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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

TO HATE AND TO HOLD

Dakota Rebel

Dedication

For Michele – My editor, and more importantly my friend. You have made me a better writer and while there is no way I could ever repay you for what you've taught me, I can at least write about hot boys for you once in a while. ;)

> XoXoXo Dakota

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Rambo: Studio Canal Image S.A.

Freddy Krueger: Nightmare on Elm Street, New Line Cinema

Chapter One

Ethan Connor, Vampire Prince and total douche bag, had been back in Royal Oak for less than an hour, and already he was pissing me off. It may have been a new record, even for him.

I watched him run his fingers through his jet black hair for the fifth time in as many minutes and contemplated going over to him and punching him in the face. I knew it would make me feel better, no matter how childish.

"Jamie, if you don't stop staring at him, people are going to think you don't hate him as much as you claim to." My sister Beth dropped another mead off in front of me on her way down the bar to take care of other patrons.

She enjoyed shooting barbs at me while she was working, it made it harder for me to retort. When we were kids, she did the same thing, running up into my group of friends, with her green eyes shining brightly, and telling them a horrifically embarrassing story, then off she went again too quick to catch. If I didn't love her so much, I probably would have staked her in her sleep years ago.

Draining the mead in a few swallows helped take off the edge. You could almost feel the pulse throughout the clan at Ethan's return. I'd heard he'd fallen for a mortal and followed him to Chicago. Apparently, it hadn't worked out. Too bad.

I motioned for Beth to bring me another drink. She shook her head at me but dropped it on her way by me anyway. She hated when I got drunk, not that I blamed her. Even I know I can be a dick when I've had too much. But she didn't have much recourse since I'd bought into The Kiss a few months ago. I was a silent partner which pretty much just meant I drank up the inventory, and no one could call me on it, while Beth took care of the actual running of the pub.

Ethan looked as if he were working on a good drunk, too. His laughter grew in volume with every mug he drained, the sound of it giving me goose bumps for no good reason. I knew I had to get out of there. I didn't want him to decide it was a good time to fight with me again as he had the night he'd left town. We had managed to beat the piss out of each

other before his mortal boy toy rescued him from me and our 'barbaric clan of vampiric idiots'.

As far as I could remember, it was the only time Ethan had willingly left the clan. Like most vampires, he seemed more comfortable around his own kind. I wondered what the mortal had offered to make him go but then decided I didn't really care that much. I would much rather find out what had made him come home.

I checked to see where Beth had gone and, of course, found her busy at Ethan's end of the bar. She flipped her long auburn hair over her shoulder and laughed with the rest of his court. I grabbed a bottle of Absinthe from behind the bar and started to walk out.

"Prince Jamie!"

I turned to see Sasha, one of the waitresses running towards me.

"Don't call me that," I said with a sigh. "What do you need?"

"Well, I was just wondering if you needed a glass or any sugar for your drink, sir."

"Jamie. My name is Jamie. And no, thank you, the bottle will be fine."

I walked out into the cool night air, shaking my head. Most people had stopped calling me by that title years earlier, but there were still a few who had problems adjusting to Ethan being the Vampire Prince, even after fifteen years. Usually it didn't bother me, I would correct them and move on. But just being around Ethan had gotten me in such a foul mood that it stung to be reminded of my past.

I'd been Prince, but the death of my parents had ended the short lived role. Ethan's parents had taken over the clan and, in the eyes of their subjects, had saved us all from certain death, so the heroes' son now held the title. Good for Ethan.

I headed for the town square, knowing it would be pretty empty with the impending storm growling overhead. Most people would be in their homes, avoiding the rain. I loved the rain, had loved it since I was a child. Sitting in the park, drinking with the thunder sounded like Heaven.

I lay on the cool grass, head propped up on my jacket while I drank the Absinthe. The harsh liquorice flavour wasn't my favourite, but it would do in a pinch. I heard people out on the streets now and realised that the bars must have closed.

I heard singing growing louder and cursed to myself. Someone was coming to the square. I wasn't ready to leave. I was quite enjoying the crisp autumn air and the smell and

sounds of the impending storm. I could only hope that whoever was coming over would shut the hell up and let me be.

"Jamie McHale? Jamie, you son-of-a-bitch, is that you?"

Fuck. Of course, it was Ethan. Who else could it have been?

"Ethan, go home." My voice was slow and careful. I didn't want to start a fight with him if I could help it. I just wanted him gone.

Unfortunately, Ethan was even drunker than I was. He dropped to the ground next to me, grabbed the bottle from my hand and drank deeply from it. He made a pained face and handed it back, coughing.

"Why are you drinking that garbage? Ugh, tastes like...like...gross."

I laughed, sitting up and clapping my hand over my mouth quickly, but he heard it. He grinned broadly at me, showing his perfect teeth, fangs safely retracted away. He slapped me on the back, a little harder than was comfortable, but I wasn't sure he'd meant to hurt me.

"You're a funny guy, Jamie, and I think your eyes are the same green as this booze. And you have great hair, all dark and red and shiny. You're like...I don't know. How's come we don't like each other?" He was even drunker than I'd thought he was.

"'Cause you're an asshole," I said, shrugging his hand from my shoulder.

"Hmm, well that certainly sounds like me. But what did I ever do to you and your pointy cheekbones?" He took the bottle again, and I let him. I was confused by the situation, but as I wasn't eager to get my ass kicked I figured I would let it go as peaceably as possible.

"We have done a lot of terrible things to each other, Ethan," I blew out a sigh, snatching my bottle back for a quick drink. "I would say you probably started it by stealing Jeremiah Sorenson from me, and it just got worse from there."

Worse in the sense that I was pretty sure his family had hired the hunters who had murdered my parents. Though the investigators for the clan had completely cleared the Connors of any wrongdoing, I'd never been able to let go of the theory. The whole situation just seemed too damned convenient—the hunters finding my parents on vacation in another state, the Connors' quick rise to take over the clan before the elders began fighting amongst themselves. Everything had clicked into place so easily for them, it had just never sat well with me.

Ethan laughed, which with my current train of thought was not what I expected from him. I narrowed my eyes at him, feeling my blood start to boil in response to him.

"I'm so glad you can find humour in the situation, Ethan."

"Oh calm down mate—"

"I am not your mate."

"Christ, Jamie, that was years ago. Besides, Jeremiah was an idiot. You were better off without him."

I snatched back the bottle from him, trying to calm down as I drank from it. Of course, he had been laughing about the boyfriend discussion. He couldn't have known my mind went where it almost always did when I spoke to him—to the death of my parents.

"Well thanks. But it would have been nice if I'd had the opportunity to figure that out for myself."

"Quit hogging the booze, you big cry baby," he said, lunging for the bottle again and falling into my lap in the process.

"Ow, get off me." I shoved him hard, but he didn't budge. "It's mine anyway. Go get your own."

"Can't," he said, sitting up and wrenching the Absinthe out of my hand. "No more alcohol tonight. Fuck, this town sucks."

"Then why did you come back?"

A bolt of lightning spread across the sky, and Ethan's ice blue eyes flashed with it.

"None of your fucking business."

Oh good, I'd hit a nerve.

"Did your mortal come to his senses and kick you to the kerb?"

His lips moved, but the words were drowned in a crash of thunder. Before I realised he was even coming at me, he had me pinned to the ground. He was obviously pissed, but I was too drunk to even try to understand why.

He swung at me, and pain exploded in the right side of my face as his fist connected with it. I shoved up as hard as I could, managing to knock him off balance. I jumped on him, my hands closing around his throat.

"You asshole," I screamed. I lifted his head up, slamming it into the ground. My knees were on either side of his hips as I tried to keep my balance over him. Lightning flashed

again, and I felt it surge through my entire body. As my skin burned with heat, I fell off of Ethan, panting on the ground next to him.

I looked over to find him trying to catch his breath as well. He looked pretty good for having just been struck by lightning. His eyes were wide, shining in the light from the lampposts overhead, but his skin looked smooth and soft, and his hair was still the shiny jet black it had been since the day I'd met him. I watched a trickle of sweat roll from behind his ear down his neck and tried to figure out why he was suddenly so fascinating.

