his neck needed attention and he'd need rest but otherwise he looked like he might live.

"My car is in the drive. Go warm it up." He held out the keys and moved just enough for the man to slip past him, through the door. Passing the keys over to a strange human might be a risk, but showing any weakness to the man's pissed off former mistress would be a bigger one. To her he offered a short nod. "Your tribute is accepted. Please consider me at your service while you stay in my city." Not that she would be staying long in Pittsburgh if he had anything to say about it. This female was a killer. He could practically smell death on her breath. Even if she was hundreds of years older than him, there was no way in hell he'd let her stay in his hometown, killing those he considered under his protection.

His car purred to life. It was time to go.

With a hard nod, he spun and left. He trudged back through the freezing rain to his Porsche. Even that short walk chilled him. Chilled him even more than his usual cool body temperature. Fortunately, the human had the car running and warm air flooded the small space. When he slid into the driver's seat, the warmth encased him with comfort.



His passenger though looked anything but comfortable. The poor guy huddled on his side of the car watching warily. With good reason, too. The scent of the still bleeding neck wound dragged at Dillon's hunger. His fangs ached and his stomach clenched. When was the last time he'd fed? Obviously it'd been too long. He'd have to get the scent muffled or he'd have a devil of a time focusing on driving.

Dillon reached behind the seat for the small first aid kit he kept handy. "Your neck is bleeding. You can't spare the blood." He pulled out a large gauze pad and the tape while the guy cringed a little less. "Here, use the mirror and put this on."

The guy took the pad and did as he was told. Once the tape was in place, his hands settled into his lap to toy with a white envelope.

"Do you have a name?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" Dillon couldn't keep the growl from his tone.

The man's fingers tightened over the envelope, as if it could save him from his unknown fate. "Jason, but I haven't been called much but 'slave' and 'hey you' in the past ten years."

"You've been with her for ten years? I'm surprised she hasn't killed you." Now that they were out on the road, he looked over his new "servant". The guy was too lean, and his pale skin was countered by his flushed face. The scent of his fear-laden sweat and leftover physical desire combined as a vampire aphrodisiac.

"I believe that was her plan tonight."

Then why didn't the human sound happy about being rescued? Had he been a willing plaything for the female? No, he'd said slave. "Then I'm glad I stopped for a visit just in time to ruin her dinner."

Jason mumbled something, and slumped, with the mail still clutched in his hand. In seconds, he was limp in the passenger seat and stayed that way for the rest of the short drive.

With the Porsche safely garaged, Dillon rounded the car and opened the passenger door. "Wake up. We're here."

There was no response. Jason didn't come awake even with a shake, but his heart pounded slow and steady.

Dillon scooped him up, slamming the car door closed with his foot. Damn, the poor guy was light. He felt much lighter than he should have considering he was probably close to six feet tall. There wasn't any extra weight on him but he wasn't skinny either. Rather than wake him, Dillon carried him through the house toward his guest room.

As he passed his own bedroom, a vivid image of Jason spread out in his bed tripped up his steady stride.

Damn, he would look good, too good. He continued down to the next room and gently laid Jason onto the bed. "Hey? You awake?" He shook Jason's shoulder which did nothing but tip his jaw to the side, revealing the blood soaked patch of gauze. Shit, he was still bleeding. That bitch of a vamp had done a real number on him.

He gathered up some supplies and returned to Jason's side. He didn't bother to undress him, but did pry the crumpled envelope out of his hands and drop it onto the nightstand beside the bed. It landed face up revealing it had been addressed to Jason, not his former mistress. *Interesting*. He was tempted to open it and maybe learn something more about his new houseguest, but when his fingers brushed the paper—no, he'd leave the man a little privacy.

He turned his focus back to tending Jason's injuries. The moment he pulled the gauze away, he saw Jason had been right. Serena hadn't planned on letting Jason live. Damn good thing he'd knocked on the door when he did. Now it'd take a good bit of effort to get Jason healed up enough to survive. First, he set about cleaning the ragged wound. Then he used butterfly Band-aids to hold the edges together while he focused his energy on encouraging the wound to heal. Usually this kind of skill was used to seal up small punctures left by feeding, but this wound was far beyond the usual. His pale skin had lost the slight flushed look from earlier.

How could that female throw aside a human life so easily?

Soon enough she'd pay for her choices. How much she suffered would depend on if this man lived through the night.

He'd done as much as he could for the wound. He should go out and feed. If he called his brother now, he could meet him in whatever bad

neighborhood was being patrolled tonight. Dillon stood to go, but couldn't make it past the doorframe. *What if Jason wakes? What if he needs me?*

Feeding would wait. He sank into the bedside chair to watch over the human. The long day, needed feeding and the expended energy used to get Jason's healing underway caught up to him in minutes and his head nodded against his chest.

*He was back in his brother's laboratory, flat on the floor and wondering what had knocked him there. He forced himself up despite rubbery legs and swelling nausea.*

*"Easy my brother..." Johnathan caught his arm in a surprising strong grip and helped him balance.*

*"What happened?"*

*"What do you remember?" There was a wariness in Johnathan's tone that was unusual and unexpected from his brother.*

*Memories flashed over him but they didn't make sense. A dark stranger in the lab... Johnathan's sudden interest in the properties of blood. Then his disappearance. And return with the stranger. "I don't know what happened. Tell me."*

*"We are vampires now. You and I both are."*

*The walking dead... "What does that mean? Why did this happen?"*

*"I met a man who was willing to change me. I couldn't bear to lose you like we've lost everyone else in our lives. Now we can continue my work together."*

*Slowly the meaning of his brother's words sank into his mind. They were now damned for all eternity so that Johnathan could continue his work. "How could you?"*

*But he'd known even then that it was his own fault. He remembered Johnathan asking him seemingly pointless questions about staying safe from disease and death, but he'd taken them for the usual ramblings of his far too smart brother. The very last thing he remembered was Johnathan asking if he trusted him... and he did.*

*He might be older and better at many things, but Johnathan was a genius and would never have risked his life above all others.*

*Why were they both now the cursed undead?*

*"I saved us. Now we will not fall to the illness sweeping the city. If I could have saved our mother I would have, but now we will be safe."*

*"What would our devout mother have said to us falling from God's light?"*

*Johnathan straightened and met his gaze. "I don't believe that is so. Indeed we are different now, but how could it happen if not God's will?"*

*It made no sense to Dillon and for once he hadn't wanted to hear an explanation from Johnathan. Instead he'd left, walked out and attempted to find his way in this new and horrible existence.*

Dillon woke with a groan. He knew what would be next in the dream and wanted no part of it. Instead he checked on Jason and found him greatly improved. Then he moved silently back to his own room. After a long shower, he sank into his own bed. Maybe he should pray for strength. How irreverent would it be to beg God to keep away his nightly penance?

No, he wouldn't pray for that. The dream would come. He would die a little more and then wake again one step further into hell.

Dillon lay back and drew up the blanket, letting the high sun force him to sleep... and immediately fell back into the dream that was in truth a memory and all the evidence he would ever need to see how black his soul had become.

*The night he left Johnathan and every one after, he was assaulted by depraved needs and desperate hungers. And within a week he killed.*

*The man stood in the darkest of dark shadows, but Dillon's improved night vision had no trouble picking him out. He saw, too, the knife at the man's side. He should have crossed the street and left the villain to find another victim. Instead he walked too close and waited for the inevitable end of his undead life.*

*Each breath he took as he passed the shadows might have been his last.*

*Yet when he was finally jumped and dragged back into the dark, he lost himself and became the monster. His hunger rose up and commanded his muscles. With the background orchestra of the man's pounding heart and rasping breath, Dillon overpowered him, accepting the knife wound and tearing into the man's throat, gulping down the warm life of him. With the blood came the man's*

*consciousness. He saw clearly how poor, young Georgie had come to the streets to find money to feed his family. How he had hated his thievery as much as Dillon hated the killing.*

*Yet he could not stop. Did not stop, until Georgie hung limp in his arms, beating the last of his life away one laborious thud at a time.*

Dillon jerked awake to the feel of a body in his arms, and the sound of a slow heartbeat, pounding against his side. "What the hell?"

The exclamation woke the human. The man's heartbeat increased and his body tensed for a moment before snuggling in tighter against Dillon's body. One lazy hand stroked over Dillon's bare chest. The motion sent a shiver of awareness coursing through his body.

How long had it been since he'd taken a lover? More than a year at least. Releasing one desire was too dangerous when the very act of pleasure awoke all his darker hungers as well. This man must understand that after living with Serena. Why then did he risk so much by arousing a vampire's passion?

"Why are you in my bed?"

The man sighed, blowing his warm breath over one of Dillon's bare nipples, which puckered at once with the formless caress. "I awoke and felt your need."

"Since I was asleep, that is unlikely."

The human tilted his head back enough to look up at him with those fathomless blue eyes. His expression clearly called Dillon a liar. "Even now I feel your hunger beating at me. I'm yours now, so here I am to serve you."

What the hell was wrong with the fool? He didn't have enough blood to keep his own body thriving and still here he was offering to be dinner... "You're willing to offer your blood that easily?"

"Yes."

The fact that the human had crawled into bed with a blood-sucking vampire and then had the balls to snuggle up to said monster indicated one of two things. Either Jason had been brainwashed by Serena or the guy was seriously cracked. Perhaps both.

