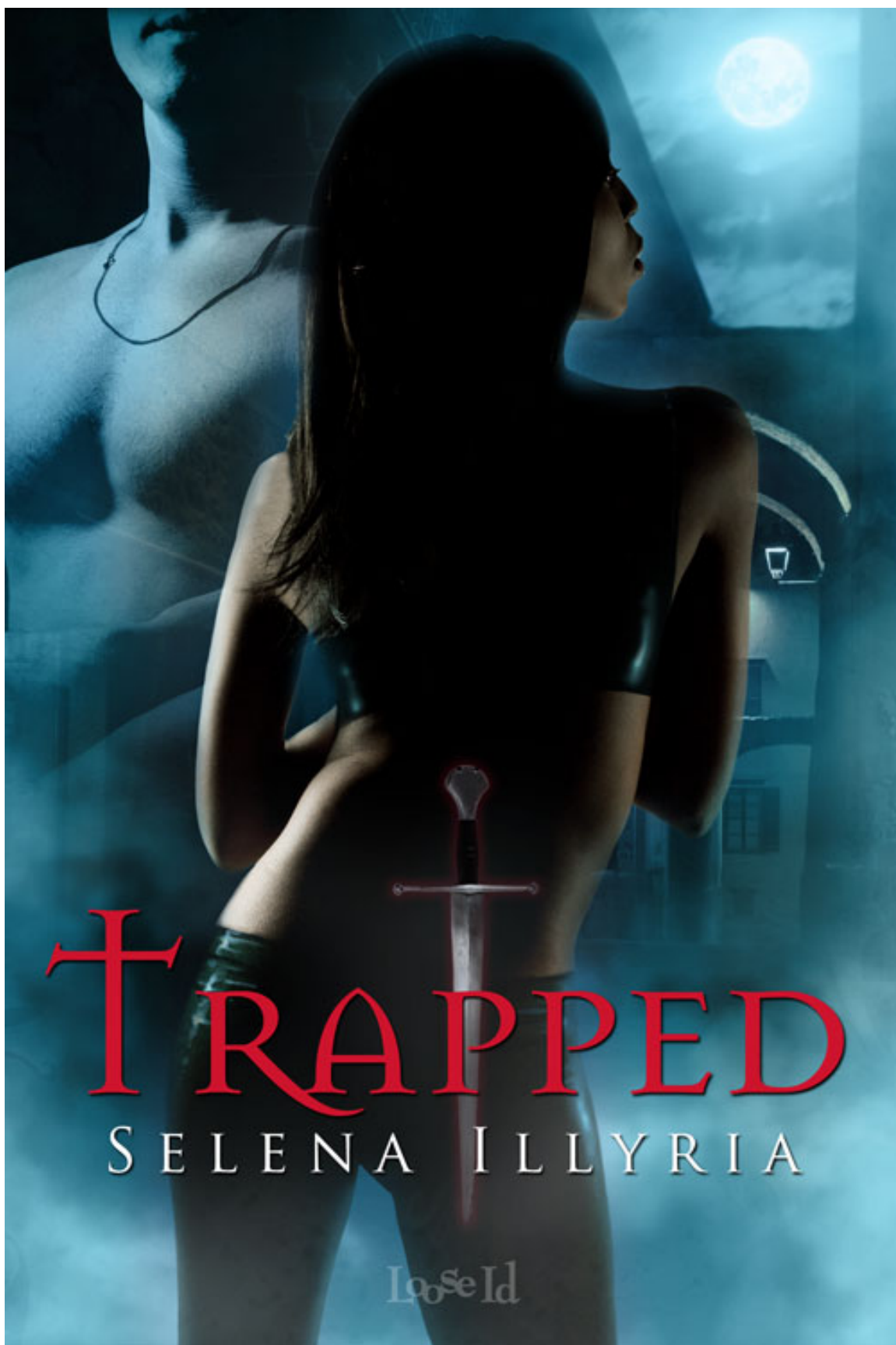




TRAPPED

SELENA ILLYRIA

Loose Id

BLOOD CLAIM:
TRAPPED

Selena Illyria

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Blood Claim: Trapped

Selena Illyria

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Chapter One

Kit walked the halls of the old inn with the representative from Blyder's clan, examining her new purchase. She loved the look and feel of the place, a large cottage done in the Tudor style, and once she got everything in order, it would be the perfect country retreat. The inn looked like it was in fairly good condition, considering it had sat empty for over a year, and all in all, Kit was pleased with what she saw.

"We're sorry we couldn't fix everything in time for this inspection," Anyka said. "You didn't give us much warning. But we did manage to get the utilities turned on and most of the rooms cleaned. Vacuumed and dusted, at least."

Kit ran her finger over a door frame. Clean. Not even a whiff of dust, mold, or mildew in the air. She glanced over her shoulder at the statuesque redhead. "All of Blyder's protection symbols are still in place? Including the pentagram?"

"Yes," Anyka said. "The pentagram is located behind the front desk, and all the wards around the property are still operable. Blyder isn't considered the Vampyre nation's greatest protector for nothing."

"Let's go back downstairs, then. I want a look at the pentagram before I sign my life away."

“I promise you, you won’t regret.”

“Oh, I know I won’t.” Kit tried to calm the excitement that was building as she and Anyka walked down the creaking stairs to the reception area. It was really going to happen. She was finally going to have something to look forward to in life other than being an assassin for her clan. She was going to own her own business.

Downstairs, she took in the overstuffed chairs and sofas, the polished wooden furniture, the paintings and photos that filled the place with affection and warmth. The fireplace stood empty, and the great brick structure looked lonely and sad without a cheerful fire blazing in the hearth.

The reception desk was simply a large counter with a stool behind it, with a phone, a computer, and a few books stacked on the dark wood surface. On the wall behind the counter, a few keys still hung on their hooks. She could barely make out the indentations where the protection pentagram had been carved, but it was there. And it would ensure that she and her guests would have nothing to worry about within the walls of their quaint country retreat.

Grinning, she turned and smiled at Anyka. “Okay. Let’s sign those papers.”

She sat down on a couch across from Anyka and watched her spread the papers out on the table. Excitement rushed through her. She tamped down the urge to squeal in delight and picked up the pen. *I’m a property owner*, she thought and scrawled her signature across the first page.

Anyka extended her hand and smiled. “It was nice doing business with you, Kit.”

Kit shook her hand and walked Anyka toward the door. She wanted to take one more look around before cracking open a bottle of champagne with her clan and celebrating the start of her new project.

Before Anyka could leave, the door burst open.

Rysen stood in the doorway, his presence sapping out all the joy Kit had felt. “You’ve made a mistake. This place is worthless.”

Anger, resentment, and arousal rushed through her, washing over her, each emotion colliding with the other.

“Um, I’m going to go now.” Anyka inched toward the door and slipped past Rysen’s looming form.

Rysen gazed only at Kit, his face a mask of arrogance. Possession sparkled in his eyes. Kit wanted to slap him, wipe that look off his chiseled face. She took in the sharp cheekbones, the lips formed in a cupid’s bow. Thick black eyebrows slashed over hooded violet eyes. His long black hair hung around his shoulders in a curtain of midnight.

Her body flooded with heat, pussy throbbing to life. Her breasts grew full and heavy, nipples stiff with awareness. Goddess, she hated the way he made her feel -- angry, aroused, and at the moment, like a child. He had superiority written all over him, from the way he stood to the look on his face. But he was crazy if he thought he could have her now, after all the humiliation his rejection had caused her.

Crossing her arms over her chest, she relaxed, readying herself for the fight that was about to come. They always fought. First, he insulted her; then, punches were thrown. “Get out, Rysen. This is none of your affair.”

“You’re my affair, whether you like the fact or not.”

Kit faced him without a tremor. “You had your chance when my clan offered me as your consort, but you turned them down. Now get out of my way. I have a bottle of champagne waiting.”

Rysen shook his head. “Stubborn and unable to see reason. Looks like the only way to get you to see things my way is to bring you to heel.”

“You can try.” Arms falling to her sides, she took a deep breath and got into a fighting stance.

He moved so fast he vanished from view for a second, and then pain burst in her lower back. She whirled around. He was nowhere in sight.

Cursing, she closed her eyes and relaxed her body, slowing her breathing. She extended her other senses, searching for a sign of him in the room. A soft breeze brushed against her face from her left. Turning, she punched the air, her fist making contact with something hard and warm. Opening her eyes, she was just in time to see him jump back before vanishing again.

“Things would be much easier, darling, if you would just submit,” he said.

“In your dreams, asshole.” She rushed at him. She vanished from sight, then appeared behind him and kicked him in the back of the knee.

He bellowed and went down. With lightning-fast reflexes, he twisted, grabbing her ankle and dragging her to him. He quickly covered her body with his, using his weight to pin her to the ground. “Give up.”

“Never.” She head butted him. Groaning, he rolled off her. She scrambled up into a fighting stance again, ready for anything he would throw at her.

Rysen rose slowly. He jerked his head back, and a curtain of dark hair flew into the air and fell down his back. “Dirty trick, darling. I’ll have to spank you for that, once I subdue you.”

“Whatever. Just bring it.”

“As you wish.”

Rysen came at her. The two traded punches and kicks, sweat sliding down their faces. Time and the outside world no longer mattered. Dominance was all they could see.

Rysen pressed her back, and the area they fought in grew smaller and smaller. Her power and ability to heal herself slowed with each minute that went by. He was moving too fast; she couldn’t block all of his attacks. She swung out at him, aiming for his jaw, but getting his chest instead.

Pain ricocheted from her knuckle up her arm. Clenching her jaw, she raised her other arm to block, but he landed a punch in her side and knocked the wind out of her. She grimaced and backed up, trying to find room to move. She pulled her injured arm back and swung. Her fist connected with Rysen's jaw. His head rocked back, but he recovered all too quickly.

He grabbed her hips, ignoring her fists to his chest and stomach, and shoved her back into a wall. Pain slammed into her when her head hit the drywall. Her vision swam, and stars burst before her eyes.

"We can stop this. Concede my victory, and we can leave." His gruff voice sounded even rougher with the effort he was making to speak.

Kit turned her head and spat out the blood that filled her mouth when she'd bitten her tongue. "Never."

With each second, she could feel herself healing, but there wasn't enough time. She was too damaged; she needed rest. Her body was starting to give way; her legs were barely holding her upright. Her vision was fading in and out. She wasn't going to last. She thought of using the poisoned dagger at her hip, but decided against it. If she were going to win, it would be with her own strength. Besides, the poison would be nothing more than a bee sting to a two-thousand-year-old vampyre.

Dizziness assaulted her, and she tried to regain her focus. She refused to pass out. If she lost consciousness, Rysen would win and she would end up his consort. She had no desire to be one of his whores after a hundred years of humiliation.

Anger fueled the fire within the pit of her stomach, and she drew on this new energy. She tried to straighten her body and felt the first brush of power. Kit swore as she watched Rysen's eyes growing brighter, the violet changing to neon yellow, the black pupils glowing a bright green, rimmed in red. She watched the cuts and bruises on his face and neck heal and fade before her eyes.

“Son of a bitch,” she spat. He was drawing on his age as a vampyre, using his two thousand years to dip into the deep well of his power to heal himself. She was screwed. She was only three hundred, give or take, and she didn’t have that kind of power.

She steeled herself, ignoring the voice within that told her to just kneel and give her body and blood to him. She wouldn’t do that. Not now, not ever.

She straightened to her full height, ignoring the pops and cracks of her spine, and balled her fists, ready to keep fighting.

“Don’t do this, Kit. Just stop and kneel to me.”

“Never.” She charged him, but a new sensation caused her steps to falter. Power unlike Rysen’s brushed across her skin. The hairs on the back of her neck and arms stood on end. *Shit!* They had company outside.

“This was once Blyder’s inn, yes?” Rysen asked.

She knew what he was thinking. Blyder was famous for his seals of protection.

Turning on her heel, she rushed toward the reception desk. She skidded around the counter, unsheathing the knife on her belt, then sliced her palm open. Black blood seeped from the wound, and Kit slammed her palm against the plain white wall.

She felt her blood being drawn from the cut as a pentagram began to reveal itself. The black blood turned red, unveiling the cracks and crevices of the protection seal. Lines, curves, and runes slowly emerged. She felt faint. The poison that had edged her blade rushed through her veins while the seal pulled the blood from her body.

She clung fast to consciousness. She didn’t want to pass out until the seal was complete. Once the seal’s lines were filled with her blood offering, the wards of protection would be activated. They would be safe until the power wore off.

Once the last rune was filled in, her palm fell to her side as darkness edged her vision. She saw Rysen coming toward her, concern in his eerie yellow eyes.

“Kit? Are you okay?”

She wanted to give him a smart-ass answer, but instead, she raised her good arm and flipped him off, letting the darkness take her at last. His chuckle was the last thing she heard before slipping under.

* * * * *

Rysen ignored the throbbing of his cock. As much as he wanted to fuck her right now, he couldn't. She was unconscious and she was hurt. When he got her in his bed, she was going to be awake and strong and enjoying every last bit of it.

His gaze roamed over her bruised and battered face. "Gods, she is beautiful," he murmured. He leaned down, scooped her up in his arms, and held her close. He took in her mocha skin, some patches darker with bruises. One eye was swollen shut. He regretted every mark, every bruise, every injury he had inflicted on her, but words did not work with her. Ever since he had passed her over a hundred years ago, when her clan had offered her to him as one of his consorts, she'd loathed him, and she'd taken up her clan's fight to avenge his insult against them.

He had wanted her -- by the gods, he had wanted her -- but he had always felt she was just too fine to bring into his world. She deserved better than to be a political sacrifice. His body shuddered at the very thought of her in his bed, arms over her head, tied to the bedposts, her legs spread far apart, her hairless mound glistening with her dew. Her pussy already dripping, ready for him to fuck her hard, fast, and deep. He wanted the image in his head so badly, and yet he knew if he even tried to make a move, she'd either kill him or die trying. He was tired of fighting her. He wanted to tie her to his bed, blindfold her, and show her the delights that could be had if she would only let him dominate her.

Carrying her up the stairs, he held her body close, cradling her like a precious relic. He made his way to the second floor. Out of all the women he'd ever encountered, she inflamed him like no one else. Her oval face, with her large, liquid brown eyes flecked with red, haunted him. Her full lips beckoned him. The graceful column of her neck invited him to

sink his teeth into her jugular and drink deep of her life essence. He wanted to cup her small, high breasts and watch his hands travel along the curves of her sides, over her hips, down her thighs, caress her calves, and massage her feet. He wanted to rub his scent into her skin so that all would know she belonged to him and only him. There would be no others if she agreed to be his consort.

He could smell the odious poison in her blood. The wound on her palm was still open, blood slowly dripping from the cut. He would have to drain most of her blood and give her some of his. She would hate him for that.