The longer I looked at him the more I wanted to reach out and touch him. Before I could move, his hand found mine. As soon as our fingers intertwined, I started to feel better. My head began to clear and the burning sensation on my skin lessened.

"What the hell was that?" he asked, his voice breathy.

"I think we might have been struck by that lightning." I felt slightly superior that my voice sounded stronger than his. Of course, I had been choking him when we'd been hit, but I still felt good about it.

Ethan let go of my hand, and I my stomach rolled. I managed to get to my knees before I started heaving. After a minute, I heard Ethan vomiting as well. We must have looked excellent, two drunk, electrocuted vampires puking their guts up in the park. How proud my Gran would be of me.

Thinking about my Gran, who was High Priestess for the Anaboris Clan, made me begin to think that maybe something else had just happened to us, not necessarily electrocution. I thought about it for a second then threw up again. Ethan seemed to have gotten himself composed and had come over to check on me.

"You okay?"

I shot him a dirty look, which he chose to ignore. He put his hand on my shoulder and the world stopped spinning. I let him help me to my feet and stared at him. Something strange was definitely going on, but I wasn't sure what.

"Let go of me," I said.

"Dude, I just wanted to help."

"No, I mean thanks. But I want to see something. Please." I had to force out the please, but I really wasn't trying to be rude.

He moved away, and the nausea hit me again. He must have felt it, too, because he groaned and leaned against a tree for support. Our eyes met and I was sure the fear in his would be reflected in mine. His touch really was making my world steady, and I had to assume that he had noticed it. But I didn't know what it meant.

At that moment, the sky opened and rain poured down on us. The water felt wonderful on my skin, as it had started burning when Ethan had moved away. I raised my face to it, letting it wash over me for a moment. I was still drunk, but the combination of fear and water helped to clear my head—at least, enough to realise that something about this wasn't right.

Ethan stumbled back over to me, gripping my hand tightly, and that did even more to help me think. I looked up at him, he wasn't much taller than me, just a few inches, but it was enough of a difference that he got to feel superior about it every chance he could.

But he didn't look superior at the moment. He looked lost, and confused, and maybe even a little pained. In the twenty years I had known Ethan, I'd never seen him look so unsure of anything before. It scared me almost as badly as the thought that if I stood on my toes I would be tall enough to kiss him.

"Ethan, I need you to stay calm for me, okay? You look like a scared rabbit about to bolt."

Some anger seeped into his eyes, and I was glad for it. That I could handle.

"I am *not* scared, you stupid fuck." Good, much better.

"Okay." I took a deep breath. "We need to make sure we're all right. If we really were struck by lightning, we need to get help." I didn't add that I wanted to also find out why I suddenly wanted to touch him, to grab him and never let him go. That was scarier than the thought that we had just been electrocuted.

"Jamie, do you feel...different?" Ethan clung to my arm, and the closer he was the better I felt.

We had started walking towards the Spring Temple, where Gran would most likely be found. If anyone could explain what was happening to us, it would be her. And hopefully, she would be able to make it stop.

I turned to look at Ethan. He took a step closer, so near me now that if he lowered his head he could kiss me. I watched as his face drop, tilting my own face up so our lips touched.

My eyes flew open, and I stepped back, letting go of him and almost falling from the pain that swept through me at the loss of his hand on mine.

Ethan fell into the building next to us, sliding to sit on the sidewalk with his head in his hands. I gripped a nearby light pole, barely staying on my own feet. There wasn't even a whole sidewalk separating us, yet it seemed as if he were miles away.

"What the hell is going on?" Ethan yelled over to me.

"I don't know." I looked over at him and groaned, dropping to the ground myself. I felt so weak and a confused. My brain screamed at me to just crawl over to him and touch him, to kiss him again but not to stop. I was completely terrified and more than a little pissed at Ethan. I knew that somehow it was all his fault, and when I found out what he'd done, I would kill him.

"Come on. Gran should still be at the Temple." I forced myself to my feet, but Ethan didn't move. I turned back to look at him and realised he was on the verge of passing out.

I went to him, putting an arm around his waist to help support him. After a few steps he seemed stronger, but every time I let him go, he stumbled.

"Jamie?" Ethan's voice was so pathetic I almost laughed. I might have if it had been anyone else, or if the situation hadn't been as frightening as it was turning out to be. "Gran is going to make this better. Right?"

"I hope so. Come on, we're almost there."

As we turned the corner, I could see that the Temple was lit up inside and said a silent prayer of thanks. The door opened before we'd made it up the stairs, and there was Gran, silhouetted in the doorway with her hands on her hips as she walked out onto the top step.

"What the fuck have you two done now?"

Chapter Two

"Nice to see you too Gran," I said.

She moved back inside, letting us come into the Temple. She led us to the front where she had been taking apart her altar. Ethan and I sat down next to each other at a small table facing her, not touching, but closer than I would have preferred to be to him, and yet somewhere deep inside of me, I felt that he could never be close enough.

"Well, you two have had an interesting night, huh?" Gran had gone back to her altar, talking to us as she packed away trinkets and candles and such. "How are you feeling?"

"Great," Ethan said. "In fact, I think I may go run a marathon when we've finished here."

"Don't get cheeky with me, young man. You two got yourselves into this mess."

"Gran, neither of us really needs a lecture right now," I said softly, not even sure what mess she was talking about. My head was killing me, and I had a feeling that if I just touched Ethan it would get better. But I had no desire to do that.

"Gran, I didn't mean to be rude. I just don't know what's going on. Please forgive me." Ethan was being incredibly calm. But when I glanced at him, I saw his eyes were squinting and he was probably in just as much pain as I was.

"You obviously know what's happening. Would you mind cluing us in please?" I asked her. Every minute, it was getting harder to talk past the pain that had started affecting not just my head, but seemed to be coursing through my entire body.

"I take it you didn't do this on purpose, then?" She clucked her tongue at us as Ethan and I stared at her in confusion.

"Do what?" I asked when she didn't continue.

"Bond yourselves together."

I laughed. I couldn't help it, the idea of being bound to Ethan was ridiculous. We hated each other. There was no way we could be married.

I was relieved to see Ethan looked just as horrified as I was at the thought. It was nice to know that this wasn't some elaborate sick joke he had come up with torture me.

"How could this have happened?" Ethan asked. "I thought only the High Priest or Priestess could bond clan members."

"If you are implying that I had anything to do with this, Ethan Connor, I-"

"He's not," I interrupted.

"No, I'm not. Sorry, Gran, I'm not thinking clearly at the moment," Ethan said quickly. "I just don't understand what's going on here."

"It was definitely a spell," Gran said thoughtfully. "But I didn't cast it. And I have no way of finding out who did. While it is true that I have performed every clan bonding since becoming High Priestess for Anaboris, I'm not the only person that can." She blew out a sigh. "Any clan member with enough power can cast a bond, most just choose to come to me to ensure that it is done correctly."

"What do you mean?" I asked. I didn't like the sound of that at all.

"The bonding spell is delicate. Many things can go wrong if the caster isn't careful. In fact, you're probably both lucky it didn't kill you. The spell involves fusing your auras, your life forces, together. In effect, making two halves into one whole. It is incredibly dangerous magic and not to be done recklessly."

I couldn't imagine who would do this to us. There wasn't a single member of Anaboris who didn't know the animosity that existed between Ethan and I. It just didn't make any sense that someone would want us stuck with each other.

"What else can go wrong?" Ethan asked, his voice bringing me back to the conversation.

"Contact is always important to the beginning stages of the bond, but it is even more detrimental when the spell is not cast properly. If the auras do not fuse completely, the spell will force them to. Until the balance is corrected, it will cause the couple to feel pain when they are not physically touching each other."

The looks between Ethan and myself became almost comical. Every time Gran opened her mouth, I felt the need to gape in his direction over the fresh hell she announced to us. Not only were we now bonded together, it seemed that it wasn't even done properly, and we would be in pain forever. It would be easier for me if we suffered through the pain rather than touch. The whole situation was quickly boiling down to choosing a lesser of two evils.