Jason's hand continued circling, drifting lower to Dillon's abs. "Are

you going to feed?"

"No." He caught the hand, torn between temptation and torment. He was hard and aching and was bound to do something stupid if he didn't get some space. He pulled free and slid away from the human.

Jason couldn't hold back the slight whimper. "Please do. I can feel how much you need to take blood. Please take mine." He propped himself up on one elbow to face the vampire who had put the space of a pillow between them. The horror in the vampire's eyes was both confusing and shaming. Here he was begging to be bitten and obviously he wasn't wanted.

"I don't want a damn blood slave."

Jason caught his hand before the vampire untangled the blanket. "I'm sorry. I didn't even ask your name."

His cold gaze jumped from their linked hands up to Jason's face. "No sweat. You weren't exactly in a position to be congenial." His voice was deep and icy, but the vampire wasn't nearly as unaffected as he pretended.

Jason saw the small sharp tips of his fangs, slightly overhanging the vampire's lower lip. The vision was sexy and offered exactly what he needed if he could only convince the male to feed. "Please don't let me chase you from your bed. Will you tell me your name?" He tugged at the wall of strength, until the male sank to the edge of the bed. Then he released him.

"Dillon."

"Thank you for taking me from the Mistress. I will serve you loyally in any way you wish."

"I don't want a slave." Dillon's voice dripped with disgust at the word. "Once you're recovered I'll help you find work and a place to live. Consider yourself free."

*Free?* The concept was thrilling and terrifying all at once. Now he would have choices in his life and control over his future. Yet he was still fucked. Because of the Blood Kiss, a prison of desire...he'd never truly be free. Perhaps if he offered enough temptation, he could convince Dillon to feed. "Can I stay here with you for the rest of the day?"

Dillon hesitated then relented with a short nod.

Although the shuttered windows closed out any light, a glance at the bedside clock showed it was barely past one. Dillon must not be a new fledgling or he would be practically forced to take daysleep. But, however old Dillon was, he was still affected by the sun's peak. He yawned, covering the motion with one large hand.

"You should go back to the guest room. It's safer."

"I've been bitten before."

"I noticed," Dillon growled. "Perhaps I don't trust you."

"That would not surprise me, but where would I be without you?" Dead. Discarded with countless other bodies wherever the Mistress disposed of them. "I owe you too much to be a threat."

"Why did you stay with her? Legally she couldn't keep you against your will."

Damn. He would ask that. Maybe it was for the best. If he revealed his shame, maybe Dillon would understand how they could be good together. "The bars of my prison were woven by the Blood Kiss."

"What the hell is a Blood Kiss?"

How could he not know? How many visiting vampires had the Mistress shared him with and nearly all had offered the Blood Kiss while feeding. "When feeding, don't you offer pleasure to your source?"

"No, I don't."

"You don't? How do you keep them from screaming or remembering your attack?" Holy shit! The thought of having this one feed on him churned his stomach. All there would be would be pain and no pleasure. There was only one reason he would let his victims suffer so much. It was another sign of how vicious vampires were. "You kill those you feed from."

Dillon didn't respond. Instead he settled back onto the bed and drew the blankets up enough to cover his boxers, leaving his chest bare.

How fitting was it to be rescued by one of the coldest killers among the vampires, one who killed and offered nothing in return? But how could that be? Most vampires fed daily. Surely that kind of body count wouldn't go unnoticed. So he didn't kill all those he fed from. Either he

was lying about not using the Blood Kiss to subdue his prey or he had some other way of concealing the deaths.

"I suppose I should expect to be staked sometime today."

Actually the thought hadn't crossed his mind, but something in Dillon's voice said he might welcome a good staking. "Since I don't see any handy stakes lying about, I guess it will have to wait for another day."

Dillon arched a dark eyebrow at his sarcasm. Then he glanced toward the open door, an obvious hint for Jason to leave.

A hint he chose to ignore. He'd awakened filled with need and even if he couldn't force Dillon to feed from him, and maybe shouldn't try to, he needed to be close to the vampire anyhow. The male's strength flooded outward and helped him find balance. It didn't end the aching need but did something almost as good. He felt safe. Which was completely ridiculous. He was now at the mercy of an unknown vampire who as much as admitted to being a cold-blooded killer.

None of that changed the fact that he did feel safe and after a life with Mistress Serena, feeling safe was a precious thing. He reached up and touched the gauze bandage at his throat. He'd been lucky to be saved by Dillon. Now if only he could escape the dangerous bonds he still wore. If only he could get Dillon to feed, to offer the Blood Kiss he so badly needed.

The thoughts swirled in an endless chaotic circle. His need to be safe battled with the desperate all consuming addiction.

"Turn the lights off. If you change your mind about the staking, do it in the dark." Dillon settled deeper onto his side of the bed.

Jason turned off the lights and returned to the bed. He tried to keep to his side, tried to force his mind to sleep, but it was all in vain. This was what he hated, this weakness. How could he lose control over his own body? Even now when he was free from the Mistress, even now he sought out the horrors she had raised him on. This male was offering him freedom and all he could do was despair because, as much as he wanted to be free, he had to have the Blood Kiss.

The Blood Kiss...

The feel of fangs sinking into his throat, taking his vein... The



drawing of his blood...the feel of his life feeding another, of his purpose, his perfection and joy... The need was too much.

The next he knew he pushed against the vampire, pressing his lips to the cool comfort of Dillon's flesh, trailing his tongue over puckered nipples and trailing lazy nips down his chest. He ignored the hands holding him back and used his hands to reach lower, stroking over rippling abs so hard they felt like granite, lower to wrap fingers around another hard piece of man, of vampire...

Dillon's cock arched up against the boxers. Taking only a second to push the cloth free, he stroked hard over the erection and down to cup and gently scrape his balls. Whether by shock or acceptance, the vampire's grip loosened, releasing Jason to fall over his body. The blankets were pushed back and their skin connected like fire and ice. And then he found Dillon's lips, kissing him deeply, licking over his fangs, loving how they throbbed at every touch.

Dillon's hands gripped his shoulders and then gentled, sliding down his bare back with a delicious brush of his rough palms. He gasped, breaking the kiss. "I can't do this."

What couldn't he do? Jason paused for a heartbeat. Perhaps Dillon didn't do men. Most of the vampires he'd met seemed to revel in any form of pleasure, at least once they were past the newness of fledglings. What if Dillon didn't?

The push of Dillon's cock, aroused and hard, pinned between them negated any concerns about what Dillon wanted.

"If you can't, then let me." He kissed Dillon, more gently this time.

He moaned and arched into the touch. His hands anchored Jason for a deeper thrusting kiss, and then released him with a jerk. Dillon shifted under him, raising his hands to the bars of the headboard.

Jason didn't need any more invitation. He turned his attention back to Dillon's body. For now, he'd give those fangs a break, but he'd have them again soon enough.

He swirled his tongue over Dillon's nipples, tasting a little salt, as well as a hint of spicy cinnamon. His hands moved over all of Dillon's tense flesh as if he could memorize this moment and pull it out again

later. The power he held over this man-vampire was intoxicating.

Rationally he knew the sense of control was an illusion. Dillon could do whatever he wanted, and if he was old enough, strong enough, he could even command Jason's body with no more than a thought. Neither the Mistress nor her companions had allowed him even the illusion of control. This chance to dominate was surreal and seductive.

This chance might never come again.

He wanted it all. Jason slid down Dillon's body, kissing and caressing. The vampire was broad and muscular, but not heavy. In fact his body was tight, a sign he recognized as one of hunger and a need for blood. But there was more to it than just a current hunger. The simmering energy, the way his body reacted to every touch... Dillon was starving for blood and sex. The need burned between them, arcing like lightning. And he wanted to give what Dillon needed.

How much would the vampire accept?

He was about to find out. Jason threw off the blankets completely and settled between Dillon's thick thighs. He focused his considerable attention on the cock rising hard and begging for touching. He stroked his hands up and down, alternating the force, speed and pressure. Then he added his mouth to the mix, sucking Dillon's cock fully into his mouth and taking him in long deep swallows.

Dillon bucked under him. His thrusting hips lost any sense of rhythm as he growled low in pleasure.

On and on, Jason continued to offer everything he could. Each time Dillon neared release, he varied his motions to hold him back from that final pleasure. If he could push Dillon far enough, string out his need to desperate enough, maybe the vampire would unleash all his desires. Maybe he would feed.

"God help me..." Dillon bellowed.

Jason paused to take in the beauty of Dillon's impending orgasm. His face was flushed, his fangs engorged. The bars under his hands moaned in protest, already bent from their former straight lines. He couldn't hold back any more and he didn't want to. While continuing to watch Dillon, he returned to and doubled his efforts.

His heart pounded in time with Dillon's and in a handful of heartbeats, Dillon came with a roar. Jason swallowed him down, savoring the spicy flavor.

## Chapter Two

Dillon stared at the man curled against his side. The damn fool didn't know what he was doing. Offering sex and feeding was playing with fire, hell, it was playing with fucking brimstone. Then again maybe he did know what he was doing. "You must have a death wish. Just what did Serena use you for anyhow?"

"She used me for whatever she wished."

"You were her blood slave."

"Yes."

"And sex slave as well."

"I was whatever she wanted."

"How could you live like that? Slavery has been illegal for more than a few decades. Surely you knew that."