Giving her his blood would allow him to track her wherever she went, to invade her thoughts and dreams, sense her moods, even from thousands of miles away. He would know if she were with someone else, he could even see through her eyes and take control of her body. He was the third chieftain of the Vampyre nation. He was the third most powerful vampyre in existence, his clan the third largest, and he was also third in line to ascend to the throne of the Vampyre monarchy. All he needed was a queen.

He made his way through a hallway and couldn't understand why she'd bought this horrid place. It had no class, no sophistication. It was out in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by woods, the nearest town five miles away.

"How in the hell is help supposed to get here in case of an emergency?" he asked the sleeping figure in his arms. "And it's not even pretty land. For the love of the gods, the garden is overrun with weeds. The lake is a cesspool, and I have yet to see one animal around here. My darling, you should have taken my offer to make you a queen. Then you could've had all the beautiful land you could want."

Even in sleep she defied him. As if on its own, her hand rose and tried to hit him.

He chuckled. "I shall call it a pet project for you, then. A hobby. But this should not be your life. You're too talented to waste your gifts on this place."

She tried to hit him again. He wanted to take hold of her hand and kiss the back of it, brush his lips against the pulse point and feel her heart beat. He looked up and saw he was only a few feet away from the bedroom he sought, the largest one at the end of the hallway. He could feel the rival vampyres outside, walking around, plotting their next move. Once he saw to her comfort and recovery, he would go outside and destroy them.

“How dare they interrupt our fight,” he growled. “As soon as I know who they are, they will be dealt with.”

If he had won, she would have been forced to concede to him, and therefore her fate would be in his hands. As much as he hadn’t wanted it to come down to that, he would have preferred it to the suicide mission she seemed to be on when she decided it was in her best interest to fight him.

“So stubborn is my darling,” he murmured softly. He loved her for that. He loved everything about her.

He kicked open the door and looked around. He was relieved to see that the room was in good condition. The furniture was of good quality, no dust or broken items. A large bed, piled high with pillows and bed coverings, stood against a far wall, the headboard a wrought-iron monstrosity whose top nearly hit the ceiling.

“This will do for now. You, my darling, deserve so much more.” His cock throbbed at the thought of laying her down in the silks, satins, furs, and velvets of his own massive bed. He shook his head. He wouldn’t feed his sexual desire now, not yet anyway. He refused to leave her while some unknown threat waited outside, prowling around looking for a weakness in Blyder’s protection spells.

“They won’t find them,” Rysen murmured as he arranged her on the bed and pulled off her boots. He paused, wondering if he should undress her to see how extensive the damage was. Making up his mind, he gently took off her tank top. Next, he removed her jeans and then her underwear.

Once she was naked, he catalogued all that he saw. Though his body reacted to the sight of her, his mind worked overtime to keep his lust at bay. He could see the bruises and wounds slowly starting to heal or disappear, but not fast enough. He took hold of her wrist and held it, palm up. Her self-inflicted wound had not disappeared.

She was too weak. Her immune system wouldn't be able to defend itself until she had fully recovered. The poison was working much too well.

Swearing, he placed her arm gently on the bed and shrugged out of his black leather duster. Kneeling, he took hold of her arm and brought it to his mouth. His tongue lapped at the spot he would bite into, preparing it to stave off infection.

His canines extended. His body began to heat, and his cock grew harder. He kissed her pulse point before biting down, and his back arched as her blood hit his tongue. The sweet, salty, metallic flavor caused his taste buds to explode with pleasure. His eyes drifted closed while her life filled his mouth like sweet, hot lava. The faint bitterness of the poison did not dampen his pleasure; it was nothing to one of his strength. He drank of her, careful not to drink too much.

A soft moan drew his attention. He saw her back arch, her breasts thrust into the air. The scent of her desire filled his nostrils, and he moaned in response. Blood slipped from his mouth, coating his chin, dripping down to stain his shirt.

"Easy, darling. Be at peace. I'm going to take the poison from you," he whispered with his mind.

"I'm dying," she responded.

"No. I won't allow it. You will not meet the Great Maker now or ever, if I have my way. Relax, my darling. Let me take care of you."

"No..."

"Do it," he growled out.

He felt her resist before he reached out with his power. Like a whip cutting through the air, his power flicked out into the space between them; like rope, he wrapped his will around her, pressing her down to the mattress. Her body flinched before relaxing back onto the bed. Once he was sure he had taken enough of her blood, he reluctantly released her wrist and lapped at the wound. Once the puncture marks were closed, he bit down into his own wrist.

He gazed upon her naked body, which looked cold and waxy, almost deathlike. He shuddered. He'd become a vampyre so he wouldn't have to lose anyone else he loved. Seeing her like this reinforced how much he loved her. His wound welled, blood dripping down onto the worn bedspread. He reached out and pried her lips apart.

"Don't fight me, darling. Drink of me."

He placed his wrist at her mouth and watched her react. Reaching up, she took hold of his arm, holding it in a vise grip, her lips pressed to his flesh. Her tongue darted out and lapped at his wounds, causing pinpricks of fire to dance up his arm, inflaming his arousal. Her mouth latched onto his wrist, and each pull of her lips felt like a caress on his cock.

Rysen's shaft throbbed in time with each tug. He reached down and, with one hand, ripped open the button of his jeans, pulled down the tab, and slipped his hand into his pants. Taking hold of his dick, he began to stroke his hardened rod, eyes now closed, head tilted back. He rose on his knees and, with a bit of awkwardness, tugged his pants down until his cock was fully freed. He wrapped his fist around his shaft and started to pump, up and down, in a grip that would cause tears to form in most men's eyes. The pain and pleasure cascaded through his body. Warm waves ebbed and flowed through his veins as his hips moved back and forth. He fucked his hand as if he were inside her.

"*Rysen*," she moaned, her voice echoing softly in his mind. He grunted in response.

“*My love*,” he answered. He did not care that he had just admitted his feelings for her or what she would think of them. He paused briefly, remembering the moment that had brought them to this place. The point where he had become her enemy a hundred years ago.

* * * * *

Kit’s clan leader, Jessye, stood before him in the garb of a warrior woman, tight breeches, loose dark green tunic, a large sword on one hip and a dagger on the other. Around her neck she wore souvenirs of those who had fallen at her feet. Her hair was pulled back in a high ponytail. Curly strands flew down her back in a spill of dark chocolate.

“I offer a proposal,” she said, bowing to him where he stood beside his throne in the audience chamber. “I offer you Kit, our newest fledgling, in exchange for your protection and ten thousand gold coins.” Her voice was steady. Determination radiated from her body.

Anger washed through him, hot and dark. An offering of a consort was not a business deal. Consorts were not bought or sold; they were offered as a show of good faith and a building of trust between clans. To ask for money amounted to prostituting the young, delicate beauty standing behind her clan lord.

“Why would you come to me with this offer? I cannot abide by this deal.”

“Even if the chosen is Kit? I know you desire her. I have seen the way your eyes watch her. I can taste the way you yearn for her. Why would you refuse what you most desire?”

Rysen swore silently. Just the mention of Kit's name caused his body to come to life. His cock pressed against his breeches, aching to be freed. His heart pounded against his chest. He itched to sink his canines into Kit's throat and drink of her blood. He turned away, knowing it was a sign of weakness. He took a breath and composed himself. He turned back to find Jessye eyeing him, a look of smug satisfaction on her face.

"Do not presume to know my thoughts and desires," he said.

"Rysen, head of the third house of the Vampyre nation, I present my blood daughter, Kit."

Kit appeared before them, wearing a figure-hugging red dress edged in gold beads. Rysen forgot how to breathe; his heart worked overtime. Sweat beaded his forehead. His palms began to itch. His cock throbbed painfully. His gaze swept over her figure, taking in every curve, the way the dress showed off the graceful column of her throat. His eyes settled on her face, and his lungs burned from lack of oxygen. He drew in a deep breath and memorized every facet of her face. He wanted to reach out; trace her features with his fingertips. He yearned to kiss her full lips, taste her on his tongue. Her large brown eyes blinked, and she looked away shyly. He inhaled deeply. Her scent washed over him.

His arms felt empty from wanting to hold her. Tension sang along every nerve of his body as he held himself back. He couldn't move. All he could do was stare.

"As you can see, your lordship, Kit would make a most suitable consort for you. She is young, sweet tempered, and quite adept at the skills of the bedroom. We have trained her well to please you."

Bile rose, burning Rysen's throat. They had trained her well to please him? No, they had trained her well to whore her to him. He looked her over again. She did not blush at Jessye's words. Instead, she looked hopeful. A weight settled on his shoulders and dampened his yearning for her. He turned, walked to his throne. This was not an offering of Kit to be his consort. This was Jessye using Kit as a political tool, leverage to gain Rysen's political connections and protection in the hope of elevating her clan.

He refused to go along with it. He refused to allow Kit to be prostituted. "Your house would be a weak link to me. I would have to spend a large amount of time and effort defending it from other houses that wish to take over my lands and subjugate my people. Add to this a consort who cannot even defend herself? Explain to me how this is an acceptable deal." He sank down on his throne and placed his ankle on his knee, one hand on the armrest, and drummed his fingers in a show of boredom.

Kit, on the other hand, looked scared, sad even. A shard of pain lanced his heart at having to hurt her. His resolve weakened with each second he looked at her. He tore his gaze away from her form and focused on Jessye.

Jessye's mouth snapped shut; her jaw jutted out rebelliously. "Come, Kit. We will be insulted no more. His lordship has refused us."

The heels of Jessye's boots clicked on the marble as she marched toward the double doors. Rysen cast a glance at Kit. Her sadness and despair overwhelmed him. He wanted to reach out, call out to them to stop. Instead, he watched them go, his heart leaving with Kit.

When the doors closed, Rysen vanished from his throne to his bedroom. His chest ached with yearning. He undressed and fell into bed, tears slipping down his cheeks.

* * * * *

Rysen returned to the present, his hand stroking his cock. His body ached for her. He wanted to hold her to him, take away the pain he had caused. He wanted to make love to her. His cock throbbed in response. The thought of slipping inside her tight, wet heat, watching her face change from pain to mindless pleasure, increased his arousal.

Kit. He was lost in pleasure. He whispered, "It feels so good to have you here with me, feeding from me. Not fighting me. This is as things should be, as it would have been all those years ago, had I accepted you as my consort. Feed from me, my love. Take from me what I give to you freely."

His hips pumping back and forth, he thrust faster and faster, his grip on his cock tightening. The slit at the crest of his shaft wept pearly drops of arousal.

He felt the sharp caress of her fangs on his wrist as she bit down just above his own wounds. He didn't pause to wonder why. He just thrust his hips faster, his balls drawing closer to his body, his stomach tightening with each thrust. He was so close to coming. Heat danced through his body, and shivers raced up and down his spine. His toes curled as he fucked his hand faster, and again she bit down. He lost it. White ribbons of cum landed on the bedspread, the carpet, coating his hand and his thighs. He continued to pump his hand until he was empty, his world becoming dim.

With sudden clarity, Rysen realized she was draining him dry. She was trying to kill him.

His hand fell away from his flaccid penis, and his eyes flew open, vision blurry.

"Kit," he cried out. His voice was weak and hoarse, as if he'd been screaming. His body protested as he tried to tug his arm away from her.

Kit's grip increased. She opened her eyes, looking at him now with hatred in her glowing yellow irises.

"What have I done?" he asked before his body fell forward, head swimming as his heart started to work harder, trying to pump what little blood he had left within him. He had to get away from her.

"I'm sorry, my darling," he murmured weakly. He drew what little power he had to him and tore himself from her mouth. He stumbled out of the room and down the hallway and then into another room at the end. He fell onto a bed and bounced gently, thankful for his age and strength. He threw up a ward of protection against the door, but it cost him, draining more of his power. As sleep took him, his last thoughts were of Kit and her safety.

Chapter Two

Kit awoke with light streaming through the windows. The sun was up and the room was spinning. Her head throbbed with pain. She tried to sit up, only to have her stomach threaten to rebel against her. Lying back down, she closed her eyes and tried to remember the events of the night before.

That's right. She'd come to the inn for a final inspection of the place, and then *he'd* turned up. Opening her eyes again, she looked first left, then right. She didn't see him anywhere, and she had no desire to sit up and risk throwing up. So she lay there, waiting, wondering if he would appear.

Then she remembered the others, and the seal, and the poison. It was obvious that her unknown enemies weren't powerful enough to pass through the building's protection seal. Only very old vampyres had that kind of power.

Approaching footsteps made her tense. Light, with a clicking sound. *Female*, she thought. The scent of a floral perfume reached her nose, and her stomach roiled.

"Good afternoon, Lady Kit. Master Rysen called me here to ensure your comfort and safety," a soft voice said.

Kit closed her eyes and clenched her jaw. He had called one of his whores to attend to her? "I'm fine," she gritted out.

"His lordship informed me you were stubborn. He insisted that I check to make sure you are, in fact, well."

Kit opened her mouth to protest when she felt cool air brush against her skin. Gooseflesh rose on her arms, stomach, and legs.

Shit. She was naked. "What the hell did he do to me?"

"I don't understand," the soft voice said. A silken caress of fingertips caused Kit to shiver. A soothing energy poured into Kit, and her body became like water. She couldn't move, despite the order she gave herself to sit up. Growling, she looked up at the intruder. The vampyre looked young. Long blonde hair flowed over her shoulders and down her back in waves. She had large brown eyes, a pert nose, and a small rosebud mouth, like an anime character. A glance farther down almost made Kit think she was one, with her large chest and unnaturally small waist.

"How did you get past my wards?" Kit asked her.

"Me?"

"No, your twin sister. Yes, you."

"I am two thousand, five hundred and twenty-five years old," the vampyre said proudly. "Your wards were not difficult to pass. How is your stomach?"

"Peachy. Can you go now?"

"Not until his lordship arrives."

"And just where is the asshole?"

The vampyre blinked for a second and then replied, "He is resting."

Resting? A shiver of worry ran through her. Rysen didn't rest. He was energy, life, vitality. *What happened last night?*

“I am Karella, by the way.” She gave Kit a small smile, and her eyes crinkled. She honestly did look like an anime character. All she needed was the space-age, naughty nurse costume with too many straps. “Can you eat?”

“Food or blood?”

“Food.”

“I doubt it.” As tempting as it was to pull a Linda Blair on the cheerful vampyre, she had no desire to throw up. “Do you have any clothes for me?”

“Of course. His lordship was specific about your clothing.”

Kit resisted the urge to groan. He probably wanted her dressed up like one of his whores, light on the fabric, heavy on the peek-a-boo. It surprised her when Karella showed her a simple dark blue tank top and jeans, complete with black button-up sweater and thick black socks.

“His lordship knew you would be more comfortable in this,” Karella said simply.