"I take it you have been experiencing this...problem with your bond?"

We both nodded.

"Can you fix this?" I asked.

"Of course, I can fix it. I have been the High Priestess of Anaboris for fifty years. You think I can't unbond someone?"

I sagged in relief and felt Ethan do the same next to me. He shifted in his chair, his knee resting against mine under the table. The pain in my head receded, and I almost rescinded my earlier thought of preferring the pain to touching him. The effect was so immediate it really was almost better to tolerate him.

"So," she said slowly pulling a calendar out of her bag. "You two can meet me back here November second, and we'll get you two unbonded."

"Okay," Ethan murmured. He had dropped his head to the table and looked like he would pass out.

I reached over and brushed a strand of hair out of his face. He smiled weakly at me, and I found myself smiling back for a moment. Then his eyes flew open at the instant her words sunk in for me as well.

"November!" we yelled together.

"See, you two are thinking more alike already," she said. She laughed to herself then bustled away as if to finish cleaning.

"What do you mean November?" Ethan asked.

"I mean, the bond cannot be broken for one month and one day. I usually prefer to give it a few extra days, but because of the animosity the two of you hold towards one another, I think we can skip that formality in this case."

"Animosity," I said with a laugh. "I fucking hate him."

"Young man, do not use such language in here. If you must use cuss words, take them outside."

"Gran, I'm sure Jamie is sorry. Isn't there any way to fix this tonight? I mean, can't you just, I don't know, reverse the spell and let us go?"

"Stop calling her that," I growled at him. "She is not your Gran."

"I am everyone's Gran, Jamie McHale. Stop being such a cry baby." She rolled her eyes at me before turning to Ethan. "If I try to break your bond tonight, you will both die. I know that you probably don't understand the full effects of this magic, but unfortunately, you are

going to have to live with them. You will have to find a way to live together for the next month. By that time, the bond will have settled, and it will be safe to break."

"Is it going to hurt every time we break contact until then?" Ethan asked. He had shifted again, his thigh resting fully against mine. "I can't spend a month attached to him."

"No, your auras should be completely fused within the next few days. Until then you should only have to touch every hour or so to hold off the discomfort."

"Discomfort?" I asked as Ethan said "Every few hours?" with the same amount of confusion in his voice.

Gran turned back to us, a quizzical look on her face.

"Gra-Shawnna," Ethan started. "Every time I let go of him I feel as if my body is trying to rip itself apart."

I nodded in agreement when she looked over at me.

"This could be amplified because of your...dislike of each other. The bond is going to force you together, and the harder you fight it, the worse it will become. By the way, what were you two doing together tonight anyway? You must be touching for the bond to take effect."

We glanced at each other, and I felt a smile tug at my lips. It wasn't funny, not even a little. The situation was just becoming so bad I didn't know how else to respond to any of it.

"We were fighting."

"Of course, you were." She blew out a sigh as she walked over to me. She jerked my chin over and tsked at the bruise that had probably formed on my cheek. "Don't you think you two are a little old for all of this? For God's sake, Jamie, you're twenty-five years old. When are you going to grow up?"

"He started it. I don't see you admonishing him."

"He is not my grandson. You are. He has parents who will be pissed enough at him for what's happened. Though, if the Connors have ever raised their voice to their Prince I would be surprised."

It was well known through the entire village that Ethan's parents let him run wild and had since he'd learned how to speak. He was their only child, their golden Prince, and could do no wrong.

"Do you really think that talking about my parents is going to do anything to fix this situation? I mean, if it will, please tell me, and I will talk until I am blue in the face, but somehow I doubt it. And this is just as much your fault, Jamie. I've been gone for almost a year and *still* you can't let go of this...issue you have with me."

"Of course. Blame me. Nothing could possibly be your fault, could it, Ethan? You didn't attack me in the park tonight. You didn't do anything wrong, because you never do. You are above reproach on all of this, aren't you?"

Every word brought me closer to him, until once again I found myself an inch from his face, from his mouth, and only Gran saved me from attacking him where he sat.

"That is enough!" Gran's voice echoed through the Temple, quieting both of us. "You two have to learn, very quickly, to get along or I might as well break the bond and kill you now. It would be a damn sight more humane that what will happen to you if you don't consummate this bond."

"Consummate?" I asked, backing away from Ethan again. "You don't mean..."

"I certainly do. Most people who enter a marriage do so because they love each other and have no qualms about making love with each other. You two, however, have some large hurdles to overcome. And quickly. The bond will drain on your energies until you end up comatose, and you will die."

The silence that filled the Temple was thick enough to choke on. And that was exactly what it felt like I was doing. The thought of having sex with Ethan was enough to make me wish I were back in the square vomiting out my guts.

Our eyes met, and the hatred we felt for each other was plain on his face. We would probably die long before either of us would let the other touch him in that manner. And right that second, regardless of what my body begged me to do to him and how much better I felt with just his leg against mine, I would have preferred death.

"You two are going to be absolute children about this, aren't you?" Gran asked, seeing the looks on our faces. "Fine. Make sure someone calls me when you two collapse. I'm sure I'll be able to rustle up a spell or two that will get you on your...feet."

She turned from us again, and I knew the conversation was over. There was nothing that could be done for the moment. I was exhausted, though luckily no longer drunk. Of course, if I had been, I might have taken all of the news a little better. Then again maybe not.

It's not every day your grandmother tells you that you must fuck your mortal enemy or die. Come to think of it, there might not be enough booze in the world for such a conversation.

Ethan followed me outside, and we stood on the sidewalk back to not touching each other. My headache rushed back. I hoped that sleep would help alleviate it. I looked at Ethan for a minute, but there was nothing to say.

"Okay," he said, his hand reaching out to loosely grip my wrist. "The sun's coming up soon, and we have to sleep. Or at least I do. And there is no way I can do that with a pounding headache. For today, at least, we are going to have to sleep next to each other. Do you still live with Beth?"

He was right, but I didn't have to like it. And I knew what he was suggesting, thinking it would be easier to stay at his place because there was no one there who could stumble on us and make assumptions.

"Yeah, I still live with her. Fine, we'll stay at your place. And tomorrow, we're going to have to work out something. I cannot spend the next four weeks tied to you. I'll just kill you and end the whole thing quickly."

"How romantic," he said. "Just what I always wanted to hear from my husband on my wedding night."

"We may be bonded, but I am not your husband." I moved my hand to take his, wanting to cry when the pain lessened even more at the feel of his fingers intertwining with mine. This was so unfair.

I let him lead me to his place, a small house his parents had bought him for his eighteenth birthday. It was sparsely furnished, very minimal with bare white walls and black furniture. He let go of my hand once we were inside and showed me the kitchen, bathroom and, finally, the bedroom.

His bed was huge. In fact, it was orgy sized. I rolled my eyes, but he just smiled. He knew I'd always thought he was a whore, and the bed just cemented it for me. I kicked off my shoes and crawled onto the bed completely dressed. My head was aching again, and I was starting to feel dizzy.

Ethan climbed in next to me, and without opening my eyes, I found his hand with mine. The dizziness left, but the headache didn't want to go away. I figured it was caused by stress rather than the bond, so his touch wouldn't do much for it.

"Jamie," he said softly.

I opened my eyes to see he was on his side looking at me. He looked amazing, so solid and gorgeous. I wanted to move closer, to pull him into my arms and run my hands over every inch of skin I could reach. Damn it, I would go crazy if I had to live through a whole month of thoughts like that.

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry. For all of it. Not just tonight, though God knows I couldn't be any sorrier about that. But I'm sorry you think I've wronged you in some way. I know we've never gotten along, but I didn't know you thought it was my fault."

I was pretty sure he'd just apologised to me for the way I felt about him, but I was too tired to argue about it so I just nodded and closed my eyes again. I hoped that everything would be better the next evening. In fact, as I started to drift off I hoped I would wake to find the whole thing had been a dream.

Chapter Three

His hand gripped my hair tightly, holding me in place while he ravaged my lips with his mouth. I shifted slightly, trying to lessen some of the pressure against my erection. He moved at the same time, creating the most delicious friction against me. My hips bucked against him, his hand finding my cock and sliding up and down, slicked by the pre-cum that had formed at the head.