Jason sighed and ran his fingers through his short hair. "Yes, I know that slavery is illegal, but after a few years of feeding a vampire, I had little choice."

"You always have a choice."

"Bastard. You've never been addicted to the Blood Kiss. How the fuck do you know what my choices have been?"

"Shit."

"Yeah, total shit." Jason left the bed and paced across the room toward the still shuttered window. Perhaps if it had been open he would have stared sullenly out into the front yard. Since it was closed, he turned and paced back to the bed. "Look, life with her was hell, but I couldn't

leave. At first I was a child and didn't know any better. Then, later I stayed for the Blood Kiss and to try and protect my sisters. Now they are gone, and I thought I would be next."

"She killed them."

"Either her or one of the others that she entertains. She is very generous with sharing her slaves with others who are impressed by such things."

"So she kills humans. Does she hunt off the street too?" All the evidence said she did. Dillon had tracked the scent from the latest kill right to Serena. It had to be her.

"I don't know. Most likely." Jason finally stopped pacing and settled back onto the bed.

"Are there any other vampires there now, or just Serena?"

The shutters lifted quietly, but Jason stayed on the bed. "I don't know."

Jason lay back on the blanket. He made no effort to cover his partially aroused body. His eyes offered more sex. Dillon's body reacted at once, but the cost was too great. This time Jason would expect him to feed. Just fucking great. Now he had all the devil's temptations just laying there in bed looking like a dream. Looking tasty enough to kill for... Shit, how was he going to keep from running down this path to hell?

"I'm going out." Maybe some space would help.

Jason rolled away from him, curling into a ball under the thin sheet.

He didn't have time to worry about hurting the guy's feelings. It was time to see what his little brother was up to. At this time of evening he was most likely already out hunting. Dillon tried to remember where the last drug or gang shooting had been. That was where he'd find Johnathan.

Johnathan spent his never-ending nights hunting human vermin, leaving the vampire ones to Dillon, but those two goals sometimes got twisted. This hunt might be just such a case. Not all of the dead found drained in Pittsburgh would be from the vampire serial killer. Some would be his brother's.

Little bro didn't feel so bad about drinking from humans so long as

it was the drug dealing low lives that the world was better off without. A glance at the paper showed a well known nut job was fresh out of prison. Knowing J, he'd be following up to keep the fuck-up on the straight and narrow.

And if the guy had fallen back into old habits, there would be no need for another trial. J would take care of him. Dillon slid into his Porsche Boxster and spun the baby out of the narrow private lane. The only problem with tracking J down was it gave him too long to think.

What the hell was he going to do with a human servant? With a half dead, needy fucking human servant? Maybe he could dump Jason off at a shelter or maybe set him up somewhere and help him get a job... But that wouldn't help Jason get over the problems he had. And damn, but the man did have problems.

He actually expected to be fed on and seemed more than a little pissed that Dillon had passed on the offer. Shit, that's why he'd bolted. How could he stay there, hear Jason's heart pounding, smell the sweet scent of the man's arousal and have any chance of keeping his distance? Not that Jason would let there be any distance. No, he'd crawled into bed with him, given him the kind of pleasure he'd almost forgotten.

"Dammit." He could still feel his hands, taste his lips.

The little convertible flew down the parkway at over one-twenty, and Jason might as well have been in the car with him for all the good running had done.

It didn't take long to get to the East End and took even less time to home in on Johnathan through the faint mental connection they shared. Since the rain had slowed to a cold drizzle, he grabbed up his duster and left the car, taking the last two turns on foot. He found his brother in the midst of interrogating one of the drug-dealing scum he usually hunted.

J threw a look over his shoulder. "Be right with you, Bro."

The scent of blood burned away some of the humanity he'd fought to hold onto. His gut churned and fangs ached with hunger. "No rush." What he'd meant as reassurance emerged a low animal growl.

Johnathan's green eyes shone through the rain and night. And the brilliant analytical mind tore him apart and found him wanting. "Get your

ass over here. You're in need and this asshole has high blood pressure anyhow."

His brother always knew the truth no matter how hard he hid it from everyone else, even from himself. He was still a vampire, still had to have human blood to survive and it had been too long since he'd fed. When he remained across the alley, J dragged the human over to him, pushing the guy into his arms.

"Drink already, before you get too wild to keep control. Not that I care if you drain the dumb fuck, but I know you'll care and then it might be another month before you feed again." When Dillon hesitated, Johnathan snorted in disgust. "When are you going to get over all that pissiness? I know you hate what we are, but it's not likely to change. After more than eighty years you still have to feed or you will die."

"It's wrong to live off the deaths of others."

"I'm not telling you to kill him. I can do that if it needs done. Just take his damn blood before you hurt someone important."

The problem was he didn't want this dealer's blood. He wanted Jason's. He remembered the feel of Jason's pale neck under his mouth. The pulse of blood raced through him like fire. The remembered pleasure he'd found in Jason's arms brought his hunger to a raging agony. His fangs throbbed with need. The man in his arms wasn't wanted, wasn't Jason, but was available.

"Are you going to indulge or just cuddle the asshole?"

"Fuck off." He threw a glare at J then sank his fangs into the human's throat. The drug-filled blood hit his tongue and nausea churned his stomach. He pulled free and pushed the guy back toward Johnathan.

"If you didn't come for blood, why are you here?"

He had come for blood...hadn't he? "I don't know." Dammit, all he wanted was to go back to Jason and drink his fill from him. Of course drinking more than a drop would probably kill the man, so that wasn't going to happen.

"Give me a second to get my friend here on his way, and then we can go somewhere dry and get a beer."

How terribly ordinary. Get a beer, just like any other brothers on

the street even if they were vampires. Shit. How did his brother do it? How did he live the life of a monster and not be torn up by guilt and self loathing? They'd been raised together by the same devout Catholic parents. They'd both been practicing Catholics all their living days.

"Come on, Dillon. There's a bar around the corner. It's a real dive. If we're lucky maybe someone will start something so you can break some heads and let off steam."

"I didn't come here to break heads." Dillon followed him into the bar and back to a corner booth away from the few drunken humans clustered around the pool table.

"So why are you here?"

He was running...hiding, but if he said that J would laugh his ass off. "Maybe I just missed your smiling face."

"Right. So does that mean you finally forgive me for having you turned?" The words were the same joking tone, but behind them was a hurt that had been there way too long.

"Johnathan..."

"Nevermind. Someday you'll forgive me, someday you'll forgive yourself. Until then, no bullshit. Why are you here?"

"You knew I was back in town." He waved the waitress over and they ordered before he continued. "I took care of the problem in Detroit. Glad it didn't take all that long. This Blood Stalker that is in the news..."

"It's not me, so you can quit worrying."

"I knew it wasn't you or any of the locals. We may see things differently, but you're nothing like those I hunt. The thought never even crossed my mind." The beer arrived and he grabbed up his bottle for a long drink. The cool liquid did nothing to ease his hunger or desire to run back to Jason. Shit. "I found the one responsible."

J slammed his own beer back down. "You're sure?"

"Yeah, I tracked her by scent and confirmed her identity last night."

"So what's the problem? Surely you didn't come here to ask me for help. I know how much you hate to ask anyone for help."

"I ask when I need to."

"Yeah, you usually do, so is that why you're here?"



"She is an old one and very powerful, but I didn't come here to ask you to fight her. I was hoping to catch her out away from her lair." Anyway he looked at it, he wasn't likely to be able to beat this old one. Not alone anyhow, which was maybe why he wasn't asking for help. Part of his reason for coming down here was just to see his brother again before taking the crazy bitch on. But he sure as hell wasn't about to say that. "Since you're down here all the time, I was wondering if you noticed any places that seemed particularly prone to drained dead bodies? Ones that aren't yours, of course."

"Of course." J didn't answer, just returned to sipping his beer and watching him with an intensity that left Dillon feeling like he was under the microscope glass. Johnathan nodded slowly, must have come to some conclusion. Then he sipped his beer quietly and glanced around the bar. "If you need me, I'm there. Don't hesitate to ask, because my answer is not in question. She may be a bad one, but this is not the time for you to be saying goodbye."

"I'm not—"

"Tell the truth and shame the devil." Johnathan grabbed his arm, slamming the beer back to the table. "What's happening to you? I thought you were more together than this."

Dillon took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Johnathan always knew. "I'll be fine. The vamp in Detroit was a nasty piece of work." And the bastard had pointed out a few similarities they shared.

"Do you want me to come with you to take out this female? If you think we'll need more help, you know the guys would be willing also."

He let his breath out slowly. "Maybe I will take some help for this fight, but it won't be tonight. I have some more surveillance to do before I can eliminate her."

Across the bar, two of the pool players were hassling the waitress. It was the kind of minor problem that could quickly become a major one. Johnathan tipped his beer back, emptying the bottle in a long swallow. The glass banged down and J was up and in motion. "Come on, my brother. Our wish has been granted."

Dillon threw some money down on the table and gulped the last of

his drink while following Johnathan. Deep down where he didn't want to admit it, he thrived on these minor skirmishes. Hell, he loved the major ones. That was why he hunted vamps. They offered a challenge that no human could match. Against a vamp, his heart would race, his life would be in the balance, he felt alive.

He and J advanced on the young and drunk hoodlums. Johnathan pulled the girl out of the fray and Dillon pushed back a couple of well meaning humans who would have just made the problem worse. The two drunks were easy enough to strong arm. He grabbed the bigger of the two and left the other to Johnathan. Together they half carried the bullies out the door and once outside in the cold rain it was short work to convince the two to head for home rather than go back inside for another drink.