“Underwear?”

“He said you should not wear any.” Karella placed the clothes on the bed.

“Bastard.”

“Do you need help dressing?”

“I can manage.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, Bambi, I’m positive.”

Karella blinked at the nickname but said nothing. Instead, she turned and left the room.

When she heard the soft click of the door, Kit closed her eyes. Until she got better, truly better, she was stuck at the inn with either Karella the Happy, Naughty Nurse, or Rysen. She wasn’t sure which was worse. She sat up slowly, and a wave of nausea hit her.

She threw her legs over the side of the bed and stood up. Her body shook and she felt dizzy. Stumbling forward, she reached out with her hand, hoping to find something to steady herself against. Her hand landed on something hot, and a steady throb beat against her palm. Opening her eyes slowly, she looked up into violet eyes. Rysen had returned, looking too pale to be healthy.

He took hold of her arm, and a flash of memory floated up, his lips brushing against her pulse point, his fangs sinking into her wrist. She moaned as her core pulsed in response to the phantom feeling. Her stomach tightened, and her nipples hardened into beads.

“I felt your anger and insecurity. I had to come see for myself.”

She tried to jerk her arm away from his grip, but he refused to let go. “You’re aroused, my darling. You’re aroused by me.”

“Go to hell.” She refused to tell him just how aroused he was making her.

“Been there, got the T-shirt. Do you need help dressing?”

“No, let go of me.”

“So you can sway on your feet and fall over? I think not. Allow me to support you.”

“Pervert. You just want to watch me get dressed.”

“That is quite true. I am a pervert. You bring out the leech in me. I want nothing more than to watch you bend over as you put on your jeans. I want see that sweet ass exposed to my gaze. I long to part those deliciously rounded cheeks, fall to my knees, and lap at your anus until you become aroused, your pussy dripping with need for my cock. I want to tease you until you squirm against me, urging me to fuck you long, hard, and deep. I want you to admit you want my cock up your ass, in your pussy, and in your mouth. So yes, darling, I am a pervert.”

She shivered at his words, each syllable causing her aching channel to clench with need, gushing more cream. Her clit throbbed as her nipples tightened even further.

“I want to watch you put on your tank top. See those delicious nipples of yours pressed against the thin fabric of your shirt. I want to take those nipples in my mouth and suck on them while my fingers sink into your pussy, feel your juices slip over my hand and down my forearm. I want to finger fuck you until you come all over my hand, until the air is heavy and pungent with the scent of your sex.”

The image inflamed her. She wanted what he was saying so badly. Her cunt clenched with need. She felt the beginnings of an orgasm tightening, curling, writhing within her. She tried to control it, stop it, but it only twisted tighter, increasing the ache and fire between her legs.

“After that, I want to throw you against the wall and sink into you, balls deep. I want nothing between us, my darling. I want to feel your pussy spasm around me each time I slam into you. I want your legs wrapped around my waist, my hands holding your wrists up high over your head as I fuck you. I want to sink my fangs into your throat as I pound your pussy. I want to feel you come all over my cock, your cream slipping down my balls, over my thighs, and then I want to come inside you. I want to pump every last drop of my seed into you. I want to fuck you until my scent is rubbed into your skin. Yes, my darling, I am a leech. I am a pervert. For you, I will be all that and so much more. Don’t think for a second that once I have you, I won’t possess you, fuck you in private and in front of everyone. I want everyone to know who you belong to. *Everyone*.”

His words nearly brought her to her knees. She was so close to coming. Her juices slid down her thighs, hot and slick, reminding her of her need for him. She could smell her arousal. She fought the urge to reach between her legs and touch herself, to soothe the aching bud. Her legs shook with effort; sweat slipped down her forehead; rivulets slipped over her body. The room was an inferno. She needed to get away from him, from the words that were driving her to the brink.

He let go of her arm, and she nearly fell over. Her body was one pulsing point centered on her pussy. The look in his violet eyes was so intense it burned her, branded her as his. She

blinked, and in that moment, he was gone. She swore and really did fall over, only to be caught up in his arms.

“You smell so damn good. I want to lick and nibble your pussy until you come all over my face. I want to feel your cream dripping off my chin.” She shook in his embrace. She wanted to tell him to stop it. She wanted to cover her ears and wish him away. He was the enemy. *He* had rejected *her*. She was in turmoil, and her body was demanding release. Never in her life had she been so aroused. She felt the large, hot presence of his hand on her abdomen. His fingers moved down until he cupped her mound.

His middle finger delved between her engorged nether lips; a light brush of his callused finger over the sensitive head of her clit caused skitters of electricity inside her. Her hips thrust forward. She wanted to cover his hand with hers, urge him to put more pressure on her clit, but she couldn’t move, could barely breathe, wanting to see what he did next.

“Gods, you’re dripping all over my hand. I can’t...I need to... Not here,” he moaned. “Not now. You’re not recovered yet, and neither am I.”

His hand dropped away, much to her remorse. He steadied her until she could stand up on her own without wobbling.

“I will be back, darling.”

She felt him leave and couldn’t sense him anywhere near her. She rushed toward the bathroom door and kicked it open. She dashed to the shower, her body taut as a wire, nausea and dizziness forgotten in the face of arousal. She reached out and turned the knobs and was relieved to hear the pipes rumble. Water came pouring out of the showerhead. A few moments later, little clouds of steam billowed up around her.

She stepped into the tub and stood under the spray, wanting every drop to rinse her clean of her need. She didn’t want to masturbate. She didn’t want to think of Rysen as her fingers slid between her pussy lips and found her clit. She was not gentle; this was not a slow seduction of her body, coaxing it to release. She needed to come, now. She slid her fingers

into her pulsing core, and her walls clutched the invading digits while her thumb held down her clit. Her fingers pumped, short, deep thrusts. Her hips rolled back and forth, bringing her closer to climax. All it took was a memory of his fangs piercing the thin, delicate skin of her wrist to surface again and she was gone.

Her body convulsed, her core tightened around her fingers, and her stomach clenched as heat rolled over her body. She didn't want to see his face as her orgasm crashed over her, his eyes looking back at her, but damn him, that was what she saw. Even without her eyes closed.

Her legs gave out, and she fell to the tub, water cascading down around her, soaking her hair. Her muscles still twitched and jumped as small aftershocks rolled through her, and she let out a small scream of frustration. "Damn him."

* * * * *

Rysen's hips rose off the bed, his back arched, and he felt his release, a hot and sticky liquid coating his thighs and balls, soaking the sheet twisted around him. He had felt her come, felt her frustration run through him like a sugar high. As he caught his breath, he prayed that soon he would be able to hold her in his arms in the afterglow.

For now, he had to continue to recover. He would need all his strength. The enemies surrounding the inn would move eventually, would bring in someone powerful enough to slip past the wards, and he refused to have Kit hurt for any reason. What's more, his needing time was lurking in the shadows of his body. Soon he would need to find release or go mad. He couldn't go to her until he was fully in control of himself. She was still too weak.

He was still fragile from her feeding. He shouldn't have gone to her, shouldn't have used his energy to reassure himself she was okay. He had felt her frustration, her annoyance, and her disorientation as if they were his own. He had tasted her emotions on his tongue like sweet-and-sour candy. He knew sending Karella to her would annoy her, but he had underestimated just how much.

It pleased him to know she was annoyed at the idea of him being with other women. It showed that despite her words or actions, she cared. Now if only he could capitalize on it.

The door to his bedroom clicked open.

“Your lordship, we have news,” Karella said. “The clan surrounding the inn belongs to Albyus. They say there has been a coup of some sort within his clan, that Albyus has been pushed out of power.”

Rysen closed his eyes as his thoughts moved with lightning speed. The clan’s new leader was undoubtedly trying to go after Kit. She would make a good hostage to exchange for control of Jessye’s clan.

“Who is in power now?”

“No one knows, sire. There has been no announcement.”

“Find Albyus and bring him to me. Send word to the other chieftains that we may have a rogue tribe on our hands. Send reinforcements to the inn, but keep them out of sight. Bring me several blood packs. I need to feed.”

“But, sire, wouldn’t it be more productive to feed from a vein?”

“I don’t have time to find a suitable donor; besides, I haven’t had my release yet.”

An audible gasp told Rysen that he had shocked his servant.

“Don’t worry. I’ve taken the edge off, but I need blood. I don’t want a human donor. I want the blood bags.”

“Yes, sire.” Karella bowed and left the room. Rysen sat up, ignoring the way his vision swam. He threw his legs over the side of the bed and stood up. He rushed toward the bathroom, vision blurred, shoving the dizziness off him until he stumbled into the shower. Time was essential. If whoever had overthrown Albyus’s clan was after Jessye’s, Kit was in more danger than he’d thought.

* * * * *

Syrus looked over his new clan, or at least those who were left. So far his plan was going well. He had Kit, second daughter of Jessye, the leader *pro tem* of Ryu's clan, holed up at Blyder's inn and three members of Jessye's clan trapped at Ryu's compound in the mountains. Once he had defeated them and absorbed them into his clan, Jessye would come too. Then he would move on to the other smaller clans. Once he had amassed enough numbers, he would take on the chieftains. That would mean facing his brother, but so be it. He had a score to settle, and no one was going to stop him.

"For Sabella," Syrus murmured. He turned and vanished, appearing in the hotel suite he was using as his base of operations. Looking over the family trees of the vampyre nation, he tried to decide his next move. Heaviness weighed on his shoulders, and he sighed, turning away from the chart. He walked over to the window and drew back the curtain, looking over the city below.

"I wish I didn't have to do this. I wish things hadn't come to this, but this is how it must be. She killed Sabella, and that can't go unpunished. One of those chieftains is hiding her, but I will find her. I will tear apart every clan until I find her." His thoughts turned to the past.

"Things weren't always like this, brother. We used to be happy. We used to laugh and have fun. We used to be close. Now things are scattered, things are broken, and I must do whatever it takes to make things right. Whatever the cost."

Syrus turned away from the sun-soaked streets and high-rises, back to the family trees.

Chapter Three

Rysen brought himself to the bedroom. For a second, the room became a blur, and then it solidified. He was getting better, but it was taking too long. He reached into the bag Karella had left on the dresser and extracted a blood bag. His fangs extended and he bit down. The metallic taste of O positive flooded his mouth, and he sipped noisily until the packet was drained dry. He pulled out another one.

Looking around, he found a trash bin and threw away his first bag while biting into the second. He could see the remains of Kit's clothing were gone and the bed was made up. The door opened, and Karella walked into the room, Kit following on her heels.

"Sire." Karella dropped into a curtsy, bowing her head in respect. Kit only crossed her arms, pushing up her breasts. The hint of cleavage the tank top showed made his mouth water.

"El, please leave us."

"But, sire, you are still not well enough --"

"There are reinforcements outside waiting. I shall remain here with Kit until we understand the circumstances of the situation. Go now."

Without looking, he threw away the second blood bag and pulled out another. His eyes didn't stray from Kit's irritated form. Karella disappeared, leaving them alone.

"You look like hell," she said.

"You look much better, although I preferred you naked."

"Letch." Her chin lifted in defiance.

"I admitted such before. Let me apprise you of the situation we find ourselves in."

He walked over to the bed and sat down, then patted the empty space next to him.

"I'd rather stand, thank you." She leaned against the wall, and he noticed she had on her fingerless leather gloves. She'd also armed herself again.

"So you prefer being an assassin to a hotelier?" He wasn't sure whether to be pleased or annoyed. He could see her aura vibrating around her, a swirling, pulsing cloud of emotions writhing together. Her energy fluctuated as if her body was still adjusting to the more powerful blood coursing through her veins. In other words, she wasn't stable.

Her long, dark hair was pulled back into a low ponytail, her face free of makeup, showing off her natural beauty. He swallowed as his body responded to her, stomach tightening, balls hardening, cock rising, creating a bulge in his leather pants. He cleared his throat, reminding his body that they had a situation outside that needed immediate attention. Sex could wait for the moment. He focused on her while he drained the last of the blood, and then he threw the packet away and reached into the bag for another. She raised an arched brown eyebrow.

"There's been a coup," he said. "Albyus has been overthrown -- by whom, we're not sure -- but apparently they're interested in Jessye's clan next. Hence the goons outside watching for you."

"And?"

“And I’ve got my men outside watching them. They’ll move in when they feel we’re in danger, but not before. We’ll stay here and wait, study our adversary, and try to figure out who’s behind this.”

“You can leave, Rysen. I’m a mercenary, a killer for hire. I don’t play nice with others.”

“Darling, this is no time to let the past come between us. We have to work together to figure out this problem, or we’ll both be dead.”

She raised a shoulder nonchalantly.

“Fucking hell.” He shot off the bed, threw down the empty bag, and rushed toward her. He grabbed her shoulders and pinned her to the wall. “I refuse to leave you to face the unknown alone. You are not dying as long as I’m around.”

She shrugged again. “I’ll fight whether you’re here or not, and if I die, so what?”

He shook her, hard, her head flopping like a rag doll’s. “Don’t you dare make me invoke the blood claim. You can’t leave here until the seal’s power has faded. I will handcuff you to the bed if I have to.”

“Go ahead and try it,” she dared, eyes narrowing to glittering brown slits.

He smashed his lips against hers in a violent kiss, his fangs scraping against the plump flesh of her full bottom lip. His stomach tightened, his groin hardened, and fire licked its way through his veins. He leaped back from her and swore as a thick, musky scent permeated the air.

Her eyes widened. Her pupils dilated, and her nipples pressed against the thin cotton of her tank top. She clenched her fists tightly and stared at him in shock. “You’re in need?”

The sexual need he had been holding at bay raised its dark, twisted head within him, baring fangs, demanding to be fed with blood and sex. He swore. It was too hot; he was wearing too many clothes, and so was she. He wanted to fuck her now, hard and fast. A second musky scent joined his -- pungent, hanging in the air, beckoning him.

His needing had caused her body to respond, sending her straight into her heating time.

“We are so fucked,” she groaned.

Kit was torn between taking off her clothing and humping him, or strangling him. How could he have done this when he was in needing? She eyed him, trying to calm her hormones, but it wasn’t working. His eyes had bled to the bright yellow that said he was in hunt-and-conquer mode.

Shit. *Fucking dammit to hell.* They were so in trouble, enemies on the outside and a need to fuck inside. Her legs quaked at the thought of being fucked by him. She had fantasized about it, dreamed of it, until he’d rejected her. After that, her thoughts had turned to ones of Rysen on his knees, begging her to accept him, pleasure him, fuck him.

“I knew you were my true consort,” he said. “Only a true consort would react to my needing time as you did.”

“Well, tough shit. I have no intention of sleeping with you.” Kit straightened and inched toward the door, moving slowly so as not to set off his predator’s instinct to chase and dominate anything that ran. She refused to give him the satisfaction of making her submit.