I was going to come. I could feel the pressure building in my balls and knew it wouldn't be long. But he didn't stop, instead as if he could tell how close I was, he increased the speed of his hand, but his mouth slowed, sucking on my tongue, gently grazing it with his teeth.

I cried out as I woke, spraying cum on my chest and my shirt. I sat up, completely disoriented at my surroundings.

"Oh fuck." I looked over to see that Ethan had been jerking off too and had cried out as he came into his hand.

The bond. Fuck. I threw myself back down on the bed, catching my breath and trying not to get angry at the situation, but it wasn't working.

"Good evening to you, too," Ethan said softly. I watched him take off his T-shirt and use it to clean himself up.

I blew out a sigh and did the same. I looked around the room and realised I didn't have any clothes with me. I would have to go to my place. We'd have to talk about living arrangements, sleeping arrangements, anything that didn't involve talking about me jacking off in my sleep while dreaming about him. Or the fact that opening my eyes to see him playing with himself had made me want the dream to come true.

He got up, leaving me alone in the bed while he went into the bathroom. I heard the shower start, and I blew out a sigh. This would be a disaster. Even if we managed not to kill each other, we would probably die from the bond anyway. I should have made Gran break it the night before. She was right. It would have been more humane that what Ethan and I would end up doing to each other.

I looked up to see Ethan walk back in the room with a towel around his waist. He stared at me for a minute then turned away only to turn back with a groan.

"Look, I hate this. And only you can understand how much I hate it. But I...I can't do this."

"Yeah, well it doesn't look like we have a choice," I said coldly. My head hurt, my skin felt like it was crawling and I couldn't put up with him right then. I just couldn't.

"No, not that. I mean...fuck. Jamie, will you come take a shower with me? Please?"

My eyes open wider. I knew how much it must have cost him to throw that please in there. And I also realised I was feeling so gross because Ethan and I weren't touching. Just great.

I got out of bed and tried hard not to look annoyed with him. He wasn't enjoying it any more than I was, and we would have to figure it all out. We had made it through the first night together, and the shower would just be one more step. If we could get through twenty-four hours without killing each other, it could only get easier.

I hoped.

I followed him into the bathroom, dropping my jeans and socks to the floor then climbing in the tub with him. He had a nice shower, with dual shower heads which just reminded me what a slut he was. Of course, everything about him reminded me of how many men he had slept with, and how many of those men had been mine first.

It may have started with Jeremiah Sorenson, but it hadn't stopped there. He was like a jealous little brother, always wanting what I had first. My friends, my lovers, my title, he had tried to encroach on any aspect of my life he could get his hands on and it never seemed to let up.

When my parents had been alive, they used to joke about adopting that 'adorable Connor boy'. Which just made losing them in the manner I had even more horrific for me. And all of my friends thought I was ridiculous for not wanting him around. And my boyfriends...well they'd run to him as fast as they could whenever he'd shown any inkling of interest in them.

I stared at his back while he washed, watched the water cascade over the smooth flesh, and wondered what anyone saw in him. Sure, he had a nice body, soft skin, thick black hair. But so what?

I picked up the soap, lathering it in my hands before reaching out to spread the bubbles over his broad shoulders. My hands travelled down his back as I contemplated what everyone was on about when it came to Ethan.

He was self-centred, egotistical, spoiled rotten, and he had a huge chip on his muscle-bound shoulders. I rubbed at the knots in his neck while I thought about what a jerk he was. I moved closer, my cock growing against his skin as my arms went around his waist, soaping up his chest.

"Um, Jamie?" His voice sounded strained and breathy.

"Mmm?" I asked, my face against the back of his neck.

"Not that it doesn't feel good but..."

Fuck! I backed up quickly, catching myself with a hand on the wall before I actually fell in the slick tub. I'd been feeling him up for a few minutes without even realising what I was doing.

"Sorry. I...it's the...sorry Ethan."

"S'okay," he said with a small laugh. He turned off the water and I got out of the tub as quickly as I could, grabbing a towel and drying off as I walked out the door. My skin started crawling again, but I didn't care. I couldn't be in the same room as him right that second. I knew he would follow me quickly, but I just needed a moment alone to collect my thoughts.

Judging from what had just happened, the bond would do its best to force us to consummate. I had no desire on my own to have sex with Ethan, but within twenty minutes I'd dreamed about him jacking me off and molested him in the shower. I was pretty sure I wouldn't mind fucking him if it happened because we both somehow wanted it, but neither of us should have to be forced into it.

"You look like you're thinking really hard," Ethan said coming over to me and taking my hand in his. "Trying to work out a way around having sex with me?"

"Something like that." I sighed in relief as the tingling feeling went away. "You don't want to end up forced into it do you?"

"No. And I don't want you forced into it either, Jamie. I hate this. Fuck until yesterday I'd have said I hated you. And now, here we are, stuck together in this bullshit situation that I wouldn't wish on...well you." He laughed, but I couldn't make myself join in. "I don't

know what we are going to do. But I would prefer to not rape you because of a magical influence."

"How would you prefer to rape me?" I asked, smiling in spite of myself.

"Drunk, of course."

We laughed together, walking to the bed and sitting next to each other, fingers playing along each other's hands.

"Jamie, we will find a way around this. Until then we just have to try not to kill each other. Do you think we can manage it?"

I looked at him, carefully studying his eyes. He looked like he meant it, but he was a skilled liar, and I had never been able to trust him. As with so much that was going on, I realised I didn't have much of a choice.

"Yeah, I suppose we're going to have to try. I think the first thing we have to be able to get over is this annoying need to touch each other. I can't spend every hour of the day clutching you like you're my teddy bear."

He agreed. I watched him walk into his closet and come back with clean jeans on and a few shirts in his hands. He dropped them on the bed, and I noticed he kept rubbing his arms like he was cold.

I realised he felt the same crawling sensation I did. This would get very old, very quickly. I walked over to him and took his hands in mine. I closed my eyes, and we stood there, waiting for the feeling to pass. When I opened my eyes, he was smiling down at me.

"You don't really hate me, you know."

"Don't push me, Ethan." I dropped his hands and walked back into the bathroom to get my pants. I pulled them on and stayed in the room until the headache returned and my body shook. I didn't want to walk out there. I didn't like that he had that much control over me. I didn't like anyone or anything dictating what I did and who I did it with. But the fucking bond didn't care about any of that.

The magic would continue to force us where it thought we should be. As if it were a living entity with thoughts of its own. It would push and force us to its will and there would be little we could do to stop it.

I opened the door to find Ethan leaning against the wall across from it. His arms were crossed over his chest, and he was glaring at me.

"If you're done being a stubborn little asshole, I thought we might go to your place and pick up some clothes. Feel free to grab one of my shirts if you want. I threw yours in the wash."

"I'm the asshole?" I asked incredulously. "You expect me to just move in here because it's what you want, and I'm the asshole? Go fuck yourself, Ethan."

"I don't have to. If I wait around long enough, you'll do it for me, thanks."

The pain in my head had reached a level I'd never experienced. It took every ounce of willpower I had not to sink to the floor from the pounding in it. But I wouldn't reach out to him. If we couldn't last ten minutes without touching each other, we were in serious trouble.

"Damn you, Jamie." His voice was barely a whisper as he slid to the floor. "You're going to make this impossible, aren't you?"

I fell to the ground, too, my hand outstretched to find his as my eyes closed. His fingers curled around mine, and we lay there in silence, both of us waiting for the pain to subside. But unlike earlier, it didn't fade right away. It was as if the magic was punishing me for my stubbornness, and it would bring Ethan down with me.

"I hate you, Ethan," I whispered. "I hate you so fucking much."

"Right back at you, scumbag."

He gripped my hand harder, and I squeezed back, both of us lost to our pain and our own thoughts until we passed out.

* * * *

I woke the following night still on the floor in the hallway with a blinding headache pounding in my temples. I opened my eyes and found Ethan staring at me from a few inches away. I groaned, and he moved his arm over me. I scooted closer, letting him hold me tight against him. If it would make the pain stop completely, I could let him stay close to me for a few minutes.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his mouth almost pressed against my ear.