If only his own problems could be solved as easily.

### Chapter Three

Jason paced around the house. After Dillon left he'd tried to sleep, and when that hadn't worked, he'd wandered through the house in an effort to learn more about his new master. No, not master, host or some such shit. As if he knew how to be a guest in this stranger's house.

The damn vampire had bolted like his tail was on fire. And he was now left here aching for the Blood Kiss and for sex. Dillon was one hot undead piece of meat and even seemed like a decent man.

He didn't believe for a second that Dillon was the heartless vampire he pretended to be. If he was, then they'd both have found satisfaction before the sun had set. Somehow he'd found the one vampire out there who wouldn't drain him even when desperate for a feeding.

If only he'd fed...

If Dillon had, he might be dead. Instead he was alive and well, aching with need.

His pacing took him back through the bedroom he'd first woken in and his gaze caught on the white envelope on the nightstand. It was the one he'd picked up for his mistress. Why was it still here? Had he taken it without thinking?

He picked up and lo and behold, there was his name on the front, but not much else. No return address, it just had a postmark from El Dorado Springs, Colorado 80025. Had he been there with the mistress? Even if he had, no one would remember him.

He broke the seal and opened the flap. *Weird*. All that was inside

was some kind of card. Like a playing card or something a psychic might use to entertain or fleece the public. The one side was all dramatic black and red and when he turned it over... His heart slammed into high speed.

It was beautiful. Emblazoned with the word "Love" and picturing two people entwined tightly, like only people who truly trusted and loved could. Oddly enough the one man looked a bit like him. The other was hidden from view by the embrace, but he could imagine those big shoulders belonging to one reluctant vampire.

The thought was comforting. He set the card and envelope back down, and still smiling, he left the bedroom with more hope than he'd felt in years, maybe even ever.

He wandered to the kitchen, hoping to find some human food to distract him from his other hungers. It was a thin hope. Some vampires didn't bother with food at all, since they got so little from it.

But Dillon's fridge was stocked, and even had perishables like milk and eggs, things Serena had rarely bothered supplying. Jason set about with one of his favorite pastimes, cooking.

It was rare he had opportunity to indulge in cooking. For awhile, he was glad to have the house to himself. But by the time the ham and eggs were fried, the momentary pleasure had faded. His mind turned to a darker hunger that couldn't be satisfied with food. When would Dillon be home? Would he indulge in feeding now that his life wasn't hanging in the balance?

*Shit.* The vampire was disgusted with him, with his warped needs. Dillon wouldn't feed. He wouldn't offer the Blood Kiss. Hell, he'd be lucky if Dillon didn't throw him out of the house. Did it really matter? If Dillon won't feed, there was no reason for him to stay. His stomach churned. The thought of eating Dillon's food...he couldn't swallow another bite.

He slowly wrapped the food up and placed it into the fridge. He couldn't stay here. He couldn't wait for a vampire who didn't want him, let alone understand his needs. He stepped out of the house and into the icy storm. The cold wind cut into his borrowed clothes and soaked him in seconds.

He set off toward the road at a slow jog. The addiction burned within him, demanding he seek out the one who would Kiss him. He needed it more than protection from the weather. He needed it more than some illusive freedom he'd never glimpsed. The Blood Kiss was all that mattered.

When he reached the street, he carjacked the first victim he came across, knocking the man aside and taking the car.

Even as he pulled away in the Toyota, shame filled Jason, bringing tears to his eyes. *This is the bottom. There is no coming back from moments like this.* He'd go to the mistress. He'd smile while she drained him. He'd die like countless others, but for him it would be an end of twenty years of suffering. For him it would be a blessing.

A terrible calm fell over him. Grim and dark, it settled around him, numbing the pain and some of the raging addiction.

It was past midnight when he approached the Mistress's mansion.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dillon hunkered down in the shrubs to watch the entrance to Serena's house. Johnathan had suggested the most likely part of the city for the bitch to be caught hunting in. Now all he had to do was be sure she hunted her own food and that she did it alone. So far he'd seen only humans enter the house. Perhaps she was territorial and didn't share her lair with any others.

No, Jason had said she shared him with other vampires.

Shit even the thought of Serena mistreating the human shafted anger through him. Jason had been passed around like a plaything, used and misused by any vampires she chose to hand him to.

The poor bastard. It was no wonder he was so fucked up.

Fucked up and still fucking hot. The cold rain did nothing to slack the heat coursing through his body at the thought of what waited for him at home. He let his breath out in a puff of steam.

He wouldn't have the strength to resist Jason again.

Not that he'd resisted much the first time. Oh, he hadn't bitten

Jason which had taken all his restraint, but he hadn't complained at the fuck-tastic blowjob either. "That man's mouth is a sin all by itself."

The rain fell and no one stirred in Serena's house. Why was he here in the rain? Why wasn't he at home taking advantage of Jason's messed up needs? *Oh hell.* That was exactly what he wanted. He shouldn't. It was wrong of him to even consider using Jason like that after all the man had been through.

But strangely there was a rightness to it also. Against everything he should have felt, he wanted to be with Jason. Not with just any human, but with Jason.

And that was when the Toyota turned up the private drive and plowed into the hedged fence line around the front entrance. The car shuddered to a stop and rumbled into silence. The house's front door flew open, pouring light out over the porch, lawn and car. It revealed the opening car door and the man who fell out, the man rushing for the house.

The light spilled over Jason.

Dillon's muscles froze and it wasn't the damn freezing rain. What the fuck was Jason doing here, running like a wild man back to the house where he'd almost been killed?

Jason's forward momentum was blocked and absorbed by the tiny woman who caught him just inside the entrance. Serena. Her fangs flashed. Jason screamed.

The ground flew under Dillon before he even realized he was running toward them. He had to get to them and stop this murder. Because he didn't have a single doubt that Serena was about to drain Jason, kill him, end his life without a single thought of remorse.

Why had Jason come back? Why hadn't he stayed safe?

None of it mattered all that much as he came face to face with Serena. The female met his accusing gaze over Jason's bleeding neck where she fed.

"He's mine."

Slowly, seductively, but none too gently, she backed her fangs out of Jason's flesh. Jason for his part moaned and trembled in her arms. "Yet

you didn't keep him or offer him what he needs, although all can see you want him." She turned Jason, forcing his head up to face Dillon.

Jason's blurry eyes slowly focused. "Dillon." His voice was raspy, raw. "I'm sorry."

The plea ripped through his gut. "It doesn't matter." He held out a hand to the human. "Come on, let's go home."

For a second it looked like Jason would reach for him. Perhaps they'd walk out of Serena's in mostly one piece. Jason's arm rose and he started to pull free.

Serena tightened her grip viciously. "I don't think so."

"Let him go."

"Not this time." Serena glanced past him. "Get him, boys."

Dillon threw himself to the side, but it was too late. The two vampires hit him, tackling him to the ground. Then it was as if his muscles belonged to someone else. He wanted to keep fighting but those betraying muscles relaxed until he lay passive, flat on his back.

The female leaned over him, while the other two backed away warily. "You have some strength to you, young one, but this is not a battle you can win."

"I won't let you keep him." His voice came out breathy and barely audible.

Serena laughed at the joke which was his helpless rebellion. "You thought this was all about the human. Foolish young one."

This time words wouldn't come at all. He let his eyes demand the answer he wanted.

Which sent Serena off into another gale of laughter. "Stand up, love. I have other plans for you." Her hand caught his and his body rose awkwardly to stand beside her. The most objection he could offer was an eye-rolling glare. She led him away from the entrance, while wrapping her body around his in a cruel mockery of lovers on a stroll. "I intend to make you suffer more than you can at this point even comprehend." Her low sultry voice shivered into his mind.

What had he done to her? Nothing that he could think of, not yet anyhow.

"I know your thoughts. There is nothing you can keep from me, so I will tell you why you will be punished. In the past ten years, you have murdered several of my coven, vampires I made and who were under my protection. For that you must die. But for your insane ego in thinking you could hunt me...for that I will make you suffer your worst fears and beg for death long before I finally kill you."

*Shit, that didn't sound good.*

"No, not good at all." She opened a door and walked him into a starkly bare room. Even before she flipped on the light, he recognized the horror. It was a sunroom, with all glass walls and ceiling. Only the side of the house offered any protection from the coming day. The room was empty, except for thick chains bolted to the concrete floor. "I had this room built for just these special occasions. Note the drain? It makes cleaning so much easier." Her cold fingers stripped away his clothing one piece at a time. "You won't need any of these. You'd only get tan lines and we can't have that." She laughed again at her own joke.

By now he was down to his boxers. She paused and stared hard at his crotch, and to his horror, he felt his body reacting, hardening. Only then did she hook her fingers into the waistband and drag them down his hips and thighs. His cock caught and then sprung free, almost slapping her in the face.

"Mmm, now that is impressive. Perhaps I will begin with a different kind of torture for both you and your lover."

He forced his gaze past her to Jason, struggling in the arms of a male vampire. He was no match of course, and at Serena's nod, Jason was dragged forward and chained to one ring by a foot long chain at his ankle. Jason scooted back away from them all as far as the chain allowed. He was naked and shivering from the unheated room. He crouched on the cement, pulling his legs up protectively.