“Who said anything about sleeping?” His voice was whisky-rough and deep. The sound shook her. Her core clenched, dripping cream, soaking her jeans. Her nipples hardened, wanting to feel the scrape of his teeth against them, the rough tug of his mouth on the tips until she cried out. His eyes burned in their intensity as they roamed over her body. She watched, dry-mouthed, as he shrugged out of his long jacket, then pulled off his shirt and unfastened his belt, popped the button of his leather pants, and pulled down the zipper. He shoved the material down over his thighs, letting the heavy fabric bunch around his knees. She swallowed.

Lightly tanned skin met her eyes. He was lean, like a cat -- broad shoulders; long, lean arms; a wide, hardened chest dotted with puckered red nipples. Below the ridges of his abdomen, a thin line of black hair trailed down to a thick mesh of black curls. His cock rose proudly from the dark nest, long and thick, the crown of him already slick with precum. Her body flooded with fire, and she shivered. He was beautiful. Scars and old puncture wounds here and there couldn't detract from his masculine beauty. She wanted to explore him, taste him. She just wanted him. Her knees started to shake, and panic rose inside her as his eyes met hers.

"Run."

That single command acted as the impetus she needed to act. She turned and rushed out of the room. She ran down the hall, arms and legs pumping hard, and she nearly fell down the stairs as she tried to slow her momentum.

At the bottom, she found herself in the waiting area of the inn. She couldn't go outside; the seal wouldn't let her pass. She couldn't disappear; she wasn't old enough or powerful enough for that so soon after her injuries. Her only option was to hide, but her damn musk would be a dead giveaway to her location. She couldn't turn it off. Her body needed to be fucked, hard and fast, by the man upstairs.

Hands gripped her shoulders and pulled her back. She tried to move forward, but his grip was strong, too strong for her to break.

"Rysen, please," she started.

"Unless you're going to beg me to fuck you, I suggest you not use the word 'please.'" His voice was harsh like gravel now.

"Rysen, you don't want to do this."

"I have no choice. I've put this off for far too long. I've taken the edge off, but I can no longer deny my hunger. Do you want me to leave you? Disappear and fuck some random

woman when you so clearly need me, too? You're dripping wet for me. You need me just as I need you."

She wanted to dispute his words but knew he would know the truth. She did need him. She needed his cock, she needed his blood, and she hated that. She hated that she needed *him*, period.

"If I agree to this, promise me you won't take this as my acquiescence to be your consort. You will not own me." She waited for him to agree to her terms.

Time seemed to pass slowly before he grunted.

"Yes or no. I need to hear you say it," she ordered.

"Yes. I agree to your terms. Now undress."

He let go of her shoulders. They sagged in relief. She started to undress, placing her clothes in one pile and her weapons in another. Turning slowly, she lifted her head to look at him. She swallowed. His eyes were no longer neon yellow, but bright orange. Fear extended its tendrils throughout her body. Her heart leaped into her throat, and she tried to swallow.

"All fours now," he said. "I'm going to fuck you from behind."

She felt almost as if she had been slapped. She missed the man who had used words to inflame her passion, who wanted to explore her body, tug her nipples into his mouth. She turned around again, holding back tears of disappointment, feeling like just a whore to him, another warm body to satisfy his needing. She didn't want to be disappointed, but she was.

He could taste her disappointment, hear her thoughts, and he knew that she wanted more than just the mindless fuck he was offering her to satisfy both their cravings. He was pleased that she wanted something more, but she just didn't understand. To give her more would mean he wouldn't be holding back, would mean he'd be claiming her as his, declaring her his consort. That was something she didn't want.

He would try and show her tenderness, but his need was riding him hard. His cock wanted to be buried in her pussy, fucking her until they both screamed. He craved the taste

of her blood on his tongue. Dropping down to his knees, he reached out with his mind and checked on their adversaries outside. So far, they were bored, restless, and harmless, just the way he liked them. Once he started this joining, he didn't want any interruptions.

He reached out and caressed her back, tracing his fingers down the ridges of her spine. He bent over her, his cock sliding over the crease of her ass as he placed kisses along the center of her back. If she wanted more, he would give her more without trying to claim her. Her arousal surrounded him, overpowering his own scent floating in the air. He kissed his way back up the column and ran his tongue over her spine. He took hold of her hips, his fingers gripping the soft flesh as he held her still. A light sheen of sweat coated her mocha skin as he planted kisses between her shoulder blades.

"So beautiful," he murmured as he kissed his way down her back again. He felt her mind relax as she accepted his praise. "I will try to be gentle, my darling, but I honestly can't guarantee it. The need is too great."

"Then fuck me," she urged.

He was torn between showing her gentleness and allowing his baser needs to take hold of him. He'd longed for her for the last hundred years, resisting his attraction to allow her to strengthen, to come into her own. She'd been too young back then to defend such a high position from those older and more powerful who'd have sought to take her place. And he'd refused to allow Jessye to use her as a bargaining chip to buy status for her clan.

Rejecting her had been one of the hardest things he'd ever done. But in the end, it had made her stronger. Now she was feared as one of the most efficient mercenaries of their people. She had even gained the attention of the high king. When she became his consort, her status would be guaranteed. He closed his eyes and breathed in.

"Are you sure that's what you want?"

"Yes."

He reached down and took hold of his cock, positioning himself at her entrance. With one thrust, he nearly came when her core clenched around him. He groaned aloud. So hot, so wet, so soft, so tight. His fangs extended even farther; bloodlust clashed with arousal. He clenched his jaw, ignoring the painful throb of his fangs.

“Gods, you feel so good.” He withdrew until only the head of him remained inside her. He shoved his hips forward, thrusting into her inch by inch, torturing them both.

“Stop playing with me, you bastard. All in me, now!”

He chuckled, pausing to lean over her, sweat misting his skin. He placed a kiss on first one shoulder, then the other. He kissed the nape of her neck. Releasing one hip, he took hold of her ponytail. He held the silken strands in a tight grip and pulled back, hard. Her head whipped back, and she growled. Placing his lips next to her ear, he whispered, “I’m in charge.”

He brushed the tip of a fang over the shell of her ear and felt her shiver underneath him. He pulled back his hips and pushed forward, then repeated the action until he was balls deep inside her.

“You are in my care now.” He withdrew and slammed into her hard, balls slapping against her slit. “I call the shots.”

He bit down on her earlobe, and she cried out. Her musky scent increased, her walls tightened around him, and he felt her cream slip down his thighs. He pulled her head back even more, tightening his grip on her hair. He started to pump into her with slow, hard thrusts.

“All. Mine.” The feel of being inside her, the scent of her need, was trying his control. He trailed his fangs along the column of her neck, tracing her jugular vein. She shook beneath him. He pulled his head back before he struck. His fangs pierced the thin, delicate skin of her neck. Scorching-hot blood flooded his mouth. His hips started to work faster. He thrust into her harder and harder, branding her as his with each stroke.

He pulled his head away from her neck, blood slipping down his chin and spotting his chest. He threw back his head. One hand slipped around her hip, delving between the engorged lips of her sex. He found the hardened nub of her clit and stroked it in circles, slowly.

“Tell me, darling. Tell me how good this feels. How much you love having me inside you. You feel so damn good. Tell me how much you love the way I fuck you.”

She shook her head, and he laughed.

“Oh, I know a way to get you to say it.” He pressed down on her clit and started to slow down his thrusts. Her head turned, and she glared at him over her shoulder. Narrowed dark brown eyes glittered in a frame of black lashes.

“Fuck me,” she ordered.

Chapter Four

Kit wanted to scream. He was going too slowly. His amused violet gaze was making her insane.

“I can finish myself if you’re not up to the task.” She smiled at him sweetly as she felt him pause within her.

His eyes narrowed, anger flickering in his gaze. “Don’t you dare.”

She relished the shift in power. She pushed her hips back and then pulled her hips forward, fucking herself on his cock.

“Oh no, you don’t,” he growled. He withdrew from her completely. Ignoring the ache, he stood up.

“What the hell are you doing?” She whirled around to face him, anger and arousal making her shake in frustration.

“Lie down on the floor and put your hands over your head,” he ordered.

She wanted to resist, but the need was too great. She wanted relief. “This is just about scratching an itch,” she declared, trying to ignore how much she missed his touch. Slowly, she lowered herself back onto the floor and extended her hands over her head, her eyes

never leaving his. She wanted to look away, didn't want to watch him lower himself on top of her.

It had felt so good having him inside her. A feeling akin to completeness entered her body when he was inside her. She didn't want to examine that emotion. She didn't want to think, even for a second, that having him with her, inside her, would do anything other than to feed the need. She didn't want to even think for a second that she had feelings for him.

She watched him drop to his knees and crawl toward her, his movements slow, lithe. He was like an animal, a sleek predator about to mount its mate. The heat in his eyes terrified and thrilled her. No one had ever looked at her like that. Every glance told her he wanted her. It scared her how much she wanted to submit to him. A dark tendril of submissive desire snaked through her mind and body. She wanted to submit to him, give up her body and control to him. She always had wanted to belong to him. After his rejection, she had rebelled against that dark need. She shut it in the back of her mind, refusing to entertain it until she was alone and her mind could run wild.

She watched his head lower over her mound. The sound of him inhaling deeply made her shiver. Feminine honey slipped down between the cheeks of her ass, over her anus. She spread her legs wide, tilting her hips up, allowing him to see just how wet she was for him. Silently showing him what she refused to say.

"So slick. I bet you're still hot. I bet that juicy pussy of yours is aching to be stretched and filled by me. I bet you can't wait for me to be inside you."

She gasped at the tip of his tongue sliding up one nether lip and down the other. Her hips rose of their own accord, begging for more attention.

"Say it, darling. Say you want me to eat you. To nibble every inch of this beautiful pink pussy."

She cried out at the scrape of his fangs over her pussy lips, the sharp tips causing pain that clashed with pleasure. She watched him as he maneuvered to balance on one hand while

placing his palm on her stomach. She arched her back, asking for his touch. His hand slid up, slipping into the valley of her breasts.

“Tell me what you want. Tell me you want my touch, my mouth nibbling at these beautiful, thick pussy lips. I’d love to feed from you here. To taste your cream and blood mixing would be divine nectar not even the gods could replicate.”

“Oh, gods,” she moaned. She cried out when he pinched her nipple and nearly screamed when his fangs pierced one of her pussy lips. The soft pull of his mouth as he fed from her sex made her core contract. He pulled back his head, and his tongue delved into her slit, the tip circling around her clit and flicking the hardened bud. He sucked the turgid peak into his mouth, tugging hard. She bucked against his lips. Releasing her clit with a soft *pop*, he ran his tongue along the other lip of her sex. He bit her there, and ripples of pleasure and pain collided inside her. Her body jerked. She wasn’t sure what she should be doing. His fingers continued to torment her nipple as he drank from her.

She felt his power crack over her. Her wrists were tied together, her shoulders were pinned down, and she felt invisible rope around her ankles pull her legs wider apart. More of his power wrapped around her body, tying her in invisible rope. Thick strands of power wrapped around her nipples, squeezing each bud gently. A thin string of power wrapped around her clit, pinching the engorged nubbin. A thick shaft of power slid into her wet, tight channel. Another pole of power, this one thinner and surprisingly slick, pierced her anus.

“Fuck,” she cried out, squeezing her eyes shut at the sudden invasion. She shut out the burning sensation and pain. She had only been fucked up the ass twice before and hadn’t enjoyed it much.

“Rysen, no more. I can’t take any more.”

He growled, the sensation causing waves of pleasure to rush over her. He pulled his mouth back and lapped at the puncture marks. She opened her eyes, trying to breathe past the feeling of being so filled. Raising her head up, she looked at him.

“Rysen, I’ve --” Suddenly telling him that she’d had only had two lovers fuck her up the ass seemed wrong. Looking away, she bit her lip. Everything seemed to stand still. The pause and silence was pregnant with unsaid words that made her feel guilty for no reason.

Her body jerked at the feel of his tongue rimming her entrance. She looked back at him. His violet eyes seared her, pinning her with a possessive look. She opened her mouth to start again, only to lose her train of thought when the shafts of power inside her core and ass withdrew slowly before thrusting into her hard. She cried out as pleasure and pain collided.

“Tell me what I want to hear, and I replace one shaft with my cock.”

She bit her lip, resisting him. The shaft buried deep in her pussy withdrew and then thrust into her hard, hitting her cervix. Before she could gasp at the brief spark of pain, the shaft in her ass withdrew and pushed into her hard and deep. She cried out. The invisible rope around her clit tightened briefly before loosening. She moaned when she felt him flick the tip of her nub.

“Rysen.” It was all she could say; what she felt was too much. The pleasure and pain crashed into each other. She wasn’t sure what to feel. Her flesh was slick with sweat. She felt so hot. Her skin felt too tight. She wanted to come so badly. The constant tightening and loosening of the threads of power didn’t give her time to think. Words floated away once she grasped them in her mind. She felt more ropes wrapping around her body, pushing her down to the floor. She was immobile and at his mercy. He ran his tongue up one side of her slit and down the other before biting her again.

Her hips tried to buck off the floor but didn’t get far. He sucked the lip into his mouth, and her inner walls clenched with need, keeping time with each sip he took of her blood. The shafts worked in tandem, the cords of power tightening and releasing. She was on the verge, so close to coming. *If only...* The thought escaped her as he bit her again.

“Rysen, please,” she begged.

He released her nether lip. "Please what?" He ran his tongue along her labia, taking one side into his mouth, nibbling the delicate flesh before sucking it.

"Fuck."

"Fuck what, darling? Say it," he growled before taking the other petal into his mouth.

"Fuck me, Rysen, please." She hated herself for begging, but she wanted relief. She was on fire, aroused and in need of relief.

"Tell me how to fuck you, love. Tell me what you want me to do." He blew on her overheated sex, and she tried to squirm. The bindings held her in place.

"With your cock. Fuck me with your cock."

"Uh-uh. Not good enough. I want details. I want to know how hard you want it. How fast I should be going. What my mouth and fingers should be doing. Do you want me to fuck you in both the ass and pussy? Should I be kissing you? Should I continue to use my power to tease those beautifully tempting nipples? Tell me. I want to hear it all. I want to hear all the ways you want me to fuck you. All your fantasies. I want every last detail."

She shivered. Part of her was scared and another part of her was horny as hell at his words. She licked her lips, suddenly nervous. Did she dare to tell him what she thought of when she masturbated? All the fantasies she'd had of him? His tongue blazed a path up one side of her sex and then the other, delving between her pussy lips to flick her clit before rimming her entrance again.