"I will be. Just give me a few minutes. Do you mind?"

"I don't mind."

I was in too much pain to be embarrassed. He seemed to be doing better than I was, and I wondered if it was because he had been conscious longer. But I didn't have the energy to ask.

After about five minutes, I started feeling better. I raised my head and smiled at him.

"Thanks. Sorry about that."

"You don't have to apologise, though I have to say I can't keep spending days on the floor in agony until I lose consciousness. But we're going to get through this, you know that right? We are both too stubborn to roll over and die because of a spell."

I nodded and even managed a small smile. "Yeah, I wasn't expecting it to take that big of a toll on us. But you're right, I'll try to control myself in the future." I sat up, leaning against the wall for support. "I think I can get up if you help me."

He stood, pulling me to my feet and holding me with his hands on my hips until I felt steady. We went into the kitchen and sat at the table across from each other with our hands holding each other in the middle of it.

"So, we need to figure out the living arrangements. It's obviously going to take at least a few days before we can handle being apart. I only suggested staying here for privacy reasons, but if you want to stay at your place, we can."

He was trying, which was amazing. I hadn't expected him to be the rational one in any situation, let alone this one. I knew that meant I would have to give a little, too.

"No, you're right. I don't know what's going to happen, and it would be better if there weren't other people around us right now. I don't mind staying here, now that it's not a demand."

"Neither of us wants to have to give anything up. Believe me, I'm not ecstatic at the prospect of you living with me, and even less so, at the thought that we're going to eventually have to...you know. But it seems that, for a while at least, we're going to have to let the magic run its course. There will have to be some compromises, from both of us."

He was being so damned reasonable. I wasn't sure why it made me want to smack him, but it did. He should have been outraged. I was. It didn't seem fair that I felt completely lost, and he got to be all calm and collected.

"Fine, you're right, but I don't have to like it," I said grudgingly. "We'll go to my place, and I'll pack some things, then we'll come back here and try to figure out what to do next."

On the way to the apartment I shared with Beth, I said a silent prayer that she wouldn't be there. I wasn't really in the mood to explain to my baby sister why I was moving in with the person I claimed to hate most in the world.

I should have saved the energy because of course she was there, with Gran, drinking tea and waiting for Ethan and me to show up. I walked past them without a word, leaving Ethan in the living room and hoping I could manage to pack a few clothes without needing him with me. As soon as I walked into the bedroom, however, the crawling feeling returned and my head started to ache.

I ignored the pain as much as I could, grabbing things randomly from the closet and throwing them into a bag. I looked longingly at the bed, wishing I could crawl into it and sleep for a week...alone. But the sound of Ethan knocking on the door ruined that for me.

I turned to see him leaning on the doorjamb, head resting on the frame and a half smile on his face. He didn't look like he was in any pain at all. The selfish bastard.

"Shawnna wants to talk to us," he said, finally having the decency to rub his arms in some show of discomfort. But then he crossed his arms again, that cocky smile still on his lips, and I lost it.

I ran at him full force, tackling him against the far wall. There was a loud thump as his head cracked the plaster. He brought his arms up, shoving me off of him as hard as he could. I fell to the ground with him on top of me, gripping his wrists to keep him from punching me. He struggled to get away, but I clung to him so hard I my nails sank into his flesh.

"Enough!"

We stopped completely frozen in place by Gran's words. All we could do was glare at each other until she released the spell.

"If you two cannot control yourselves, I will leave you like this for the rest of the night," she said coldly. "I realise this is difficult, for both of you, but there is nothing to be done. I know that you are frustrated with each other, I understand that neither of you wants this, but what's done is done, and as I explained last night there is nothing I can do for you. You have to do this for yourselves. Now, I am going to let you go. I want you to be at the very least civil while you are here."

Ethan's body relaxed on top of me, melting against mine. I didn't push him off of me but let him get to his feet on his own and even took his hand when he offered to help me up. I could do civil.

"Great," Gran said brightly, as if she hadn't just threatened us both. "Let's have some tea and discuss why you are at each other's throats tonight."

I glanced at Ethan who just shrugged and held tighter to my hand. We walked to the kitchen where Beth was still waiting, calmly pouring more tea. The women in my family are pretty tough to ruffle. The fact that Gran had raised her voice to me at all was a little surprising. It took quite a bit to get her angry, though busting up walls in a fight probably deserved it.

Ethan and I sat next to each other, knees touching under the table but able to let go of each other's hands long enough to drink some tea.

"So you two have obviously not consummated your bond yet?"

"Gran!" I felt a blush creep up my neck.

"Well, if you had perhaps you wouldn't have destroyed your hallway. The pain is not going to stop until you two grow up and do what needs to be done. And this animosity, which was obviously strong before the bond, will only get more violent. I know you don't want to hear this, but I don't think you're going to realise it until it's pointed out to you. The sexual tension between the two of you is so strong Beth and I can feel it. We've felt it since you walked in the door. The bond does not care that you don't like each other. The magic can feel itself in the other's body, and it wants to connect, to complete, and it will not let up until you do."

I looked over at Ethan in horror. I didn't realise that he would feel the same way about me that I had been feeling about him. I had never bothered to consider that he wanted to touch me the way I imagined touching him. Even the...incident when we'd woken up hadn't really made me think he thought about me.

Beth nodded, and I shot her a dirty look she probably didn't deserve. She rolled her eyes at me but was apparently happy to let Gran do the talking because she didn't throw out any of her trademark insults at me.

"Gran," Ethan said. "I don't see how this is going to work. There have been moments with Jamie where I wished for death rather than to be stuck with him. I don't think of him as

anything other than a whiny jerk. There has to be something that can be done to resolve this."

"Well, I can put you both under a spell to make you think you are attracted to each other, but that is a little too much like coercion for my taste, and I would prefer not to do it. Or I can break the bond and kill you both. Or you can act like adults for once in your lives and just have sex and get it over with."

"So, if we have sex now, all of this will be over, and we can just ride it out for the next few weeks?" I asked, already knowing that wouldn't be how it worked.

Gran sighed, reaching out to take my hand, but the contact made me hiss with pain and recoil quickly. Suddenly, I realised that meant that no one but Ethan would be able to touch me for a while. I groaned, dropping my head to the table. What a fucking nightmare.

"Boys, I'm sorry that you're stuck in this situation. I really am. And I think you know that just having sex once is not going to be enough. I'm hoping though, that the feelings you'll share with the bond in place will make you want to have sex more after you have gotten over the first hurdle."

"I don't want to have feelings for him," Ethan whispered, the effect of his words probably ruined by the fact that he was running his fingers through my hair as he said them. I moved my head slightly, pressing against the warm comfort of his hand. It wasn't that bad if I forgot who it was who touched me.

"I want you two to do something for me tonight. You have spent so many years hating each other that you barely know one another. I want you to spend some time together. Talk to each other, touch each other, and learn to tolerate each other as much as you can. Will you do that for me? For yourselves? You may just find out you don't really hate each other as much as you think you do. It is one small step, gentlemen. I think both of you can handle it. Right?"

I raised my head and looked at Ethan before blowing out a sigh. She was right. We didn't know that much about each other, and it wouldn't hurt to talk. I nodded, and Ethan followed.

"Good!" Gran clapped her hands. "Now, you two should get going so Beth can get ready for work. And tomorrow, you are going to come over and fix the wall."

Chapter Four

We had managed to get through the evening without killing each other, so that was very exciting. After agreeing to avoid talking about boyfriends, family, and each other, there wasn't that much to say. For the most part, we sat in silence, holding hands, and trying not to piss each other off. But it was a decided improvement over the previous twenty years so we were quite proud of ourselves.

By midnight, we had decided we could handle going out in public together and went to see Beth and get blood. I was hoping it would be dark enough that people wouldn't notice if we had to hold hands through the meal.

We had attempted to spend longer periods of time not touching, but the pain was so immediate and strong that we had only been able to tolerate trying a few times. And every time it happened, I couldn't help noticing that my pain seemed stronger than his, which was easier to assume than believing I was a bigger wuss than him.