Would Serena chain him the same way? So far she'd made no attempt to bind him with anything other than strength of her mind.

Her cool breath blew over his ear. "Darling, my mind is more than enough to handle you." She wasn't wrong.

He continued to try and fight back and the most he managed was



an occasional twitch. Out of control, he lay back on the floor, not even able to shiver at the cold concrete when it pressed against his back.

Serena leapt onto him, straddling his throbbing body. Her hands found his wrists, her long sharp nails digging, slashing, ripping. He couldn't pull away, protect himself or even gasp at the agony. All he could do was accept the pain and watch his blood well up and freely race in rivulets toward the drain.

With her blood-slick fingers, she fondled him with harsh strokes meant to bring pain not pleasure. Then she thrust her body down over his. Her claws raked him. Her fangs bit into his flesh. His body was violated.

His head fell to the side when she bit his throat and that was when he saw Jason. Tears trailed down Jason's cheeks, but when their gazes came together they held. *You said there was pleasure.*

*There is only pleasure when the vampire offers it. She wants you to suffer. She wants you to submit but even that will not be enough.*

*She wants me broken.*

*Yes. Jason rocked over his heels. I wish...*

*I know.* He knew what Jason wished. He, too, had his delusions. While Serena saw to his torture, he pictured Jason rocking and imagined he was behind his lover, embracing him. He wanted to comfort Jason with words of a future together or even a future apart, but the lies wouldn't come.

Escape from this torment wasn't likely. He couldn't save them. Hell, he couldn't even keep the orgasm from ripping through his fading body.

Serena stood and stared angrily at the two of them. "You were communicating," she snarled. A motion to the other vampire had the younger male scurrying forward to chain Dillon to the second ring. "Very well, hearing your lover won't be a benefit. Soon enough, you'll hear him scream and beg for mercy." Serena spun and stormed out of the room.

What did she mean by that? Dillon felt control of his body rush back the moment the door closed. He pulled at the chain but of course it didn't budge. The thick metal collar around his neck was locked with a small but sturdy padlock.

Jason came closer. His fingers closed around one of Dillon's bleeding wrists. "Dillon... I'm so sorry."

"This is not your fault, so let the guilt go." The feel of Jason's fingers brought more comfort than he'd expected.

"Can you stop the bleeding?"

He stared down at his wrists. They looked like hamburger. The blood seeped out one precious drop at a time. He would bleed to death. Even though the blood had stopped spraying out, it wasn't because he was healing. The decrease was only due to his lowering blood pressure.

"You can't. I knew it."

"Knew what?" The question made no sense, but that would be the blood loss. His mind would weaken and so would his body. Then he'd grow tired and sleep...the dirt nap kind of sleep.

"I knew you hadn't been feeding well enough. If you had been you'd be able to heal that before... well before this point." Jason increased the pressure over the wounds, but even his long fingers could not cover the whole length of the deepest slashes. "Dillon."

"Yeah?"

"Your fangs are out." Jason's hands adjusted their hold so that his fingertips caressed over Dillon's palms. His voice dipped lower. "She didn't take much of my blood. You can feed from me and then you'll be able to heal yourself."

The sweet scent of Jason and blood...Jason's blood all tangled together and beat a path over top of Dillon's raging hunger. He inhaled once and then again, drawing that perfect combination deep into his lungs. What would it be like to accept the offer, to lean in and bite Jason? No, he wouldn't just bite him. He'd kiss Jason's neck and nuzzle the delicious curve between neck and shoulder. Jason's pulse would thunder just under his skin and he would let that flutter vibrate through lips and fangs.

"Yes. Do it, Dillon. I want you to."

He opened his eyes at the sexy entreaty. When had he closed his eyes? How close had he come to actually biting Jason? "I can't. I can't feed from you." He shook his head once but stopped as a wave of vertigo

flipped the world wrong side up.

“Why can’t you? Why am I not good enough to save your life?” Jason chuckled with the questions but beneath it was an ocean of hurt.

“It’s not that...”

“Then what is it?”

How could he explain? Simple, he’d just tell the truth and then he’d watch as Jason’s face filled with horror and disgust. “When I feed, I take it all.” Not every time. Some of his victims had lived, but not by any control on his part. He studied where Jason still held his hands. He couldn’t watch Jason’s face. That would be too painful.

“You kill just like she does?”

Dillon shrugged. He didn’t want to say he was the same, but in his heart he knew there was very little difference between himself and the woman he’d labeled a killer.

“Most vampires feed nearly every night.” Jason released his wrists and put a little space between them. “How old are you? How many have you killed?”

He didn’t know. He hadn’t kept track of every kill. How horrible was that? He didn’t even know how many people he’d killed. Jason deserved the truth, no matter how he chose to react to it. “I am over one hundred years old and I don’t know how many humans I have killed. In the last year I have murdered five vampires and three humans. I have no excuse for what I am.” He expected shock, anger, disgust and perhaps violence.

## Chapter Four

"That isn't possible. How could you survive on three feedings in one year? It isn't possible." Jason stared at the dying vampire slouched before him. He had to be lying and yet every instinct inside Jason said Dillon was telling the truth. "Why would you starve like that?"

Dillon's shadowed eyes slowly rose to meet his. "I don't want to kill, but I don't know any other way."

What a horrible way to live. Jason understood it so perfectly, wanting something, needing it and yet knowing it was wrong. But he'd given in long ago and accepted that he had to have the Blood Kiss. Dillon had kept fighting his need. "How did you survive if you didn't feed on humans like other vampires?"

"I fed on vampires and I ate human food. Both helped but..." Dillon leaned a little to the side and Jason moved so the vampire could lean on him.

"But you still need human blood, especially when you're injured."

Dillon's head rested on his shoulder. "I hate what I do. I hate what I am." The words were slurred. "I don't want to bite you."

"But you will. That is what this whole scene is about. Serena has made sure you will have to feed on me. Even if you don't want to, your hunger will take control and you will feed."

"Not if you kill me now." Dillon sighed against his neck. "I wouldn't mind and you would live."

But Jason would mind. He wasn't about to let Dillon sacrifice

himself. "How long would I live? My only hope of leaving this house alive is for you and me to get free and for us to leave here together."

"That sounds damn good."

"It does." He stroked Dillon's hair back.

"Why did you come back here? You were safe at my home. I'd have let you stay as long as you wanted. You didn't have to come back to her."

"I wanted to stay with you, but I needed the Blood Kiss." How could Dillon understand? That would only happen if he could explain how bad his addiction was. "You're not the only one who knows how to hate something that can't be changed. The Blood Kiss, it's an addiction. I knew she would kill me and yet the Kiss drew me back. It can steal my mind when the need is great enough."

Dillon lifted his ravaged arms to hug Jason close. The vampire brushed his lips with the lightest of kisses. "If only our end were different."

"Our end? Dillon, I'm not ready to call this my end."

"I'm open to suggestions."

"Are you really open, willing to consider all our options?" Jason held on tight to be sure he had Dillon's attention. "Will you trust me? Will you do your part so that we can both escape?"

Dillon sighed. "Yes, I'll do whatever I have to so that you, we, can get out of here."

Jason relaxed. He knew Dillon would balk at what he was about to suggest but he now had his promise to bully the vampire into what needed done. "You have to bite me."

Dillon pulled back and glared. "I don't want to kill you."

He cupped his cheek, loving how much Dillon fought to protect him. By now the vampire's hunger must be terrible and yet he made no threatening move. "I will show you how to feed without killing. I will show you how to offer pleasure instead of pain."

"What if..."

"Trust me. This is our only chance. Without your full strength, we won't get out of this room. You won't get full strength without feeding on human blood. The good thing about this is your starving will mean I have

to donate less and won't be so helpless during our escape."

Still Dillon hesitated. "If you're wrong..."

"If I'm wrong, I'll be dead and you'll still get out of here." Surprisingly he didn't actually want to die. His suicidal urges had fled at the thought of Dillon sinking fangs in him. Caring for Dillon could be a life purpose, a reason for going on. And for once his addiction wouldn't be a bad thing. He could teach Dillon to give what he needed and together they could both be happy.

*I don't want you to die. Promise me you won't leave me alone.*

Jason choked up at the desperate need in Dillon's mental tone. There was no way in hell he could deny him. *I promise.*

For a long minute they just held each other, letting their hearts beat in one rhythm. Jason waited for the euphoria to end and the crushing despair to return, but still, he felt...hope. How long had it been since he actually looked forward to the future? It had been years. His youngest sister had been the one who had been filled with excitement for life. She'd disappeared five years ago, in what town? Was that Chicago or Minneapolis? He didn't even remember what state had buried the Jane Doe who was his sister.

But he did remember her face and her love. She'd have been happy for him. And she would have kicked his ass for delaying the escape.

He pulled back from Dillon's embrace. "Are you ready?"

"No, but let's do it anyhow."

"It won't be so bad. Most vampires actually enjoy feeding."

"Most vampires are assholes." Dillon's lips quirked up over his distended fangs. "In fact I'll introduce you to my brother once we get out of this to confirm the opinion."

He stroked the hair back from Dillon's face unable to stop touching him. "Are you saying your brother is a vampire and an asshole?"

Dillon chuckled, a low sound that rolled through him. "I'm saying my brother is a vampire and he would agree. He's called me that and worse often enough."