Rysen was losing his mind. The taste of her blood and her cream on his tongue teased him. The scent of her arousal drove him nearly over the edge. She wanted him, and he knew it. He wanted to hear every filthy little detail. What she thought about when her fingers did the walking. He wanted to know how to please her in every possible way. It might be the closest thing he would ever have to possessing her. He moved away from her sex, kissing his

way up her stomach, between her breasts, and up the side of her neck, flicking the pulse point before kissing along her jaw, until he pressed his lips against hers.

Her mouth parted, and her tongue darted out shyly to engage his. He flexed his power, releasing the bonds around her clit and nipples. Driving the invisible rods in her core and ass, harder and faster.

“So close,” she murmured, pulling her mouth away from his.

He growled and slowed down the speed of his thrusts. “Not without me. Now tell me,” he ordered.

She groaned and squirmed underneath him. He opened his mind to her, letting her thoughts and feelings wash over him. She was frustrated and conflicted. He now knew just how much his rejection had hurt her, formed her into the rebellious hellion lying under him. She wanted to submit to him, give him all she had, yet she was too hurt.

Closing his eyes to stem the flow of thoughts and emotions, he took a deep breath and blew it out. He tried to rein in his need to dominate and fuck her. If he was to get anywhere with her, she would have to be the one in control.

Sliding off her reluctantly, he lay down beside her. He turned his head to look over at her. Their eyes met. He could see her confusion. He grimaced as a wave of pain washed over him.

“Take me, love. Use me.”

“You’re relinquishing control?” Confusion was evident in her voice.

“Yes.”

“But --”

“No buts. Fuck me.” His inner dominant vampyre railed against this change. It wanted her on all fours, his hand buried in her hair, head pulled back, neck exposed, as he fucked her and drank of her. He shook his head at it. *Not this time. She needs this.*

He released the ropes of power that wound her body, then stretched his arms over his head, spread his legs, and wrapped those cords around his body, holding himself down. He waited for her to take him up on his offer.

“Are you sure about this? I know --”

He didn’t let her finish. “Fuck me.”

He closed his eyes, readying himself for the feel of her on top of him, the slick glide of her pussy as his cock slid home, the way her muscles would clench around him. He also braced himself for hunger to overtake him. The need to dominate her once she was on top of him would be the hardest to fight. He swallowed and slowly opened his eyes. His lips parted, about ready to order her on top of him when he felt her beside him.

Her hand caressed his face. “Rysen,” she said softly. He opened his eyes, waiting for her to make a move.

“Rysen, look at me,” she ordered softly. Turning his head, he looked into her eyes. His breath caught at the gentleness he found there, as well as the passion blazing behind the calm front she was projecting. He knew she was in turmoil. He could taste her emotions on his tongue.

“Yes, darling?” He groaned inwardly at how husky his voice was. He cleared his throat and tried again. “What is it?”

She looked away and then back at him. Licking her lips, she opened her mouth.

“I want you to fuck me. I want you to be in control.”

He stared at her. He could feel her struggle. “Why?” He needed hear from her lips what she was thinking, feeling, what she wanted.

“Because...” She stopped speaking and looked away. He wanted to open his mind, invade her thoughts, but instead, he shut down their link. She would tell him on her own.

Kit wasn't sure why she was insisting he take control again. As tempting as it was to be the one on top, she had liked what he was doing to her just fine. Besides, something inside her wanted to find out what it would be like just once to be under his control, to finally give in to him. Perhaps then her hunger would be sated. She looked back at him, meeting his eyes.

"I just want to see what it's like."

"What *what* is like?"

She hated that he was so calm, as if he wasn't on fire like she was. As if his body wasn't covered in sweat and he wasn't aching like she was.

"I want to see what it would be like to be under your control..." Her voice tapered off at the end, but she was proud that she had at least said it out loud.

"Are you sure? Once this starts, there is no going back."

"Yes." She prayed he wouldn't ask her again.

"Okay then, lie down as you were before."

She did as she was told, spreading her legs wide, arms over her head. She closed her eyes, hoping that this time, finally, he would fuck her. She felt his power slide over her like butter-soft leather, binding her ankles and wrists, holding her legs apart and her upper body down.

She felt his heat over her, his body sliding against hers. He brushed soft kisses over her stomach, working his way up. She was on fire again; just one touch ignited her. She was drowning in him again, and he had done nothing more than kiss her. His lips continued their path up between her breasts, across her collarbone, up her neck, tracing her jugular vein with his tongue as he continued to blaze a trail up to her mouth. His eyes came into view, and his body heat surrounded her.

“What is about to be done can never be undone,” he whispered. His eyes blazed to life. The brightness nearly blinded her. A shiver of fear rushed up her spine. The neon yellow orbs glowed, and she started to struggle.

“I’ve waited too long. I am far beyond gentle. Far, far beyond anything civilized.” With that declaration, he thrust into her. She cried out at the invasion. “By the gods, you’re tight. So fucking tight. You feel so good.” He withdrew and slammed into her again. He pounded her pussy hard and fast. He wasn’t just fucking her; he was branding her. His mouth took hers in animalistic possession, his teeth biting, scraping her bottom lip, sucking the thick flesh into his mouth. His tongue plunged into her, mimicking the movement of his hips slamming against hers.

Oh god, she cried out silently. She felt his power wrap around her clit and squeeze. More strands wrapped around her nipples. The slick slide of skin, wet flesh slapping against flesh, his grunts of pleasure, and her heart hammering against her chest were all that she heard. She felt her stomach tightening painfully. She was on the edge, so close to coming. She wanted to wrap her legs around him and meet his thrusts with ones of her own. He fucked her hard, the head of his cock hitting her cervix with each drive of his shaft.

“All mine, every inch of you.” His voice was a deep, hollow sound, no longer recognizable. She didn’t have time to think or even ask him what was going on. His fangs pierced her shoulder, and her body bucked against the invisible restraints. Her inner walls quivered around his cock; her muscles jumped and twitched as an orgasm rolled over her. She opened her mouth and screamed.

Chapter Five

Rysen felt as if he were losing his mind. He couldn't stop himself from thrusting into her. Her pussy deliciously clenched around him, squeezing his cock, the pain adding to his arousal. He was on fire, burning up. He could feel his power welling up inside him, threatening to spill over. He already knew his eyes had changed. What would happen next, he wasn't sure. He was losing control, and he didn't care. All he knew, all he felt, was her. He continued to piston his hips, reveling in the feel of her wet, slick channel all around him. Her blood flooded his mouth, and his vision became red.

Delicate tendrils of fire rushed up and down his spine. His cock expanded and twitched inside her tight cunt as it contracted all around him. He could vaguely hear her screaming. His balls drew closer against his body. His stomach tightened, and he tensed. Releasing her shoulder, a roar issued forth from his mouth as he came deep inside her. He didn't stop thrusting. He continued to pump his hips until every last drop of his seed was inside her and his cock was flaccid.

Panting harshly, he looked down at her and cursed silently. He watched a tear slip down the side of her face. What had he done? He slowly withdrew from her, trying to ignore the seductive scent of their mingled arousal. He willed the power wrapping around her body

and holding her down to break. Her legs fell open, and he turned away from the sight of his seed slipping out of her pussy.

He opened his mouth to apologize, but no words would come out. He had wanted to be gentle, but by the time they had finally come together, it was too late; the hunger had consumed him. It didn't help that she had given him permission to take control. He ran a hand through his hair and looked down, swearing at what he saw. There, on her left breast, right below the puncture marks where he had fed from her, was his seal, burned right into her flesh.

She was now his whether she liked it or not. The tattoo said as much. He dropped to his knees, reaching out he brushed back strands of hair that clung to her sweat-drenched face.

"I'm sorry, darling. I was too rough," he started. Pain lanced his heart as he watched her curl up into a little ball. He opened his mouth to apologize again, but she cut him off.

"I liked it," she whispered.

With hesitation, he asked, "Liked what?" He continued to stroke her hair, silently sighing at the feel of the thick, silken strands against his palm.

"I liked the way it felt to have you in control."

He could hear the tears threatening to spill in her voice. He hung his head while continuing to run his fingers through her hair. He knew now why she was so sad. She had hoped, in the back of her mind, that if she gave him control it would satisfy the curiosity and taste for him. It hadn't. She had liked what she had felt. She was now wondering if that made her weak. She was asking herself if all that hard work she had done to rebel against him was for nothing.

He wanted to tell her it wasn't. That she was still strong despite liking the way it felt to have him in control. He kept silent, knowing if he said anything it would just make things worse. Instead, he continued to stroke her hair and waited for her to gather herself together.

To put back on the armor she wore around him and get ready to fight him for power again. He felt honored to see her so vulnerable. He knew, though, that she would not feel the same.

Finally, she reached up and batted his hand away. "I'm not some fucking cat. Get away from me."

He hid his smile and moved back, waiting, watching to see what she would do next. "That was round one. We have a long way to go before our hungers are met."

She sat up, not bothering to cover up for modesty's sake. Instead, she ran a hand through her mussed hair and looked up at him, her eyes meeting his with a look that dared him to say something about what he had just witnessed. He sat there, silent. She stood up on wobbly legs. He preened. She walked over to her pile of clothes and weapons and gathered them up.

"I'm going to shower. When I get back, I expect you to have found food somewhere in this place that isn't stale, moldy, or so past its expiration point that it can walk and think for itself." She padded past him and rushed up the stairs.

Once he was sure she couldn't see, he grinned.

* * * * *

Kit pushed open the door of the bathroom and walked in, dropping her clothing on the floor. She pulled back the shower curtain and turned the knobs and waited for the water to heat up. She turned around and looked at herself in the mirror. Her eyes widened as she reached up to trace the mark on her chest. She recognized it as Rysen's crest.

"That bastard!" she shrieked. Her fingers passed over the mark again. The tattoo felt warm. Anger rushed through her. She turned off the water, then whirled away from the mirror and marched out of the bathroom. Her vision went red for a bit, and energy swirled around inside her. Explosions went off behind her. She paid them no mind. Her world narrowed to tunnel vision, and all she could think of was Rysen and demanding answers. She made her way downstairs, looking for him.

When he appeared in front of her, she rushed at him.

“How dare you! You swore you wouldn’t make me yours!” Her hand connected with his face. His head rocked to the side, and he stumbled to the left, almost dropping the items in his hand. Tables toppled. Lamps, sconces, and glassware shattered.

She launched herself at him, only to bounce back. She tried again with the same result. Panting, she glared at him as he straightened. His head turned toward her, his face a mask of calm.

“First of all, I did not mark you on purpose. Secondly, calm the hell down. You’ve lost control of your powers.” He raised his hand and gestured around the room.

Her eyes widened at the destruction around her. “What the hell is going on?” She looked back at him for an explanation.

“You’re coming into your new powers.”

“What powers?”

“You had to feed from me. You were very weak, the poison was destroying you, and you were healing too slowly. I had to save you.”

“You had no right --”

“You would have died.”

“So? My choice.”

Everything dropped from his arms. He disappeared and reappeared before her in the blink of an eye. He grabbed her wrists and pulled her to him, “I don’t give a flying fuck what your so-called choice is; you are not dying on me. Ever. I love you far too much.”

“You asshole, how dare you? I don’t care if you love me or not. When my time is up, it’s up. You can’t stop that.”

“The hell I can’t.”

His lips came down on hers hard, a possessive and violent kiss. She tried to take control of it, shaking off his grip. Her hands came up to take hold of his biceps. Her fingers could only take in half the width of his muscle. She squeezed, her nails biting into his skin, breaking the flesh. He groaned and bit her bottom lip. Pleasure rushed through her as the beginnings of an orgasm formed. She was so close. Her legs quivered, and her juices slid down her thighs as her pussy clenched around nothing. A violent urge overwhelmed her. She wanted to fuck him. She wanted to feel his cock stretching her to the limit. She needed to feel him coming inside her as she screamed out her release. She let go of his biceps and grabbed ahold of his shirt.

She pushed him against the wall and pulled her head back. She tasted the blood from the wounds he'd inflicted and licked her lips, smiling, her body humming with need and power. Buttons flew everywhere as she ripped open his shirt, exposing his lightly tanned chest and the ridges of his abdomen. Her hands dropped to work on the belt around his waist, and he shrugged out of his ruined top.

Once she had his belt undone, she ripped open the fly of his leather pants. Pushing the heavy black material down, she got down on her knees before his hardened cock, taking in how thick he was, the ruddy head of him already leaking a crystalline tear. Grasping the base of him, she licked away the drop of precum and took him into her mouth.

He buried his hands in her hair and urged her head closer to his cock, asking her to take more of him in her mouth as his hips pushed forward. She released his cockhead with a soft *pop*.

"No. I'm in control this time." She moved closer and swirled her tongue around the wide head. His body stilled, his hands still buried in her hair. This pleased her more than she could say.

Her other hand released his pants and took hold of his hip, urging him to feed her mouth inch by inch. He was so thick he stretched her mouth almost painfully. Raising her gaze, she watched him watch her as she took more of him in until he hit the back of her

throat. Relaxing her throat, she swallowed him. He moaned. His eyes narrowed until all she could see was violet caged by thin black lashes.

She purred inwardly in satisfaction at the power she held over him. She bobbed her head up and down while pulling and pushing his hips forward and back. He followed the rhythm she set, thrusting his hips gently. Hollowing out her cheeks, she increased the pressure around his shaft. Her tongue slid along the length of his cock.

She felt his shaft throb in time with his heartbeat, her own heart matching the cadence. It was as if they were one. In his eyes, she could see his every thought as if it were her own. She saw pleasure and awe. She dropped her mental shields and let his thoughts rush through her mind. His husky voice heightened her arousal.

So good, it feels so good. I can't believe she's doing this to me.

He tightened his grip on her hair as the pace of his hips began to increase. She dug her nails into him, and he slowed his thrusts.

I want to come, he groaned. I want her to swallow every drop of me.

Trusting that he would continue to keep the pace she set, she released his hip and slid her hand upward, over his abs up to chest. She circled his nipple with her fingernail before scraping the hardened peak. He hissed, his head tipping back. She squeezed the tightened bud and then tweaked it.

"Kit," he moaned. In response, she started to hum, releasing his nipple, letting her fingertips glide over his skin, drifting over his hip to slip between his legs and cup his balls. She rolled the hardened eggs in her hand gently before tugging the sac. She knew he was close; he twitched in her mouth. She released his cock before standing up.

"Kit, what the hell?" He looked at her in confusion. Instead of answering him, she reached down and grabbed his cock, turned around, and led him away from the wall, toward the dining area. She let go of his shaft and hopped up on the polished dark wood table. Spreading her legs wide, she showed him the glistening lips of her pussy.

“Fuck me,” she ordered as she held on to the edge of the table and lay back. It didn’t take him long to follow her order. He grabbed her hips, held her in place, and with one thrust, buried himself as deep as he could go. He pounded into her hard and fast, his balls slapping her ass with each thrust.

“Mine,” he growled. “All mine.”