Beth raised an eyebrow at us as we made our way to the back of the pub. The tables near the back stayed pretty dark so we hoped we could drink and get out without too much hassle.

Beth came over quickly with two mugs of blood, setting them down and taking an open chair. The Kiss had an agreement with a local blood bank, and we kept blood on hand for nights when mortal donors were sparse.

"I've only got a few minutes, but I wanted to warn you that pretty much the whole clan knows what happened."

I groaned. There were no secrets amongst the vampires

"Also, that mortal was here earlier looking for you," she said to Ethan.

He stiffened next to me. I turned to ask him about it, but he just slowly shook his head so I let it go. He would tell me if he wanted me to know.

"Oh and Jamie, just because I feel sorry for you right now doesn't mean I don't still think you're an idiot." Beth smiled at us both before running back to the bar to take care of her customers. A different waitress came to the table so we took advantage of my sister being busy to order two pitchers of mead. She couldn't yell at us for drinking if she was too busy to notice.

In fact, drunk seemed like an excellent idea to both of us, and we kept our waitress hopping for an hour, bringing pitcher after pitcher until I was pretty sure I was numb enough that I might never fear letting go of Ethan's hand again.

Of course, rather than wanting to be far away from him, the mead made me want to be closer, much closer. Our chairs had somehow moved around the table until we had our arms around each other's shoulders and our sides pressed tightly together.

We were talking in hushed whispers when I noticed someone standing in front of us. I looked up and gasped at the sight of the mortal Ethan had left town for. I jabbed Ethan in the ribs to get his attention, and when he noticed the man, he jumped to his feet, backing up from the table in surprise.

I stood too, blocking Ethan's view of the blond.

"Oh, are you going to protect him from me?" the blond laughed, and the sound was horrible, like broken glass on my flesh.

Ethan put his hands on my hips, whether in an attempt to hold me back, or just because it was the most convenient place to touch me from where we were standing I didn't know.

"You need to leave. He obviously doesn't want anything to do with you, and you don't belong here. Go back to your own world, Human." My voice was steady, but I felt anger leaking from every pore in my body. I didn't understand what was going on between Ethan and the guy, but I was drunk, and Ethan didn't want the blond there, so the blond had to go.

"What an adorable couple you two make. I understand now why Ethan chose to come back to you. I might have done the same if I were him. But then, I can always do better." The twink gave me an arrogant little smile.

Ethan caught me as I was about to throw myself over the table at the man. Ethan's arms wrapped around my waist, and I let him pull me into his embrace.

"Let it go," he warned against my ear. "Come on. Let's just go home."

"I had heard you'd recovered from our...relationship quickly Ethan, and I just had to come down here to see for myself. Gee, you do move fast, don't you?" The mortal gave a wicked smile.

Ethan clung to me but not as if the pain caused him to. No it was more like he was actually afraid of the mortal. I couldn't begin to imagine what had happened between them to make Ethan so scared, and right then, it didn't matter.

"Get out of here," I growled, feeling my anger rise and begin to spread out, lashing at the mortal as if it were a weapon.

The blond laughed, but he walked away, leaving us alone at the table with the entire pub staring at us. I shook my head when I saw Beth making her way towards us through the crowd. She looked at me for a minute before shrugging and going back behind the bar to get the crowd under control.

My rage had apparently spread further than I'd intended it to, and she would have a rough time getting everyone calmed down. I felt bad, but Ethan was right, we needed to leave.

We stumbled outside together, and I glanced up and down the street, relieved to find that the blond was nowhere in sight. Ethan and I helped each other down the sidewalk towards his house, and we managed pretty well for the amount of alcohol we'd consumed.

"So what was his problem?" I asked. "Did you break his poor little heart?"

"Something like that," Ethan said softly. "I really don't want to talk about it right now."

I nodded but pushed on anyway. "What did he mean that you left him for me? How could he have heard rumours about us? He doesn't even live here."

"I don't know. Will you shut up?"

I stopped, pulling my arm back to punch him. But the alcohol threw off my balance, and I fell into him before my fist could connect. He caught me and laughed, dragging me over to lean against the wall of a shop for a minute.

"You're drunk." He laughed harder as I started sliding down to the ground. He tightened his arms around me, pressing his body against mine to keep me on my feet. "Were you really going to fight him?"

I looked into his eyes and smiled. "Well, you didn't want him there. And we were actually having a pretty good time together. I didn't want him to spoil it."

"I still hate you, Jamie McHale," he whispered, moving his face towards mine.

"Right back at you, scumbag." I raised my hands to run my fingers through his hair, urging him lower until his lips touched mine.

He moaned into my mouth, his tongue pushing my lips apart while he ground his erection against my stomach. His hands gripped my hips so tightly that I knew I would have bruises, but I didn't care.

My own cock strained against my jeans as if trying to break free and find Ethan's skin. I realised that my headache was completely gone replaced by an ache in my groin that could only be relieved with more touching by Ethan.

He broke away from my mouth, and I felt a blush creep up my neck at the pathetic whine that escaped my lips. But he just smiled at me, smoothing my hair out of my face and kissing the tip of my nose.

"We can't do this here," he said.

I nodded, knowing what he was talking about, what we would do. I was past caring if it was the booze or the bond or if it was what I actually wanted from him. Right then, I just wanted him inside of me, the whys could be asked later.

We didn't exactly run, but we managed to get to his house pretty quickly anyway. He opened the door, and we attacked each other in the hallway. I kicked the door closed as he pulled his shirt over his head, throwing it to the floor before pulling me into his arms and kissing me again.

His hands roamed up my back, tugging at my shirt but not letting me take it off. I laughed, putting a hand to his chest to hold him off long enough to remove the shirt before our bodies crashed back together.

Our tongues wrestled while we fumbled with belts and buttons on each other's jeans. He reached inside my pants and gripped my cock firmly, making me groan into his mouth.

He smiled, pulling away to look at me. His eyes were wide, and his breathing was just as strained as my own. My heart thumped as if it would break out of my chest. It took more control than I care to admit to stay on my feet and not drop to my knees in front of him.

He led me to the bedroom, not letting go of my hand as we crawled up onto the bed. When his body lay on top of mine, the weight of him felt like home, and for the first time since this had happened, I relaxed.

A wave of calm, so strong and beautiful, washed over me. I knew that this would be all right. As long as neither of us spoke, we could do this and both be okay.

"Jamie," he whispered.

"Shut up." I kissed him, trying to keep the words from coming out. I didn't want to know what he thought. It didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was how we both felt, and judging from the impressive erection pressing into my skin, he was feeling as happy as I was.

"No, Jamie, stop for a second." He pushed himself up on his arms, looking down at me with a crooked smile on his lips.

"Don't ruin this Ethan. Please. I am begging you to just fuck me now. We can talk tomorrow. If we do this now, it will be done, and it will be one less hurdle. Please Ethan, fuck please just..." I trailed off, watching his face break into a wide grin.

"Fair enough, mate." He lowered himself to me again, fingers snaking into my hair as he recaptured my mouth with his own.

I heard his shoes hit the floor and kicked mine off as well. He slid down my body, trailing kisses over my collarbone, my chest, my waist. He kept moving, taking my pants with him as his body flowed like water down my legs and he gently nipped at my thighs and knees with his fangs. When he had me completely naked, he crawled over me to kiss me again.

I raised my legs, trying to use my feet to get his jeans off, as well. We struggled for a moment, neither of us wanting to be the first to break the kiss, and eventually, he was naked as well, his cock hard and warm against me.

"I want you inside me," I whispered against his lips.

He leaned back, looking down at me with a confused look on his face. I nodded, trying to reassure him that I knew what I was doing. I had a flash of fear as I realised that it was possible none of this had to do with the booze or the bond, but just me wanting him. I pushed the thought aside. It was what it was, and I couldn't change what was happening without driving myself insane.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I'm fine. I just...I don't want to screw this up."

"We'll get through it," He whispered. "I won't hurt you...not like this."