"You do have a nice ass." His whole body was beautiful. He fully intended to worship it once they had the time to, but for now... "About

the biting, you need to stay focused even when in the thrall of the pleasure. It's losing that focus that steals your control."

Dillon gave him a look that said, "duh!"

"I know it's not that easy. I'm not a moron." He slid his hands down to hold Dillon's. "If you can think of something else that is more important, maybe a loved one like your brother, it should help you stay in control."

"That doesn't seem like much."

"There's a lot more to it. We can use a time out word that will allow you to go slowly. I think all your abstinence should make this easier. You've been building up control for a hundred years. This last step shouldn't be hard at all." He pulled Dillon forward until they were head to head. "I trust you even if you don't. We're just going to go slow and talk our way through this."

Dillon's face still looked very worried, set with grim determination.

"I want you to concentrate on biting me once, feed while counting to five then stop." Jason tilted his head to the side offering Dillon the side of his neck that she hadn't bitten. "Just take it slow and focus on control."

Dillon shifted, brushing his fangs over his neck. Then he pulled back again. "What about the pleasure-pain thing. How can I give pleasure to you?"

"You can't, not yet. First you need to be sure of your control, then we can worry about making it fun." He kissed Dillon, bringing their lips together. He carefully kept the contact tame. Dillon didn't need passion screwing with his control, not this time anyhow. Someday soon though, he promised himself that he would push all of Dillon's buttons until the vampire broke and lost all that control. "It won't hurt much, but we need to get through this soon or we'll be caught here in the sunrise."

Dillon nodded. Then he moved in against Jason's throat. Jason... He made it all sound so easy. Maybe it really was easy and all these years he'd been the one to complicate the shit out of the process. On the other hand, he'd rarely had a victim who offered to let him use them to learn on. Jason was unique.

He breathed over the smooth skin on Jason's neck. The throb of

Jason's heart crashed through him. The human was intoxicating. But this was the time for control.

*Bite, count to five, pull back.*

He could do that. He had to. He scraped his fangs over the skin, thrilling when Jason shuddered. They both wanted it. He adjusted and sank his fangs deep toward that pulse. Heat slammed him, rushing sensation through his body, bringing him to life. His hunger swallowed him up. Every drop burning away the starvation until it was little more than a vague memory.

*Are you counting?*

He wasn't. He'd forgotten to count. The shock of what might have happened drained away the pleasure, turning the blood bitter on his tongue. He pulled back swirling his tongue over the small wound, sealing it shut as he retreated.

"You didn't count."

Dillon couldn't lie. "No," he whispered.

"You didn't have to. The counting was to make sure enough of your mind stayed alert to hear me if you needed reigned in." Jason's arms came around him. "You heard me just fine."

Relief was a brief respite from his fears. Just because he hadn't killed Jason didn't mean he hadn't hurt him and didn't mean it would be as bad or worse next time.

"You worry too much. Look at your wrists." The shredded flesh was knitting back together with only a few sips from Jason. "You need more." When Dillon hesitated to attack the neck so willingly offered, Jason straightened. "What's wrong?"

There was more than a little edge to Jason's voice as if he was losing patience. "I'm sorry. The thought of hurting you... I don't want to bite you like that."

"Sweet as the sentiment is, it's complete bullshit." Jason grabbed his hair, forcing their gazes to meet, to lock. "You need this blood. If you want to make it fun than fuck me while you take it. I said I could teach you to offer pleasure rather than pain but I lied."

Lied? Was there no pleasure for the victim? Would he always take



and have nothing left to give?

"I can't teach it to you because you know already. All that you have to do is want your partner to have pleasure and they will. It's instinctive. It can't be taught."

"It can't be taught?"

"No, I don't need to teach you. You didn't hurt me, Dillon. You wouldn't hurt me." Jason kissed him then, a kiss full of passion and possibilities.

With his needs bare and his emotions raw from the back and forth, Dillon let go. He finally just let it go. Everything Jason said made sense and he wanted to believe in that trust. Together they could get through this. Together it wouldn't be all that bad. Hell, it might even be good for both of them.

His naked body forgot about the chill and the discomfort. He closed his eyes. They could be anywhere. All that mattered was holding Jason. So he held on. They held each other. Closer and closer until there wasn't a breath between them. He claimed Jason's mouth, deepening the kiss to a demand, letting his desire come to the surface, sharing everything he was with his lover.

Jason's body came to life. His hips rolled, just as hard and aroused as he was.

He stilled Jason's motion. "This isn't the time or the place, but I want you, more than I've wanted anyone in a very long time." Hell, he wanted Jason more than he'd ever wanted another person, living or dead.

"Are you going to bite me?"

"Yes," he panted into Jason's silky hair. "I am going to bite you. Your blood will feed my hunger."

"Let me feed all your hungers."

He wanted to both argue the impossibility and leap on what Jason offered at the same time. Before he could rally an argument, Jason reached down and cupped his throbbing erection. The first stroke left him shaking, aching and imagining what it would be like to flip Jason over and take his ass.

*Don't imagine. Do it!* Jason rolled over and presented the nicest ass

he'd ever seen, and having him offer up such pleasure...

Dillon couldn't turn away, couldn't say no. He rose up behind Jason, and ran his hands over his body, caressing, attempting to show how much he felt for this man. He nipped at his back and shoulder, loving how Jason reacted to every touch. His body began a slow rocking movement rubbing them together while he moaned low to each love bite.

He shifted to kneel between Jason's ankles, bringing their bodies even closer. *I need you Jason. I don't think I can be slow.*

*Slow or fast, just fuck me already.* Jason angled slightly to show how he was stroking his own body, how he wasn't being gentle. His hand rode his cock with hard strokes that he pushed into.

He closed his eyes against the flash fire of hunger that burned through him from fang to cock. *Damn, you do play hardball.*

This time Jason didn't answer with words. He shoved his ass back and ground against Dillon. The movement brought them flush, sliding Dillon's cock up between Jason's cheeks.

He couldn't take any more. He grabbed his shaft and pumped several time to bring the precome to the tip. Then he rode the length with that dew, while thumbing open Jason's entrance. In a single long stroke, he brought them together. He wrapped his arms around Jason, using one hand to stroke his lover in time with his fucking.

Then he rode that pleasure in long deep strokes until they both shook with the need to climax. He fought his own needs back, holding the rhythm as long as he could. When he'd drawn out the pleasure and Jason was moaning with every stroke, only then did he slam hard and clasp Jason tight, sinking his fangs into his neck.

When the blood rushed over his tongue, the bliss of the feeding threw him into his orgasm. And the continued blood kept him coming all through Jason's climax. He'd never felt so much, so alive.

*Oh God, yes!* Jason cried out in his mind.

The simple reminder of Jason and how he was feeding on his lover's blood brought him back enough to be in control. He wasn't about to taint the blessing by hurting him, not now, not ever. He loosened his bite, licking and sealing the punctures while the wild passion calmed and

eased them back to their individual bodies.

“Well, my lover, do you feel strong enough to break us out of here?”

He relaxed his grip enough to turn Jason and snuggle against him, breathing in their mixed scents. “Mmm...”

“We can snuggle better back at your place.”

Dillon hugged him tight and then released him. “Yeah, let’s blow this pop stand.”

That was when the sun burst over the horizon, taking the world from dim light to deadly bright in the space of an agonized scream.

## Chapter Five

Jason fell back when Dillon exploded upward, snapping the chain to his collar. Another single swipe crushed the thinner chain that held Jason's ankle. Then Dillon was crouched in the partial shade offered by the corner support. Still his bare body released wisps of smoke from every exposed inch.

He rushed to Dillon, using his body to offer what protection he could. "Dillon! We need to get out of here. Can you break the glass?" The question was more to force Dillon to focus than to actually ask about his ability. He'd just broken the heavy chain as easily as most would a strand of hair. The glass shouldn't be any harder.

"I can, but once it's broken I'm sure there will be alarms and I won't be much good." Dillon grabbed his hand. "My Porsche is one block down the street. I might not make it that far."

"Your Porsche won't do me much good. Neither of us has keys for it."

"There's a key under the driver's side rear fender."

Jason kissed him. "Found me a smart vamp, I did. You get us out of this room and get to some shade. I will get the Porsche and get us out of here."

*Deal.* Dillon lurched upright, growling when the sun hit him full on. With a nasty snarl, he threw himself at the glass. It crashed outward and Dillon landed in a bare-assed heap.

The alarms set out blaring with a painful high pitched squeal. He

jumped out beside Dillon and grabbed his arm. "Get up! Get that pretty ass running." Once Dillon was up, he should have out distanced him fast, but he didn't. "Don't wait for me. Just get out of the sun," he huffed out without slowing.

They reached the shrubs and ran quickly around to the shade of the next house. When they paused there, he saw at once that Dillon wasn't going to be able to take any more sun.

"You skirt around the house. I'll run straight for the car and then pick you up on the other side."

Dillon nodded vaguely without looking up. He would be virtually blind in this bright light. Blind and weakening by the second. Even the indirect light would kill him eventually. He lifted Dillon's hand and placed it on the side of the house.

"Take your time. Follow this wall to the opposite side." He hated to leave Dillon so helpless, but it was their only chance. He had to trust his lover to get around the house safely. He took off down the street, hoping he didn't shock too many people with his altogether hanging out in public. Not that he'd care at this point. He just didn't want to risk being slowed down.