His head came down. Without warning, he bit into her shoulder, causing her to buck off the table. He thrust into her harder. One hand released her hip to slip between her thighs, sliding his thumb into her slit. He found her clit and pressed down, holding his thumb there as he fucked her. Each pull of his lips sent frissons of pleasure through her, heightening her need to come. Her stomach tightened, her orgasm coiling tighter and tighter as she was taken higher and higher.

Her vaginal walls began to convulse around his cock, and her legs began to shake. She came screaming his name.

He thrust into her once, twice, three times before his cock twitched and he spurted his seed deep inside her, coating her walls. He continued to fuck her until she felt him soften inside her. It wasn’t enough. She needed more of him.

He released her shoulder and laid his head down. Without a thought, she brought up her head, leaned forward, fangs extended, and bit into the thick muscle of his shoulder. His hot, sweet blood filled her mouth, and arousal coiled within her. The aftershocks grew stronger, and again she was on the verge of coming.

He convulsed, and his cock hardened within her. He began to thrust into her again. “Demanding minx, you will pay for this later.”

She laughed as she drank his blood. Releasing the wound, she lapped at the puncture marks until they were closed. “Is that a promise?”

“Oh, yes, darling. It’s a promise.” His head rose, and he took her lips in a punishing kiss, promising dark delights later. Their tongues swirled and twined around each other. Her

arms came up to wrap around him, and her hands stroked his sweat-soaked back. She wrapped her legs around his waist and matched his thrusts with her own. The table shook beneath her as he pounded into her. She heard the wood crack just as another orgasm burst over her. Her body shook as she screamed out her release. He stilled above her, his cock jerked, and he came again. He stopped kissing her, and his breath wafted over her face as he tried to calm down.

She heard a massive crack, and Rysen lifted her just as the table shuddered and collapsed. They both looked down at the ruined piece of furniture.

His body started to shake against her, and she smacked his back. "You're going to have to replace that." That only made him laugh harder.

She found herself laughing along with him. "Okay, we need to clean up, and not together." She shook her head and slid down his body. Before he could say anything, she turned and ran upstairs, giggling all the way.

* * * * *

Syrus threw down his cell phone. The backup he had called for was nowhere to be found. After making sure his people were still maintaining their positions around the inn, Syrus had returned to his hotel, far from the action. He didn't want his presence revealed until he had enough clans under his leadership and it was time to move. Now his plan seemed to be falling apart. He needed support. They needed to capture Kit.

He paced in his hotel suite, trying to figure out his next move. So far, he couldn't get into the inn, and his brother was nowhere to be found. A thought occurred to him. If he couldn't get into the hotel, he'd make Kit come out. He picked up his cell phone and hit speed dial.

"Hello?"

"Do we have Jessye yet?"

“Yes, sir, we do.”

“Good. Bring her to the inn. Kit will come out when she sees her. And once we have Kit, we’ll have Rysen.” He hung up, smiling. “Soon, brother. Soon I’ll have you right where I want you.”

Chapter Six

Kit felt shaky as she stumbled to the shower. Her muscles jumped and twitched, her legs felt like Jell-O, and she felt dizzy. The tattoo throbbed and burned on her chest. Eyes closed, she reached out blindly, and her hand made contact with the shower knobs, turning one and then the other. She heard the spray of water and pulled back the curtain. Stumbling into the tub, she audibly gasped as the freezing-cold water made contact with her skin.

She rushed forward and patted the wall until she found the knobs, quickly turning them until warm water gushed from overhead. She sank down onto her knees and wrapped her arms around herself as her body shook.

“Darling? Darling, are you all right?”

She felt Rysen’s warm presence behind her and automatically turned. “I d-don’t know what’s wro-wrong with m-me.”

His warmth enveloped her. Just like that, the shaking stopped. Opening her eyes, blinking through the downpour of water, she saw concern on his face. *Shit, I’m in trouble.* The water stopped, and she looked up at him.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“Your body is trying to adjust to my blood. I will help you through this. Trust me, please.”

She had no choice. There was no one else. She could feel the links to her clan slowly disintegrating. She could feel new bonds forming, stretching out. An image of Karella came into her mind, naked, bent over a padded leather bench, ass in the air, hands tied behind her back. A tall, masked man stood over her, a large paddle in his hand. All the man wore was a pair of leather pants and boots. Kit quickly pulled her mind back, but not before watching the paddle swing through the air and make contact with Karella’s lily-white ass, turning it bright red.

A warm gush of cream slipped down her thigh. A sense of envy poked at her. She wanted to be Karella, being spanked by Rysen. Her body quaked. Arousal began to twist in the pit of her stomach, her nipples becoming sensitive, hardened tips. Her vaginal walls clenched. Need clawed at her.

“Fuck me, Rysen. Fuck me now.” Her heating time overwhelmed her. She *needed* him.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!” She reached up and grabbed his face and brought it down to hers. Her lips made contact with his just as she began to see images of his kin -- Karella being fucked up the ass, but also the masked man, and so many more. So many eyes, so many voices, so many emotions rolled over her and rushed through her. She was a conduit connecting them with Rysen. They both felt their fear, their lust, their need. All their emotions enhanced Kit and Rysen’s arousal. Rysen picked her up out of the tub. Once she was on her feet, he pushed her against the wall. She brought her leg up, hooking it over his waist. He took hold of her hips and pushed her upward. She wrapped both her legs around his waist. Reaching between them, he took hold of his cock, sliding it along her slit.

“Fuck me,” she gritted out.

He didn't have to be asked twice. He thrust into her, making her cry out. Her back slid up and down the wall with every thrust. She lowered her head, and their mouths met in a hungry, biting kiss that bordered on violence. She could feel his clan's lust. Images flashed through her mind -- men kissing each other, women fondling each other's breasts, orgies breaking out in rooms she had never visited. So much sex, so much need.

Rysen's thoughts invaded her mind. *I'm drowning. So much power. Goddess help me, my love is killing me.*

She felt someone come. Their orgasm surged through her, triggering the others, including her own. She cried out, her core clenched around Rysen, and her body shook. She came over and over again.

"Rysen, please help me."

The next minute, her body slumped in exhaustion, her vision blurred, and her limbs fell limply at her side. Rysen held her as she continued to twitch from aftershocks. Her head lowered to his shoulder.

"Rysen, please --" She couldn't finish the sentence; it took too much energy.

"Don't worry, my love. I'll take care of you."

She yawned, her eyelids becoming heavy. She smiled softy, relieved to have him with her as she fell asleep.

Rysen held her close, ignoring the ache of his throbbing cock. He would take care of himself later. With his mind, he turned on the water and slowly lowered her down to the tub. He stopped up the drain and let the water rise as he stepped out to gather the toiletries he would need to clean her up. He puttered around the bathroom, softly humming to himself. It had been a long time since he'd taken care of anyone.

He'd cared for his wife, Lorrie, though he'd never loved her as a husband should. When she was killed in the fire that took his entire family, he'd vowed never to lose another person he cared about. That vow had led him to his maker, the high king, Severin.

He placed the various bottles, bath towels, and loofahs around the tub and stepped back into the water. He looked down at Kit, and his heart contracted. He had never thought that he could ever love a person as much as he loved Kit. He picked up her limp body and sank down until he was sitting. Drawing her against his chest, he began the process of cleaning her.

When he was finished, he dried her carefully and then carried her to the bed. He shook his head, wishing their surroundings were more sumptuous and comfortable. With a thought, he called for Karella.

She arrived looking as if she had been running a marathon -- face red, panting, skin glistening with sweat. He could smell the scent of sex coming off her. More than one male aroma clung to her skin.

"Sorry to disturb you. I need you to get a crew here to start cleaning this place up and decorating it accordingly. The style should be simple elegance."

Karella's eyes squinted, brows drawn down as if she was trying to picture what he was asking for.

"Get a magazine if you need to. Now go." He laid Kit gently on the bed. Her features looked so relaxed, so soft and angelic, he felt awed to be so close to her when she was so defenseless.

"You are so beautiful, my love." Reaching out, he gently touched her face, just the brush of his fingertips from her temple, tracing the edge of her jaw. "My wife, may the Maker rest her soul, was lovely, but not as strong as you. I do wish I had met you before I knew her. Could you imagine us married?" He chuckled as he poured oil into his hand and

rubbed his palms together. He moved down the bed and began to massage the soles of her feet, slowly, putting just the right amount of pressure where it was needed.

“We would probably kill each other over and over again, but it would be worth it.” Taking care to massage each calf, his hands moved up her legs with slow precision. The bedroom glowed with soft golden light that danced and flickered as if cast by candles instead of bulbs.

“Sire?” Karella’s voice floated toward him. He was vaguely aware of her presence.

“Yes?”

“We felt her. As if she were one of us. What is happening to her?”

“I gave her too much of my blood. The bonds she formed with Jessye are breaking. She will soon be one of us.”

“Sire?”

“Yes, El.”

“Why her? She is not your usual type of woman.”

“Ah, El, you have no clue. She is all I desire in a woman and then some.”

“Then you will be letting go of your harem? Would you like me to inform them?”

“No, no, I shall do it once this whole thing is over. They deserve more than a messenger.”

She curtsied and disappeared. He turned Kit over carefully and started on her back.

A prickle of power seeped in from outside. It was weak, but stronger and older than the vampyres he’d sensed before.

He called Karella to the room and gave her instructions that Kit was not to be disturbed. He dressed quickly, shielded his power, and brought himself to the guards he had posted around the property.

“Up until a few hours ago, they were bored, doing nothing but patrolling or fighting each other. Now they seem more organized,” the head of Rysen’s guards reported.

Rysen looked out at the threat and blinked. He recognized some of those faces, outcasts from other clans. Exiles that had shown themselves to be a liability to the leaders of their respective houses. “Let us observe them for a bit longer, see if their leader shows him- or herself.”

He saw movement from the north, coming from the weedy garden. Two figures approached, one standing upright, strong with the virility of a powerful vampyre, and the other hunched over, as if burdens of life pushed him forward.

Ripples of disbelief rushed over Rysen. *Syrus? But he perished in the fire.*

He watched, incredulous, as his brother walked out into the open, dragging behind him the leader of Kit’s clan, Jessye. The older vampyre’s shoulders sagged. There were bags under her eyes. Those brown orbs looked haunted, as if she’d seen things she couldn’t comprehend.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Jessye!” the taller figure shouted.

Syrus’s aura washed over Rysen. The younger vampyre didn’t hide who he was. *Big mistake*, Rysen thought.

Syrus pushed Jessye forward. She stumbled and fell to her knees, dark brown hair swinging on impact. Her usually clear mocha complexion was now marred with bruises, and there were scars that hadn’t healed on her arms.

“By law, I take Jessye as my consort by blood claim. As my consort, all of her children are now mine as well, and that includes the beautiful Kit inside. I want her out here now so that I can be properly introduced to the newest member of my clan.”

“Over my dead body,” Rysen said, his voice like broken glass.

* * * * *

Rysen paced outside the high king’s chambers, waiting to be heard.

The doors to Severin's chambers opened. Rysen entered, but he didn't waste time with formalities.

"Jessye has been captured by Syrus. I know not how."

"Has Ryu been informed? He'll want to know that his only blood daughter has been captured."

"It's worse than that. Syrus has taken her by blood claim."

"Who is this Syrus? Of whose clan?"

"He is my brother. I thought he was dead. I don't know who his creator is or how he came by his power, but I know this -- he's very strong. And he wants Kit as the spoils of war."

Severin paced slowly, head bowed, eyes half-closed, fingers stroking his chin. His waist-length red hair was pulled back in a low ponytail. "I assume you don't want that."

"No, I don't, and more importantly, she wouldn't."

"Ryu's clan has become very powerful since Ryu's decision to take a sabbatical and leave Jessye in charge. We must find him. In the meantime, we must move to stop this coup by your brother. I'm allowing you any means necessary."

Rysen nodded. "Thank you, sire." He bowed and disappeared from sight.

Back at the inn, he arrived to find Karella coming out of the bedroom Kit was in.

"Is she awake?"

"Not yet." Karella smiled. "You really love her, don't you?"

"More than I can say."

"Good for you. Now, what is to be done about the threat outside? The seal is holding and will do so for quite a while, but what would you have me do?"

"I shall take care of it. Things have changed. Tell the guards to stand by, but I'm going to confront the enemy alone."

Karella looked up at him in shock. “But, sire --”

Rysen shook his head. “I need to do this. It’s important. My brother, who I thought was dead, is out there. He’s the cause of all this mess. I need to fix it and understand how this came to be.”

Karella didn’t ask for an explanation, just nodded her head and curtsied. “Good luck, sire.”

“Thank you.”

Karella nodded and stepped out of the way. Taking a deep breath, Rysen squared his shoulders and entered the room to find Kit very much awake and very much aroused.

Chapter Seven

Kit felt as if she were going to burst into flames. Her breasts were heavy and tight; the slightest breeze over her nipples caused them to throb with need. Her pussy was slick, and her clit pulsed. Her nether lips tingled, wanting his touch. She had never felt so much need for one person before. It scared her. She writhed on the bed, trying to find a cool place on the sheet. She sensed him the moment he reappeared in the house.

When she had awakened to find him gone, she had panicked, and that was when her body had gone into overdrive. It was as if her body were trying to bring him home by becoming one pulsing point of need. She sat up, legs spread, arms at her side, hands sitting on the mattress. Her hair was a mass of waves and curls, falling around her shoulders like a dark brown cloak, half of it covering her face.

With a toss of her head, it fell back, only to slide forward again. She heard him coming up the stairs, felt his heartbeat with every step. She reached down, her fingers slipping over the slick petals of her sex. Jolts of electricity sparked and blazed to life, only to fizzle. The simple touch wasn't enough. She needed his hand, needed his body, needed him.

A growl of frustration vibrated past her lips. In anguish, she pressed her fingers between her pussy lips to find her clit. Stubbornness drove her actions. The part of her that

rebelled against him wanted to prove that she didn't need him for this simple act of pleasing herself. Finding the hardened bud, she gently passed the pad of her finger over just the hood.

Her body jerked as a bolt of electricity scattered throughout her body. Her stomach tightened, nipples pulsing with need. Lying back, she arched her hips as she began to tease her clit, slowly at first and then increasing the speed, wanting to coax that one shining moment out of her body so she wouldn't have to crawl to him for release. Taking hold of one of her nipples, she rolled and tugged the bud. Heat and electric currents clashed against one another.

"Rysen," she moaned, wanting her new lover with her, wanting him to watch her as she proved she didn't need him. Yet, she knew she did. She did need him. More importantly, she wanted him. She wanted to watch him take out that thick cock of his, already dripping with precum. She wanted to watch him stroke it as he watched her masturbate. She wanted to watch him throw his head back, the muscles of his neck standing out with strain as he battled with his orgasm.