I nodded. I knew he wouldn't. I didn't know how I knew, but I did. He was probably just as lost as I was. If the bond hadn't happened, I might have never known Ethan had

normal feelings like confusion and fear and pain. I'd always figured he was just a sociopath who went through life seeking only his own comfort.

But as he slowly moved down my body again, making sure I was all right with every touch and kiss he bestowed upon me, I knew that I had been mistaken about Ethan. He and I might never call each other friend, but I was pretty sure I could no longer tell myself that I hated him.

Chapter Five

I dug my nails into Ethan's headboard as he ran his tongue up the length of my cock. I looked down at him with wide eyes, and he smiled before taking all of me into his mouth. His hands shifted to my hips, holding me down to keep me from bucking against him.

All I could do was whimper at the feel of his warm, wet mouth on me, and his teeth gently grazing my cock. I ran the silky stands of his hair through my fingers as he slowly slid up and down my achingly hard member.

One of his hands gently cupped my balls, rolling them in his palm as he continued to force my cock deeper into his throat. His mouth was so soft, his tongue like velvet against me, I never wanted the feeling to end. But the faster he moved, the harder my tip hit the back of his throat, and the closer I came to losing control.

I tried to slow him down by gripping his hair harder, but he must have liked that because he moaned. The vibration of his mouth against me, pushed me over the edge. I cried out as my cock spasmed, filling his mouth with cum. He swallowed hard, not letting me go until I whimpered in discomfort.

He grinned up at me, his lips slick with saliva and red from the amazing feat he had just performed. I sighed, reaching out to urge him to climb up and kiss me. He did, his cock leaving a scalding hot trail of pre-cum up my thigh as he moved.

I pulled his mouth to mine, pressing my tongue past his lips and tasting myself inside of him. One of his hands gripped mine, pressing it into the mattress and using it as leverage to grind himself against me. I moved my other hand between us, gripping his cock firmly in my hand and rubbing my thumb around his slick head.

He screamed into my mouth as I felt his cum, hot and thick, spray onto my chest between us. He tried to pull away, but I grabbed the back of his head, making him kiss me for another minute before finally letting him roll off of me.

We lay next to each other, hand in hand, silently catching our breath. My buzz was wearing off, and I was glad I didn't feel bad about what had just happened between us. It would have been a convenient excuse, but I didn't want that. If we were going to survive the

next month together, it would be better if we didn't have to get drunk every night just to keep ourselves alive.

I looked over at Ethan, my body stiffening at the angry look on his face. He seemed to be sobering up as well, and I thought he *was* going to blame the alcohol.

"What?" I asked, my voice defensive.

"Calm down," he said, his voice soft and not matching the look on his face. "I was just thinking that I fucked up." He rolled onto his side to look at me fully. "I don't think the magic is going to accept this as consummation."

Shit, he was probably right. But I was suddenly exhausted, and the thought of trying to have 'actual' sex right that moment made my head spin.

"We knew this wouldn't be a one time deal. We'll have to get used to being together anyway."

"Yeah, but we were ready. The first time is always the hardest, and we were all set to consummate, which I think would have made the next time a little easier. But, fuck Jamie, you had me going so quickly, I couldn't hold back. I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I couldn't hold back either. And maybe this will be enough to keep the pain at bay for a while. I don't think Gran meant we would have to have sex all the time. Just enough to get by until we can get unbonded."

He nodded. He squeezed my hand then got up. He made it to the door before turning to look at me. I could feel the stirrings of a headache, but it didn't hurt yet. Ethan turned to look at me, leaning on the door jamb the way he had at my apartment earlier.

"Do you want to try it?"

I knew he was asking if he should try to walk away by himself and have us both risk the pain or not.

"Not right now. Tomorrow definitely, but tonight I would rather sleep than pass out from the pain if you don't mind."

He shook his head. I met him at the doorway, and we went into the bathroom together. I started the shower while he got us clean towels. We stood with our backs to each other, washing and rinsing quickly, both apparently ready to be asleep as soon as possible.

We climbed into bed barely even dry, but it was so close to sunrise that it didn't matter. I felt like I could sleep for a week. I stretched my hand out and found his, letting our fingers snake together just before I fell asleep.

* * * *

I woke up to Ethan leaning over me with a worried look on his face. I had been dreaming about the night my parents were killed, and waking up to see him over me had not helped at all. I swung at him, my fist connecting with his face hard enough to knock him to the floor.

"What the fuck!" he yelled. He got to his feet, rubbing his jaw and glaring at me. "Jamie, chill out."

"Sorry," I said, realising that I didn't sound remorseful at all.

I hadn't dreamt of my parents in years. It wasn't that I had let it go exactly, but I had gotten better at not letting it control me. I could only assume that spending so much time around Ethan had brought back all of the memories of the darkest time of my life.

Beth and I had stayed with Gran while our parents went on vacation to visit the head of another vampire clan in Chicago. We'd just woken up when Gran came in to tell us. She had been as gentle as she could, but there is no easy way to tell children that their parents had been murdered.

It took years to drag all of the details out of her. My parents had been killed by vampire hunters while they were sleeping for the day. The King of Chicago had personally come to tell Gran what had happened and had even offered her his own head for letting our leaders be killed in his city. The vampires take such things very seriously.

But I had never blamed the Chicago clan. No, in my mind it had always been the fault of the Connors. They had coveted my parents' leadership for years, announcing often that they were more powerful and better equipped to rule us. Their takeover had been swift and efficient. They'd smoothed everything over with the outlying clans so none of them tried to swallow our smaller clan into theirs.

The vampires of Anaboris were thrilled with the new King's quick action. Everyone knows that we have a unique situation, being so small and so entrenched in mortal life and

culture. The mortals of our city are happy to interact with us, many of them serving as voluntary donors to keep the vampires from going crazy with hunger and attacking them.

The Connors were good leaders, I would not begrudge them that, but I could never forgive the way they had gotten their power. My parents loved the vampires of our clan, and the vampires seemed to forget rather quickly that the previous King and Queen were significant to the lifestyle we enjoyed in Royal Oak. It made me sick to see people fawn over the Connors, especially their lazy Prince with his sense of entitlement to a life that should still be mine.

"Is this something I can look forward to upon waking next to you often? I would appreciate some warning if we are going to have a repeat of this fist fight every morning."

"Fight?" I asked just as he swung at me too, clipping me in almost the same spot of my jaw as I'd hit him.

We glared at each other, both of us rubbing our faces in pain. The evening was not starting out well at all.

"You look pale," he said softly, his tone not matching the situation at all.

"Yeah." I blew out a sigh and tried to calm down. I would have to remind myself often that even if his parents had something to do with what had happened that didn't make Ethan responsible, as well.

"We should try to feed. I have a feeling blood pouches are only going to carry us for so long. I, for one, am too stressed out and exhausted to try to keep going without fresh blood. Are you up to trying tonight?"

I nodded. He had to be thinking what I was, that if I hadn't even been able to touch my own family without feeling pain, it would be difficult to feed off of someone else with no repercussions from the spell. But he was right, we would need fresh blood if we were going to struggle through this mess every day.

I became aware of the fact that my skin was tingling again and swore out loud. Ethan gave me a crooked smile that let me know he felt the same way. I held my hand out to him, and he crawled back in to bed, sitting close enough that I could put my arm over his shoulder.

"Jamie, we have to figure this out. I mean, this is going to start affecting a lot more than our physical comfort. How are you going to work like this?"

"I don't actually work at The Kiss. I'm more of a silent partner. Beth runs everything and I pretty much just get a pay check. Plus I have most of my inheritance left anyway."

He laughed. "So you're a bum, too? That works out then."

"You are not a bum." He had obviously meant it to be a joke, but I bristled all the same. "You are Prince of the Anaboris clan. Perhaps you could try to remember that once in a while."

"And perhaps you could try to remember that you are not. You were a fucking child when you were the Prince, Jamie. You have no idea what it's really like. What it really involves. So don't fuck with me about this."

I started to remember why we had chosen not to talk about our families or each other the night before. We were both getting pissed, yet neither of us could move away without suffering for it.