Yet he made it to the car without incident and found the key right where Dillon had said it would be. He jumped into the all leather driver's seat and roared the car to life. Then he circled the sporty little car around on the street and headed back for Dillon. He glimpsed a couple men running across the lawn from Serena's house. There wasn't time to use the neighbor's driveway. He plowed up the sloping lawn to the shade where Dillon waited.

The second Dillon was safely inside, he took off down the yard and out onto the street, using all the little car's impressive power to make a speedy getaway. Despite the car's tinted windows, he wanted more protection for Dillon. He glanced behind the passenger seat and found a blanket there which he dragged one-handed up to cover Dillon.

He backtracked the path he'd taken with the Toyota. In no time at all he pulled into Dillon's garage and closed the big door, shutting out the deadly sunlight. "You know Pittsburgh has the worst timed weather. On

the one day we could have used some serious cloud cover, we get the prettiest sunrise." He slowly lifted up the corner of the blanket to see how badly Dillon was burned.

"I'll be okay."

"Of course you will... after some blood, some rest and good bit of healing time." Jason helped him out and into the house. "What do you want first? Blood or rest?"

"A shower."

"Are you sure?" He'd kind of been hoping Dillon would want to head for bed. Not that he'd expected to be jumped right away, but the thought of just being together and safe sounded pretty damn good.

"Oh, yeah. I want us in a shower together and maybe a little blood too."

Jason smiled, despite his rising fears. If Dillon was asking for blood, he must be a lot worse than he looked. "We are dressed for it." Together they made their way to the master bath. While Dillon rested on the edge of the big tub, he adjusted the water temperature in the two shower heads. "You ready to get wet?"

Dillon stood and slowly stepped into the spray of water.

He followed the vampire, stepping in and reaching for the soap. "Will the soap hurt?"

"No," Dillon shook his head.

With soapy trails, he gently washed his lover, while Dillon leaned into his embrace for support. Jason had the sudden vivid image of how they would look together at that moment. The picture took the exact form he remembered from the mysterious card. Had it been some kind of prediction? It couldn't have been. How could anyone guess he and Dillon would end up here physically? Emotionally?

It was crazy and yet, here they were, entwined like the lovers they had become. Not just physical lovers, but deeper. Or at least he was fairly certain it was deeper for both. For now, he'd just have to settle for taking care of his vampire.

There were some places where Dillon's skin was burned and peeling but mostly it was the kind of burn that any other person would

get from too much sun. The lack of life-threatening damage was surely due to Dillon feeding just before the sun exposure. Even now the feeding was helping Dillon heal. With each stroke of the washcloth more healthy skin was revealed, already fresh and whole.

Before long Dillon was barely standing, more asleep than awake.

Jason stopped up the tub and let it fill while he held Dillon, just held him there under the gentle spray. "Here, sit down so we can enjoy this big tub of yours." He shut off the shower and gently forced his lover down until Dillon sprawled in front of him, Dillon's back resting in his lap.

Although the position was arousing, it was also comforting...loving. Their bodies fit together perfectly. No matter the angle, it felt right, like they'd been made for each other. Perhaps he had been made to care for Dillon. The vampire certainly needed someone.

"Wake up, Dillon. You need to feed." When Dillon only moaned and settled in more securely, Jason hugged him tight. The pleasure of this sweet moment eased the nightmare that Serena had built on fear and addiction. He'd never go back to that. Not even in his mind where she held the most power. He stretched and grabbed a razor from a nearby shelf. With a single shallow motion, he slashed his left wrist.

He pressed the bleeding wound to Dillon's lips.

"You need the blood." But he didn't need to ask twice. Dillon cradled the arm and suckled at the wound. Even without a bite, with his blood passing freely, he was flooded with pleasure from the Blood Kiss.

Dillon wasn't a cruel heartless killer. He had a giving soul who offered up all he had without ever being taught or asked.

Tears pricked at his eyes. Affection, acceptance...love. The emotions swamped him and for once he believed them. This was no empty promise, no lie from a dealer to an addict. This was one heart sharing with another. They both still had their scars but...

*We can get through the shit together.* Dillon whispered while sealing the cut. *Please stay with me.*

*Yes, yes, I'll stay.*

*I'll offer you the Blood Kiss if you want, or help you get free of the*

*addiction. But from here on out, the choice is yours.*

"Dillon..."

"You don't have to answer now."

"Shut up, Dillon. I don't have to think about it. I'll stay. I want to stay with you. I can't stand the thought of being anywhere else." It was the truth. There was more though. He wanted to be a partner, not a dependant. "Will you let me help you with your work?"

"Yes. Do you even know what I do?"

"You hunt rogue vampires. You hunt down and kill the ones who prey on humans." He pressed his lips to Dillon's shoulder, resting against him, struggling to put together his next words. "I want to help take the mistress, Serena, down." Not only did he want to see the bitch burn for what she'd done to his family, he also wasn't about to let Dillon face her alone.

"We'll need to take her down fast, before she can regroup or run."

"Do you have a plan?"

"Yeah, we need help." Dillon stood, offering him a hand up.

"Who exactly do you call to help with this kind of thing?"

"I know some people." Dillon lifted a towel and turned, using it to dry Jason. "Vampires. A few of us are determined to keep our city safe and quiet. Together we hung out a very public 'no vacancy' sign for nasty vamps."

Jason listened as best he could, but his body was distracted by the slow glide of the towel as it trailed over his body.

"My brother will come for sure. I should also be able to get Pagan, Sampson and Washington. Possibly Kalib and his wife but I doubt it." Dillon paused, then continued talking while drying himself off. "The five of us should be enough if we hit them before sundown."

"Wait! How can you hit them before sundown? You'll be killed."

"Nah, we have our ways to manage when circumstances call for it."



## Chapter Six

Those ways consisted of Dillon bundling up in layered clothing and thick shades on top of plastered on sunscreen. The good news was that four other vampires would be joining in this hunt and it was set for one hour before sundown.

Jason started up Dillon's second vehicle, a Suburban, loaded down with weaponry. Dillon himself was in the back sorting through the guns and setting out all the correct ammo for each. The first stop was to pick up Dillon's brother Johnathan.

What would the guy be like? Dillon had explained that they'd both been turned at the same time and his brother was a good guy, but they hadn't had much time to say more. He'd know soon enough.

"You have everything you need back there?" Jason asked as he pulled up to Johnathan's house.

Dillon clapped his shoulder. "I got it. Sampson will use whatever I have, but Washington will bring his own toys."

The back door opened and another bundle of clothes jumped in and slammed the door shut in record time. "If you're discussing weapons, I left that to you, bro."

"Hey, Johnathan, I want you to meet Jason."

There was a heavy pause. What if Dillon's brother objected to him being in their lives?

"Is he what had you so fucked up last night? Cause if he is, you will never yank my chain again about the woman whose finger I'm

wrapped around.”

“Let it alone, J. You don’t want to fuck with this.”

“Damn bro, you really fell for this human?” There was a shuffling of motion and then a scarf-wrapped head leaned up beside Jason. “Pleasure to meet you, Jason. Human or whatever, if you can cut his shit, I love you, man. Welcome to the family.” The vampire’s arms came around him, an awkward, brief hug that almost made them wreck into a coal truck.

“Ahh, thanks, I think.”

*Ignore him. Johnathan is what happens when a scientific genius spends a hundred years by himself in a laboratory.*

Jason laughed aloud at that, and then had to focus on the road again to be sure of the directions up through Squirrel Hill to Washington’s not-so-small mansion.

Johnathan whispered, “Whatever my brother said...well you should know he is the result of negative genetic mutation.”

It was easy to like Johnathan. No other vampires had ever treated him like this, like he was an equal. On one hand it was intimidating to think they might expect him to be a physical equal, but it was a true blessing to be valued. Would the others be like Dillon and Johnathan?

When they got to Washington’s house, Dillon moved to the front seat. Then Washington was in the back and they were heading back down the road. Dillon had said they would need picked up because both lived alone. He wasn’t sure what to expect, but Washington was a major surprise.

He settled into the back like a forty-something congressman in a limo. He hadn’t bothered with thick layers like the others. Only a simple black suit covered with a long cashmere coat and long gloves. He’d chosen to protect his face with stylish shades and a wide brimmed hat. Despite Dillon’s prediction, he didn’t seem to have any weapons.

“Dillon, your human is staring at me when he should be watching the road.” His voice was a quiet, controlled calm.

But it was more than enough for Jason to jerk his attention back to the road even as Dillon turned a glare over his shoulder at the vampire.

"Wash, I'd like you to meet Jason. I'd consider it polite if you'd treat him like family."

"You actually want me to treat him as badly as I do you two degenerates?"

"Better, please."

"Consider it done, son." Wash settled back in his seat and left the conversation to Dillon and Johnathan until they reached Sampson's place in Swissvale.

The enormous vampire jumped in, slamming the door, shutting out the bright sun. Once inside the guy whipped off his baseball cap, exposing a shaved black skull above the black and gold Steelers scarf.

"Good to see you, assholes. I've been going stir crazy in that house of mine." Sampson's bass voice rumbled out and filled the car with energy. "Fuck me, Dillon, you're the best. You even brought a snack."

The word "snack" had barely hit the air when Dillon launched partway to the back seat and grabbed Sampson by the throat. "You fuck with him, even touch him with a fang, and I will help all your insides see daylight. Get me?"