The image of him -- pants around his ankles, shirt off, hand wrapped around his cock -- inflamed her, adding fuel to the fire that was already threatening to burn out of control. Her back arched, and her fingers moved faster, increasing the pressure as she pinched her nipple harder. She pictured him, his body glistening with sweat, violet eyes darkened, glazed over with desire, and she focused on her fingers, how they moved between her thick, slick pussy lips.

"By the Maker," she moaned and rolled over. Her body writhed against the mattress, hips rocking back and forth, trying to coax her orgasm to finally break free. She didn't hear the door open or his voice as he swore. All she felt was his presence washing over her like a tidal wave, and just like that, she was drowning. Her emotions intensified; her senses were so attuned to him, it was painful. His mind crashed against hers and broke down the fragile wall. His thoughts bombarded her mind, and she could see how she looked to him, see how

aroused he was by the sight before him. His arousal caused the fire in her body to burn out of control.

She was the embodiment of fire, need, desire, and arousal. She didn't see, but rather felt, the bed dip with his weight.

"I can't hold back. I need you now." His voice was hoarse with need. She felt the pressure of his cockhead at her entrance. She stopped her fingers and balanced on all fours. She wiggled her ass in the air, raising it higher for him. He didn't hesitate. He shoved into her in one stroke.

He felt impossibly large now. It hurt to have him inside her, yet the pain and pleasure collided, increasing her arousal. She wanted more of it, more of him, and she told him so.

"More." Her voice sounded unrecognizable, husky, breathy, and not hers. She hadn't sounded like this the first time they had come together. This seemed to be more. She felt his chest on her back as his arms bracketed hers, lips brushing against her shoulder.

"*Help me*," she pleaded, using her mind; her voice wouldn't work. She was overwhelmed by what she was feeling. He slowly slid his cock out of her and then slammed back into her. She moaned, her fingers digging into the mattress, clutching the sheets below her.

"Fuck me, Rysen. Fuck me harder."

"Say you're mine," he demanded. "Tell me who you belong to."

His voice vibrated through her. The command caused her soul to quake, and the tattoo on her chest burned in response. Could she deny that he had marked her as his? Could she deny him? "My body is yours. Every inch of me belongs to you, but you will never own my soul."

"We'll see about that." He began to fuck her harder. "Everything you are is going to belong to me. *Everything*."

She thrust her hips back at him as he pounded into her. “Never,” she growled. “I will never bow to you.”

“Who said anything about bowing? I was thinking perhaps on your knees, sucking me off.”

“Ha, I was thinking the same thing, only you were on your knees, eating me.”

He slowed his thrusts, leisurely strokes that teased her. “As much as I love that picture you’ve painted, that won’t happen now. Later, perhaps.” He pushed his hips forward and stilled, his cock throbbing inside her. She squeezed her muscles, eliciting a groan from him. Balancing on one hand, she slid a hand down to continue what she had started earlier.

“Oh, no, you don’t.” He flexed his power; invisible threads wrapped around her wrist and pulled it away from its destination. She fell forward. Her arm was now outstretched over her head, and the other one soon followed as she landed on the mattress. Turning her head, she caught sight of a mirror. She saw the way she looked -- arms outstretched, ass in the air, him buried deep inside her. The scene was so erotic, so sexually stimulating to her. The threads wrapped around her nipples and clit, just as before, squeezing, pinching, her pain and pleasure sensors flicking off and on.

“Rysen,” she started breathlessly, ready to plead for release.

“Say it. Tell me who you belong to.”

“You, Rysen. I belong to you. Please, fuck me,” she implored.

“I love hearing you say ‘please.’ Just as much as I love the way your pussy holds me, nice and tight. You feel so hot, so wet, and I know it’s just for me, *only* for me. You bring out the worst in me, love, and the best.”

In the mirror, she watched him reach out and take hold of her hair. Grabbing a handful, he tilted her head back. She mourned the loss of being able to watch them in the mirror. As if in response, the image of them appeared in her mind. She watched and felt as he began to slowly plunge in and out of her.

“So tight, so perfect. I never wanted to pass you over. I have always wanted you, from the moment I first set eyes on you. You weren’t ready for me, not then, but now...now you are ready, so ready for me. You are my consort, my queen. No one else but you. No one.”

His words caused the tattoo on her chest to blaze hotter. It was almost as if fire were spreading, tendrils of heat extending over her skin, dancing along her flesh. She wriggled, uncomfortable with the sensation. Her chest hurt, heart pounding out of control. Something was happening, and she couldn’t stop it. In the distance, she heard fabric rip. She felt the pinch of her canines sinking into her bottom lip. In the mirror, she saw her eyes turn bright yellow, pupils bloodred surrounded by black.

“All mine,” he gritted out. He pounded into her faster, harder, the slap of wet flesh blending with the roaring in her ears. She watched his face become strained with concentration and saw with great clarity the rivulets of sweat that slipped down his forehead, dripped onto his chest, and joined other droplets becoming thin trails that traveled over his abdomen.

“Rysen, what is happening to me?” she asked. The question became lost when her nipples and clit were pinched hard. She cried out and shattered. Her legs began to quake, her vaginal muscles rippled around his cock, and fire overwhelmed her. Pain shot through her as he pulled her back to him by her hair. He released her hair and wrapped his arm around her waist. Holding her against his hot, slick body, he brushed his lips over her shoulder.

“I can’t wait to taste you.” Another tightening of the invisible threads caused her to come again. Her body bowed, but he kept his hold around her waist. He brushed his lips over her skin once more and then opened his mouth and sank his fangs into her shoulder. She screamed, body shaking as she came yet again. She watched through blurred vision as he drank of her, his lightly tanned skin contrasting with her mocha complexion, his head bent, his ink black hair sliding into her dark brown hair. Each pull of his mouth caused shards of pleasure to skitter through her, setting off more aftershocks.

She found his hold on her wrists loosening. Raising her arm, she reached back and sank her fingers into his wet hair, urging his head down to take more of her. She let her eyes drift closed and savored the feel of his hardness against her back. His hips continued to move in short thrusts. He stopped drinking and lapped at the wounds before raising his head. He moved back, slipping out of her.

“Lie down. I want to watch your face as you come again.”

She lowered herself down and rolled over, spreading her legs wide. His power flexed, the threads tightened again, and her back bowed as pleasure shot through her. He lowered himself over her and plunged into her, making her cry out.

“All mine,” he said. “I won’t let anyone take you from me.”

“No one can take me from you.” She wrapped her arms around him, nails digging into his back as she wrapped her legs around his waist, taking him deeper inside her. “Fuck me, Rysen, fuck me,” she urged, pushing her hips forward.

He began to move inside her, thrusting hard. She felt her orgasm building again. His hips moved faster and faster, plunging into her harder and harder. They moved together as she met his thrusts, grinding her hips against his. He shuddered above her, his body shaking as he tried to hold back.

“Come for me, Rysen.” She squeezed her walls around him, and he groaned. “Come for me, now.”

He threw back his head and cried out. His cock twitched inside her, and she felt him spurt his seed, coating her walls. He continued to fuck her until he was soft. Breathing hard, he brushed his lips against hers. She opened her mouth, and the tip of her tongue tentatively touched the seam of his lips. The kiss was slow, soft, full of affection.

Rysen pulled back his head and smiled at her. “I love you,” he said softly.

She stared up at him, shocked. He had said he loved her before, but until that very moment, it hadn't truly registered. She saw the conviction in his eyes, as well as the emotion. He loved her. He truly did love her. She opened her mouth and then closed it.

"Shhhh, you don't have to say anything. I'm just happy that you're mine." He brushed his lips against hers one last time before rolling over to the side. She lay beside him very still, not sure if she could move. Her body was exhausted. Her brain was slowing down. As her body settled into the mattress, she felt the prickle of power, familiar but distant. Her eyes widened, and she sat up.

"Jessye!"

Rysen was already out of bed and moving toward the bathroom. Stopping at the doorway, he turned to her. "Come, let's shower. There is something you need to see."

She shuddered at the serious tone of his voice. She felt Jessye's power flex again, calling to her. Despite the thinning connection between her and Jessye, as well as the rest of her clan, she still felt the call for help. She got out of bed and followed Rysen into the bathroom.

A few minutes later, she followed him downstairs. He led her to the dining room and pulled the curtain back from the window. She gasped as she saw Jessye on her knees, covered in bruises. She rushed forward, wanting to crash through the glass to get to her blood mother and the current leader of her clan.

"No, you can't pass the barrier. I will go. I wanted you to see what was going on." Rysen launched into a brief explanation, and Kit patiently listened, resisting the urge to scream and rush out of the inn, seal be damned. Anger roiled inside her, clashing with the sense of helplessness she felt at not being able to engage the enemy.

She also felt worried for Rysen. His brother was out there. Rysen now had to deal with Syrus having orchestrated this. She couldn't imagine what he was going through at that very moment, but she could see in his face he didn't want to discuss it. "You'll talk to me after this. You will tell me everything."

Rysen grabbed her hand and lifted it, brushing his lips against hers. "Of course. From you, I cannot hide."

He looked so vulnerable. Her heart contracted, and her breath caught in her throat.

"I know it will take time," he said, "but I hope one day you will trust me."

She nodded, but she wasn't sure if she could do that. "What are we going to do about Jessye?"

"I will negotiate an exchange. Jessye for myself."

A shiver of fear raced up her back. She wanted Jessye safe, but she didn't want Rysen in harm's way. She couldn't help but wonder if it was his blood in her veins that was making her feel this way. Her hand rose, rubbing against the tattoo. In response, the mark flared to life and the prickling of fire extended outward, warming her body.

He reached up and caressed the side of her face. She turned toward his touch as warmth turned into a blaze. Her arousal flared to life, reminding her that her heating time was far from over.

Reaching out, she dragged the tips of her nails down his chest and over his abdomen, past the waistband of his leather pants. She grasped his arousal, squeezing the hardened bulge. "You better return to me in one piece, or I'll drag you back to life from the Maker myself."

He sucked in a breath and groaned as she moved her hand up and down. His hips responded, rocking against her palm.

"And if you're a good boy and you do return to me in one piece, I'll suck you off, and I promise to swallow every last drop."

"Fuck." He dragged in a ragged breath as she increased her speed.

She savored the feel of having power over him. Her hand stopped rubbing, and she squeezed. "Promise me you'll come back in one piece."

"I promise," he said in a rough voice. He let out a jagged breath.

“No, no. Say the whole thing. Say, ‘Kit, darling, I promise to come back to you in one piece.’”

“Kit, darling, I promise to come back to you one piece.” He gazed down into her eyes. “And when I do, I will punish you for teasing me.”

Her cunt tightened. Cream dampened her pants. “Why? Have I been bad?” Her voice was a husky whisper. She wanted to undo the fly of her pants, slip her hand beneath the waistband, and touch herself as she stroked him until he burst.

“You’re teasing me when I can’t fuck you as I want to. We have to deal with Syrus. Then we can play.”

She squeezed him and glanced over at the symbol on the wall. Half the blood was gone. Sighing, she dropped her hand away from his groin. She was itching for a fight. She wanted to work off the frustration. “Fine. But I’ll watch what happens from here. Maybe practice with my new powers.”

“Thank you for not fighting with me on this.”

She shrugged and watched him adjust himself. That made her smile.

“I’ll be back.” He leaned down and brushed his lips against hers, and then he was gone. Kit said a silent prayer that he would return to her safely -- and bring Jessye with him.

Chapter Eight

Syrus paced back and forth. His cock was fit to bursting as he looked down at his captive. Jessye had been stubborn, refusing to break. He had never been so aroused in his life. As much as he savored his victory over her and claiming her under blood claim, he wished she had just given in to him. He was about to order his subordinates to take her back to his new base of operations when he felt a ripple of power extend outward, lashing out at him and causing him to stumble backward.

Looking up, he smiled. His brother had arrived, and he looked pissed.

“Rysen,” Syrus said, bowing his head.

“Brother.”

Syrus tried to control his joy at seeing his sibling. In a calm voice, he replied, “So you remember me. That’s good. I had thought after all these years I would have had to remind you.”

“How can I forget one of my own flesh and blood? How could I forget one of the people that meant more to me than life itself?” Rysen’s face became a mask of pain. He looked so vulnerable and exposed, it almost made Syrus walk over and embrace him. Almost.

Instead, Syrus stayed where he was, steeling himself with the memory of Sabella's lifeless body surrounded by blood.

"Pretty words, but they mean nothing. You abandoned me to that fire. Now you will pay for your treachery." Even as the words left his mouth, Syrus knew they were a lie. He knew that Rysen would have done anything in his power, moved heaven and earth, to save him. But he needed something, anything, that would make Rysen vulnerable.

"I didn't know you survived. By the time I returned, the house and property were ablaze. There was no way to get in. I could only stand back and watch. If I had known..." Rysen lifted his hands, palms facing upward, eyes pleading with him.

Syrus saw tears glisten in his brother's eyes and was not moved. Yet, he wasn't angry. "I don't hate you. I should thank you. If you hadn't left me to die, I would never have become a vampyre. Do you want to know what really sucks? What sucks is you have no clue what really happened. You believe it was a freak accident, don't you?" Fresh anger rose up within him, so hot it almost burned.

Rysen stared at him, confused.

"You're wrong!"

"Why are you doing this, Syrus? Why all this death and blood?"

Rysen looked so confused, Syrus actually felt sorry for him. "Lorrie. I'm doing it because of Lorrie. One of those bastard chieftains has her, and I have a score to settle with her," Syrus spat out. Saying Lorrie's name left a foul taste in his mouth.

"Lorrie is dead. She died in the fire." Rysen looked down at the ground and then up again, face scrunched up in bewilderment.

"Wrong. She was the one who started the fire. To hide what she was. She was a vampyre, hiding in the real world. One of her clan found her. I saw their argument with my own eyes. He demanded she come home, and she refused. She killed him and hid his body. Before she could dispose of it properly, she was found by a servant, who fetched me. There

was a struggle, and I lost. She knocked me out and started the fire to hide her secret. She is the reason Mother and Father are dead. And Sabella.”

Rysen shook his head again, and Syrus knew the questions floating around in his brother’s mind. *How could he not have known? How had she hidden herself so well?* Syrus knew the answers. “Lorrie hid her aura quite well. She ate food in front of us to convince us she was a mortal, and she was strong enough to feed on blood only once a month. She played the demure miss perfectly, acting sweet and naive, when in reality she was a monster, watching from the shadows.”

Bile rose in his throat. He was disgusted with himself, but he knew there was nothing he could have done. “She killed Sabella. One of the chieftains is hiding her, and I intend to shake the family tree until she falls out.” Syrus remembered his first love, sprawled out lifeless on the floor near him, her black hair mixed with blood in a deathly halo, her mocha skin already taking on a waxen hue.

Syrus looked down at Jessye, and his cock stirred. He was beginning to feel the same attraction for Jessye that he had for Sabella.

“You loved Sabella?” Rysen asked softly.

“Yes, brother, I loved Sabella and intended to take her with me when I moved out of the house into one of my own. But your Lorrie didn’t give me a chance.” Syrus looked up to see pain on Rysen’s face. His brother was in torment, trying to mesh the woman he knew with the portrait Syrus was painting of her.

“I am sorry, brother,” Syrus continued. “I didn’t figure it out until it was too late. I thought the argument she’d had was with her father. I had no clue until she had killed Sabella what she was. She even admitted it to me.” Syrus looked away, trying to shove away the memories. Sabella on the ground, dead, and Lorrie detailing step by step what she’d done to her.

“How could this be?” Rysen sank to the ground, his head hanging low, hair covering his face.

Syrus could see Rysen’s world was shifting around him, his worldview changing. If he could, Syrus would have spared Rysen this. But revealing the truth to his brother had to be done.

“And what will you do with Jessye?” Rysen’s head rose. He glanced at the inn and then back at Syrus.

Syrus knew his brother was thinking of Kit. “Jessye is mine now, by law, as is her clan. I will use them to hunt down Lorrie.” Syrus pulled himself out of the mire of pain and loneliness and focused on the task at hand -- taking the last of Jessye’s clan as his own and maybe convincing his brother to join him in hunting the bitch that had taken so much from them.

“What of Ryu?” Rysen asked.

“Let him come and challenge me if he wishes. He shouldn’t have abandoned his clan to begin with.”

“Pull back your men and let me think.”

Rysen looked so sad, Syrus’s heart contracted, chest aching. “I will give you until sunset tomorrow to make a decision. But know this -- if you get in my way, I will fight you.” Syrus signaled his men to retreat. Then, lowering himself down, he picked Jessye up in his arms. “Time to go, sweetheart.”

“Don’t call me sweetheart, you asshole. I want to see Kit.”

“Syrus,” Rysen called. “Let Jessye stay. I’ll go with you in her stead. I won’t stop you from your pursuit of Lorrie.”

Syrus looked back down at Jessye, and his body relaxed, as if the vampyre had cast a spell over him. He didn’t want to let go of his prize. He knew, though, that if he denied her this one small favor, she’d think him a greater bastard than she already did.

“Fine,” he said. “But there’s no need for you to become my hostage. I will keep watch, though.”

“As you wish, brother.” Rysen bowed his head.

Syrus lowered Jessye back to the ground, placing her on the grass as carefully as one would an injured bird.

Rysen walked forward and scooped her up, then disappeared from view. Syrus’s heart squeezed and then relaxed. He could feel her nearby, but the distance was still too far.

* * * * *

Rysen laid Jessye down in a guest room and called for Karella.

“Well, that was anticlimactic,” Kit said as she came into the room. “I was expecting a throw-down of epic proportions.”

Rysen didn’t respond. His head was filled with a haze of emotion. Sometimes flashes of thought would break apart the clouds, but then things would become diaphanous again. He brushed by Kit, muttering to her about taking care of Jessye, and left to wander the halls, ignoring those of his kin who called out to him.

He found a nice quiet library and shut the door. Leather-bound volumes lined the shelves. Absently, he wandered to one and pulled out a book. He flipped through the pages, seeing nothing. His world had been turned upside down. He was lost in a sea of facts and had no compass to guide him. Sighing, he sank down on a nearby chaise lounge and balanced the book on his lap.

Tilting his head back, he closed his eyes. Night turned into day, and he still didn’t have answers. His body stirred when he felt a hand slither up his abdomen, over his chest. His cock twitched as a slow fire began to stir. His stomach tightened, and his balls hardened, drawing closer to his body.

“Hey, lover, wake up.” Kit’s voice slipped into his drowsy mind, awakening him fully. He felt her body weight on him and wrapped his arms around her waist, holding her against him.

“What a pleasant way to wake up, darling. Kiss me.”

“Um, no. You have I-just-woke-up breath. Brush your teeth, eat something that’s actual food and not my pussy, and then we’ll kiss. Besides, you have some explaining to do. Like what the hell is going on. Jessye told me some crazy-ass story about your wife being alive and being a psycho.”

“Let’s go get something to eat, and we’ll talk.”

She wiggled off him, much to his annoyance, and stood up, holding her hand out to him. He took it and let her pull him up. He marveled at her strength. His blood was doing wonders for her. He could see it. Her aura was a beautiful burgundy color, fluctuating every so often. He was relieved it wasn’t a swirling mass of confusion. He couldn’t resist. Standing now, he tightened his grip on her hand and yanked her against him. He brought his head down and gave her a passionate kiss.

“I love you, and I am so thankful that you are with me.” He rested his forehead against hers, looking into her dark brown eyes, seeing the emotions churning in the depths. He knew she was struggling with this change of affection from him. “Do you feel I’m pressuring you to say something?”

“No. I know you don’t expect anything from me. It’s just disconcerting to hear you say those words. For so long, I’ve wanted you to love me...” She looked away as if trying to hide what she was thinking from him.

He rubbed her back. “I know I hurt you, and by hurting you, I hurt myself. I didn’t want to pass you over. I truly didn’t, but I hated the situation. I hated that you were offered to me on a platter, with seemingly no say in the matter. I did it because, as much as I wanted you, I knew you weren’t ready. If you had been my consort, you would have had to fight

constantly. You weren't strong enough. And besides, I wanted you to have a say. That was very important to me."

"I did have a say. It was my plan."

His eyes widened.

"I was in love with you, and I wanted so much to be your consort. After Ryu left, we were defenseless. We could fight, yes, but we had no direction. It was my idea to approach you about becoming your consort. Jessye didn't want it to look like we were desperate, so she made it seem like a formal request instead of just sending me to you."

"I didn't know. I...I am so sorry."

"It's okay. I'm not as angry as I once was."

He smiled softly at her words but knew there were a lot of things they needed to discuss and get past. "Let's go eat, darling. We can talk, too. I want your advice on an issue."

"Let me guess. The crazy wife of yours?"

"Among other things."

She squeezed his hand and led him out of the library, where he found Jessye looking much better than yesterday. There were still dark marks on her skin and circles under eyes.

"So, you claimed her," she said. "That explains the weakening bond between us. And I see your crest peeking out on her chest. This should be interesting."

"Good morning to you too, Jessye."

She shrugged. "It would be a better morning if that brother of yours would let me go."

"Syrus has always been stubborn. I doubt he'll just let you go. Besides, he has blood claim."

Jessye snorted as he walked over and served himself some breakfast. He sat down next to Kit, who was sipping coffee.

“Have you decided what you are going to do? Your brother intends to create quite a stir with this witch hunt he’s on.”

“I want to help him. If he continues to search for Lorrie, I will go with him. I want answers. And I owe him so much. I know you think I don’t, but I do. I doubt that this is a witch hunt, as you put it. He wouldn’t make up something like this.”

“You sure?”

Rysen nodded. “I’m sure. He wouldn’t do that.”

“I hope you’re right,” Jessye muttered under her breath.

He felt his shoulder being squeezed and looked over. He was relieved to see that Kit was being supportive.

“Since you’ve marked her, we must announce that Kit is no longer of Ryu’s clan. What shall we tell everyone?”

“I propose we combine clans. I’d like to use the original agreement you proposed when you first offered Kit as my consort. If that offer is still on the table.”

Jessye was silent for a minute. When she finally spoke, her voice was neutral. “If you want to combine clans, the offer is on the table. But since your brother defeated me, it will be his decision. I doubt he’ll agree.”

“I will try to convince him,” Rysen said.

Jessye looked up. “Now, how are you going to free me?”

“I do not know. He is very stubborn.”

“Just like his brother,” Kit muttered.

Rysen smiled. “The only way you can be freed is if Syrus allows it. I am sorry.”

Jessye sighed. “I knew you’d say that. Fine. So what have you decided? You want to find out the truth, but how?”

“Wherever he goes, I will follow. I will travel to the ends of the earth with him to discover the truth.” Rysen turned to Kit. “If you want to come with me, you’re welcome. And if you want to stay, that’s fine as well.”

Kit was silent, allowing him time to study her, watching as she mulled the idea over. “I want to go with you, to help you sort this out, but I need to know the whole story first.”

He took a deep breath and then told her about his life as a nobleman’s son, about his brother, and his then-wife. He spared no details, made sure she understood everything he was saying.

“So, you loved her, but not as a wife?”

“Yes.”

“If she’s alive, what will this do to you?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. I want answers. I want to know why she didn’t tell me. I want to know if she regrets killing my parents, Sabella, and the other servants. I lost so much that day, and Syrus lost more.”

Kit sat beside him silently. He felt the touch of her hand on his thigh, rubbing the muscle lightly. He knew the touch wasn’t sexual, but he couldn’t stop the stirring of his cock. He swallowed and concentrated on eating.

“What about the inn?” Kit asked. “I have the beginnings of a life here. I can’t just leave that. Is there a way to compromise? For the both of you to stay here and search for her?”

Rysen felt relieved that she wanted to be with him, yet also wanted her independence. “I’m sure Syrus and I can work something out.”

“Lucky you. We better meet him before he starts shitting kittens.”

“It is not sunset yet.”

“Yeah, but I got the feeling he isn’t the type to wait for very long.”

Rysen laughed. “You must have already met my brother.”

"I just have a way with people," she said, laughing with him.

Rysen gave her a light kiss on the lips before pushing his chair back and standing up. Jessye was strong enough to disappear and reappear on her own, so she needed no help from him.

* * * * *

Syrus came out from the woods, exhausted. It had been a rough night.

"Problem, brother?" Rysen asked.

"Nothing I couldn't handle. What have you decided?" Syrus tried to appear nonchalant, but his skin crawled. His fingers itched to touch Jessye. The question of his brother's decision swirled around his head.

"I want to help you search, but I also want to stay here with my new consort. Perhaps we could use this as your new base of operations. I propose to combine clans, yours and mine. We share power; you control those you have turned to your side, and I keep what is mine." Rysen's back was straight, determination on his face.

Syrus mulled over the idea. He liked the notion of having his brother with him, but there were so many complications. "How is that sharing power? It will be like two houses side-by-side with two leaders. That will not do. I cannot accept that offer. However, the right to use this as a base wouldn't be so bad. That, I accept." Syrus waited for Rysen's next request or statement.

"I do want to help you." Rysen's shoulders relaxed a little. "I want to understand why Lorrie would do this."

"Survival, stupidity, recklessness, take your pick." Syrus's focus shifted to Jessye. The night had felt long without her by his side.

"We must keep the high king apprised of this."

"And if he demands my head? I don't think so."

"Then I shall speak for you. Brother, please," Rysen pleaded, his eyes shining with emotion. "Allow me to help you in any way I can. I owe you so much."

"I have my own resources. If Severin comes for me, he will have a war on his hands. Because of Lorrie, I've seen a lot of death. You can't possibly fathom the things she's done to stay hidden. Are you really prepared for that? To see her as she truly is?"

"Yes, I am. I want to look her in the eyes and demand answers." Rysen's face hardened with resolve.

"You could endanger Kit," Syrus pointed out, watching emotions play across his brother's face.

"Kit can fend for herself," Jessye said.

Syrus watched Rysen's face carefully, seeking an answer to the question in his mind. Was he really going to allow Kit to fight beside him?

"She is my consort. She will fight by my side, come what may." There was steel in Rysen's voice, and Syrus found it comforting.

"So be it. We will make an alliance. You will control your clan, and I will continue to absorb more clans into mine. I will share information when it's relevant, and occasionally I will send Jessye back to Kit so the two can be together. Do you agree?" Syrus stepped forward, hand extended.

"I agree." Rysen strode forward and shook his hand. "It is good to have you back, brother."

Syrus shrugged. "We shall see."

Rysen enveloped Syrus in his embrace. Tears threatened to spill from Syrus's eyes, and he let out a shuddering breath.

"Great," Jessye said. "Now that we've got the family bonding thing going on, will I get a say in where I go? Or are you going to drag me with you?" Her arms were folded, showing off her ample cleavage. Syrus's gaze dropped down to Jessye's chest before moving up to meet

her questioning eyes. She was a distraction he couldn't afford. He knew he would have to let her go, at least for now.

"You are my consort. I can track you wherever you go," Syrus said softly, an edge of roughness in his voice.

"That is just so comforting. Then I vote to stay here with Kit and help her with the inn. I promise not to run away or kill myself. I like my life a little too much for the latter."

Syrus's head bobbed up and down, and his throat grew tight. "As you wish." *I will miss you*, he didn't add out loud. Before anyone could say anything to stop him, Syrus turned and disappeared. He had plans to make, things to do, feelings to ignore.

Chapter Nine

“Lunch is on.”

Rysen looked up to find Kit’s face at an open window. He smiled as an idea slipped into his mind. “I’ll be right there.”

“Perv,” Jessye muttered.

Rysen just grinned in response.

A few moments later, he sat across from Kit, eating his lunch, his eyes glued to her mouth. Jessye had decided not to join them.

“How did you get the window open?”

“Weirdly enough, Karella got it open. I tried, but nothing happened. I believe the protection of the seal is wearing off.” Kit popped a grape into her mouth and chewed.

“I wonder if we could open the window all the way.”

Kit stopped chewing, reached across the table, and smacked him gently on the cheek. “I know what you’re thinking. It’s not going to happen.”

“What was I thinking?” He tried to sound innocent and failed.

“You want to fuck me while I’m leaning over the windowsill with half my body hanging out. Not going to happen, so get those thoughts out of your mind.”

“Too late. They’re in there, and they’ve joined other thoughts that involve you and windows.”

“Perv.”

“I admitted such to you before. Shall I recount all the ways that you make me a perv?”

“No, I already know.”

“Or I could just show you?” A musky scent filled the air as he became aroused. Her body responded in kind, and he growled, his eyes darkening.

“Don’t you dare,” she warned. As she said this, she put down the cup she was drinking from. Her body was still, poised to take flight.

When he spoke, his voice was a roughened whisper. “Run.”

 THE END 

Selena Illyria

I/R Author Selena Illyria was born with an overactive imagination. She loves to write stories featuring futuristic cities that can only be imagined, visit island kingdoms of vampires/dragons, giggle with mischievous pixies, peek in on faeries looking for their mates, check up on the naughty staff of an exclusive academy, and sigh over how in love a powerful business exec is with his wife. She can't wait to write stories with her talented, creative and wonderful CPs, Celia Kyle and Shara Cooper.

When she's not writing, she loves to read books of many different genres. She also loves to watch some of her favorite movies (too many to be named) and television shows. She also loves to listen to some of her favorite musical artists. All of these things help inspire her to write.

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