"I get you, my man. He'll get no shit from me."

Dillon eased back to the front.

Johnathan said, "Sampson, it'd be wise not to push his buttons on this. Jason is a keeper, not a side dish." The way he took the role so smoothly...Dillon and Sampson must go head to head fairly often.

"Gotcha. Then glad to meet you, Jason. If I give you a wide berth, don't take it personal, true?"

"No offense taken. Good to meet you, too." He glanced at Dillon and was glad to see his lover was calm again. Calm, but the mood of the Suburban had darkened with the incident. Thankfully they were close to Serena's house and soon enough they'd have a way to blow off steam.

"So this guy, Pagan, how's he getting there?" Jason asked.

There was a lengthening silence before Dillon answered, *He will have someone drive him.*

Someone? But he was sure Dillon had said all these guys lived alone.

*He will force someone.*

Ah! Well, that was another can of worms. Guess that would be another guy he'd give lots of room, if he could use people like Serena could.

They pulled onto Serena's street and found the driveway blocked by an armored assault vehicle.

"That will be Pagan. Does he even know how to be subtle?" Johnathan asked.

"No, subtle isn't his specialty." Sampson's voice was muffled as he rewrapped his scarf.

"So what is his specialty?" Jason asked.

"He burns things." Dillon reached over and rested a hand on Jason's thigh. "Today we need his kind of destruction."

Jason drove the SUV up beside the passenger window of the truck. A leather-wrapped figure inside leaned out to shout over the roaring heavy metal music, "Any limits to this shit?"

Dillon said, "None"

And as simple as that, it was time to roll. By unspoken agreement they all exited the vehicles, grabbing up weapons and checking ammo.

Washington, good to expectations, drew out a pair of Glockes. Sampson choose to use a cross bow that Dillon had brought.

But they hung near the vehicles while Pagan set to work. He threw a long hose clear over the roof of the house, turned on some hidden pump and dragged it slowly across to the other side. By the time he recoiled the hose, the house was soaked and the scent of gasoline filled the area. Then he hung weird curtains over the windows.

"What are those?"

Dillon answered, "Triple thick flaming window bags. His own invention for preventing vampires from escaping a burning house."

"Nasty shit," Sampson mumbled.

"Not as nasty as what Dillon has planned," Johnathan said from the rear of the suburban. He picked up a long tubular weapon.

Jason gaped. "Is that a rocket?"

"Grenade launcher." He passed that one to Dillon and got out a

second one for himself. Then he set a box of what must be the rounds between the two of them. Only then did Jason realize just how ugly this was about to get.

Dillon brushed a hand over his shoulder, *We need to be this brutal. If she gets out here, she's strong enough to pick us off. Wash is our oldest and he's only a few years older than J and I am.*

*I understand.*

With a rushing sound and a burst of light, Pagan lit the roof and skirted the building, lighting all the window bags. In a matter of seconds, the whole house was ablaze and all of those on the outside were armed and spacing out around it.

At first there was nothing but the roar of the fire. They could have been sitting around a super-sized bonfire roasting marshmallows. The quiet held an infinite threat like the world had taken a breath and was about to scream.

Then it did. The terrified scream came first, then the fire alarm joined in the blare for help. But there'd be no help for the house or the occupants tonight.

Then there were crashes and screams from several places. Everyone was awake now and there'd be no way out for any of the vampires.

Jason double-checked his Uzi. It was ready and he hoped Serena came his direction.

"Ready, bro?" Johnathan asked while lifting his grenade launcher to his shoulder. Dillon followed suit from twenty feet to his right. They fired at nearly the same time, blasting holes right through the burning walls. Reload and fire, reload and fire. Again and again, even after the first explosions began to blow inside the house.

One vamp was blown straight out a burning window, landing in a screaming, burning heap right in front of Washington. The two silver shots to the head were a mercy for the flaming vampire.

Moments later two more ran through the front door. One had been smart enough to cover himself with a blanket. They were both picked off cleanly by Sampson's arrows.

He figured there might be another young vampire, maybe two,

plus Serena still inside. Maybe even a human or two if the younger vampires had any servants. He felt guilty about them, since they might not have known what they were signing up for. Unfortunately there was no way to get them out without alerting Serena. The best hope he'd been able to offer them was to tell Dillon where human servants usually slept and with any luck they'd be able to avoid obliterating that portion of the house, though by the looks of it, no place would be spared.

The house began to break apart, the wood devoured by the fast-moving fire. Not to mention the grenades had blown out one wall of the house completely. A fire-covered vampire stumbled out of that section into the open air and bright sunlight.

From somewhere on the right side where the humans would be, a series of screams sounded. The high and terrified pitch surely came from a young girl, perhaps as young as his sister had been when Serena had first grabbed them from the street.

He couldn't let the guiltless girl be burned alive. He had to do something, had to try and save her. He ran toward the cry.

## Chapter Seven

"Jason!" Dillon ran after his lover toward the back corner of the house. The screams had torn at him too as well as the guilt that came with them, but this battle was far from over. The screams could be, and most likely were, bait for some very nasty trap. Unlike the other vampires, Serena was old enough to withstand sunlight for a short time. If she could break through their line, she'd be an enormous danger.

If it was a trap, he and Jason were about to be inside it, because Jason wasn't slowing and he wasn't going to abandon Jason. He caught up to Jason at the side of the house. Jason was yanking down the still burning bag from the window.

Between the noise from the fire and trying to breathe despite the smoke, there was no chance to speak aloud. He tried again and again mentally, but Jason didn't seem to hear him, which was a very bad sign.

He grabbed Jason and threw him to the ground, when Jason started to climb in through the broken window.

Jason looked up at him, yelling something but the words were lost. He'd said something about children, saving the children.

He shook his head, but there was no way to explain. Then there was no need to explain.

Serena came through the window. She rushed straight for them, a maelstrom of violence with slashing claws and snapping fangs. If they'd been standing, they would have been doomed. As it was, she had to adjust her attack and it gave Dillon just enough time to roll over and grab

for his knife.

Jason must have had the same idea. He snatched the second knife from Dillon's belt. Both weapons flashed upward, catching Serena, one to the throat and the other straight into her heart.

"You killed me?" There was surprise in her gurgling tone and blood welled up around the silver plated blade. She fell forward a limp shell, a dying body.

Dillon stood and flung the smoking corpse back into the fire. He pulled his hat back into place and waited while Jason checked the still standing room, in case the child had been real, but there was no one there. Slipping his arm around Jason, he pulled him close enough to tug his scarf down and kiss for a brief second. "You ready to get out of here?"

"Yeah, the police and firemen will be here soon. Surely the neighbors have called them by now."

Hard to believe it had only been about twenty minutes since they'd arrived. "Come on. Now is the part where we get to start a new life."

"Let's not throw away all of the old one. I kind of like your friends and your brother seems like a good man."

"You amaze me." Dillon ached to get his lover alone to show just how much he appreciated him. "When we get home, I intend to show you just how much you amaze me."

"Perhaps I'll give you some more reasons to be amazed?"

They came around the house to find the others had packed away most of the weapons and were helping Pagan to repack his instruments of destruction. Johnathan turned their way. "Hurry up, you two, Pagan's scanner has the local firehouse ETA in two minutes. I say we all crash at Dillon's tonight and celebrate."

The others agreed before Dillon could object. *Sorry Jason, looks like we'll have to wait a little for that private time.*

*For you I'm willing to wait, I figure they'll head for home by morning and then we get the whole day to ourselves.* Jason turned to Dillon's vampire friends. "Hey, I saw the *Blade* movies hidden behind Dillon's TV. Why don't we watch those?"

There was a collective groan from the others, except for Pagan, who



perked right up. "I'm always up to see *Blade*. I'm there and I'll even drive these hoodlums in the truck."

"Perfect." Jason hugged Dillon tighter.

And Dillon had never been happier. He ached to tell Jason just how he felt, but in the end he didn't have to say anything at all.

Jason paused at the side of the Suburban. *I love you, too.*

"I offered to help you with your addiction but you know there is another option. I could turn you and then the addiction would never be a problem."

Jason stopped in his tracks. His gaze caught and held Dillon's. The others pulled out in the truck, leaving them alone except for the approaching sirens. Jason reached up, cupping Dillon's scarf-covered cheek and finally saying, "Someday, I want that, but for now I can think of nothing I want more than to offer you the blood you need to survive. Once you turn me, I won't have that to offer you."

*I love you for more than your blood—*

*I know.* Jason jumped up into the Suburban, laughing at the sheer joy of finally being free and with the man he loved. "Come on, Dillon, time to roll!"

And it was. They had their whole future together waiting to discover.

The End

### **Author Bio**

L. Shannon has always been a reader and lover of books, but never considered writing until one night when she ran out of books to read... She began writing that very night as the first line of defense in a battle against insomnia. Her writing has steadily grown into a full-out war against reality. Her friends kindly say reality never stood a chance.

The L. Shannon novels have expanded to fill an entire world with paranormal wonders including Valàfrn werewolves, Tascryn demons, blood-sucking vampires, sexy selkies and many, many more. Be careful if you choose to enter her hunk-filled world. You may never wish to leave...

In the time Shannon doesn't spend writing, she's kept busy by bothering her husband, showing dogs, gardening and watching over her four Butterfly Koi ponds. You can learn more about her writing and her life at [www.lshannon.net](http://www.lshannon.net).