"Apparently," I said, unable to stop now that we had started down this road. "It involves taking off for a year to chase a piece of ass. And it obviously entails fucking every non-bonded clan member you can get your dick into. And let's not forget the all important task of trying to get your hands on everything that belongs to the former Prince, as well. Wow, Ethan, you have a really hard fucking job in this clan, don't you?"

I probably deserved it, but I was still surprised when he tackled me. He moved so fast I wasn't ready for the impact of his body against mine, and we tumbled off the end of the bed together.

We landed with a thump, his hands around my throat. I tried to break his grip on me, my nails leaving wicked scratches on his hands and arms, but he wouldn't let go. He brought my head up, slamming it down into the carpet until my vision went starry.

I brought my knee up, trying to hit his groin but only managed to reach his thigh. It wasn't a good hit, but it made him let go of me long enough to drop fully on top of me, his hands finding mine and pinning me to the floor.

My eyes widened in surprise at the feel of his erection pressing against me, and my own cock twitched in response. He kissed me, his mouth violently claiming mine. Our tongues crashed together, nicking on each other's fangs but neither of us backing off. Right then all I wanted was him inside me, and I would take him any way I could get him.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew it was strange how quickly the fight had shifted to sex, but I couldn't make myself care. His hands gripped my wrists tightly, making me squirm under him though I had no desire to go anywhere.

"Jamie?" Ethan's voice was hoarse, his lips still touching mine.

"Mmm?"

"We shouldn't be doing this." He pulled away completely, looking down at me with so much heat in his eyes that I shivered under his gaze. "Not like this."

"I want you. I don't think anything between us will ever be flowers and candy. If we wait for the 'perfect moment', we'll never get any further than we did last night. We both know that we have to consummate this thing. Wouldn't it be better to do it when we actually want each other? If we keep letting the opportunity pass us by, we could die before we finally do anything about it."

He nodded, but some of the passion had left his eyes. And I was no longer as ready as I had been either. He leaned down, kissing me again, but it was almost chaste.

"Sorry, I think I just ruined another moment," he said with a small laugh. "You're right though. Next time one of us feels like punching the other in the face, we should probably just go with that feeling."

I laughed even though I knew he was half-serious. I meant what I'd said, we would never have any semblance of a normal relationship and trying to would just lead to disaster.

"So, now that I've fucked up yet another opportunity to get this over with, do you want to try to feed without passing out?"

"Sounds like fun."

We got to our feet, took a shower together with no overt groping by either of us, and got dressed, all without fighting. Things were looking up.

We decided it would be easiest to go to The Kiss, as there were mortal donors usually hanging around. Beth waved to us when we walked in the door, not even batting an eye at the sight of us holding hands. I knew she understood what was going on, but as I wasn't completely used to being attached to Ethan, it squigged me a little to see how comfortable my family seemed at the notion.

Beth moved as if to kiss my cheek but caught herself. "Sorry. Damn, this sucks."

I gave her an eloquent look, and she had the decency to look embarrassed, but Ethan grinned. "So what can I get you two?" She led us to a table, which always amused me since I owned the place too, but Beth took her job at The Kiss seriously, and if she felt better seating us then more power to her.

"We need a donor," I said and laughed at the shocked expression on her face.

"Are you sure? Don't you think you would be better off with pouches until all of this...calms down a little?"

"Do you think Jamie is going to let something stupid like a spell keep him from doing what he wants to do?"

I punched his shoulder. "This was your idea."

Ethan nodded, giving me a smile one usually reserves for mental patients. I rolled my eyes and sat down, letting go of his hand long enough for him to sit next to me, then reclaiming it as if it were my security blanket.

"What are you looking for?" Beth asked, her tone businesslike.

"Well, I think it would be easiest for us to feed at the same time, and it has to be someone easygoing and pretty tactful. I mean, if we find out we can't do this, I don't want it all over town before we even make it out of the pub."

Beth nodded and walked off to find our donor. One of the only things that I had dictated to her about The Kiss was that I wanted the donors and vampires to be a good match. It made it easier to discount anyone crying wolf the next day. The donors told us what they wanted from the vamps, and the vamps told us what they wanted, and we hooked them up. Like a donor dating service. So far it was working very well and it made The Kiss one of the most popular pubs for humans and vampires.

"Neck or wrist?"

I looked up to see a dark-haired boy smiling shyly at both of us. I knew he had to be twenty-one, we didn't let minors into the bar, but he didn't look it. I glanced over to Ethan to see that he was staring at the kid in disbelief, as well.

"I know I look young," the boy said with a laugh. "But I'm legal. Honest. And Beth said you wanted discreet, I can do that better than most. So, neck or wrist?"

"Wrist," Ethan and I said together. Blood drinking wasn't always sexual for vampires, but it was less likely to be so with a wrist feeding than from the neck. We wouldn't have to be too close to him either, which I hoped would keep any pain to a minimum.

The boy knelt on the floor between our chairs, one wrist offered to each of us. I kept Ethan's hand in mine and we maintained eye contact as we each took a hand from the boy. Pain flared up my arm, and I watched Ethan's eyes squint with his own pain.

I bit down into the boy's wrist and it felt as if my brain exploded. My eyes closed on their own and I tasted the blood on my tongue, spicy and warm, but the pain was so bad I had to let him go. Ethan's hand had a death grip on mine, and when I opened my eyes, I saw that he had let the boy go too and had laid his head on the table.

"Go," I whispered to the wide-eyed mortal. He scrambled to his feet and backed away.

I moved closer to Ethan, wrapping my arm over his shoulders and laying my cheek against his head. His body shook and I thought he might be crying, but I didn't ask. Beth came running over to us to make sure we were okay. I nodded and asked her to bag up some pouches for us to take home.

"Can you get up?" I whispered to Ethan.

He nodded, letting me get an arm under him to help him to his feet. I looked around the pub and groaned at the sight of everyone staring at us. But I couldn't make myself care too much right then. We were in pain and would be forced to live on pouches for a while, I had more important things to worry about than what others thought of us.

"Do you want me to help you guys home?" Beth asked, handing me a bag full of pouches.

"No, we can make it." I smiled as Ethan stood straighter. "I'll see you later, Beth. Thanks."

She nodded, letting us walk past her without arguing. Beth was good at that, though usually she just wanted to let my own stupidity get the better of me. But with this situation, I think she was just as lost as we were.

We made it back to the house, our energy growing the longer we held each other. By the time we got to the door we were walking upright, only needing to hold hands. I dumped the bag of pouches on the table, and we tore into them as if we hadn't eaten in days. Looking at the large pile of empties, I felt sort of glad we hadn't been able to feed off of the donor after all. Usually one to two bags will last a vampire for a few nights, but we had each had at least four, and to be honest, I thought I could probably drink another. I looked up to see Ethan staring down at the table, too.

"Do you think this is because of the bond? Is it really draining us this much, and we haven't noticed?"

"I don't know. But we should mention it to Gran. Maybe every vampire needs to feed more after they are bonded." I knew that was probably bullshit, but I was tired and couldn't make myself get worked up again just yet.

"So now that we seem to be the talk of the town, I don't really feel the need to go out much for a while. How about you?" Ethan grinned at me, his blue eyes sparkling brightly.

"Not so much." I smiled back. "However, now that we are stuck in the house together, what would you like to do?"

His eyes darkened, the sparkle replaced by some of the heat his eyes had held for me earlier. My body responded, and a sigh escaped my lips before I could hold it back.

"But we're not even drunk," I said in mock horror.

"Or angry," he said, dropping to his knees in front of me.

He ran his cheek up my leg, the heat of his skin almost burning me through my jeans. I held his head in my hands, making him look up at me.

"Do you think we're mature enough to handle this?" I asked.

"Not a chance," he said with a smile. "But I'll be damned if I let another opportunity pass us by."

Chapter Six

Ethan stood then pulled me to my feet, pushing me face down against the kitchen table. His arms wrapped around my waist, his hands sliding up my chest and taking my shirt with them. He dropped it to the ground while he kissed my shoulders. His erection pressed against my ass and my own ground painfully against the table.

I had a moment to think how quickly we were reacting to each other, but all thought washed away completely when Ethan shifted my hips so he could reach his hand down my jeans and grab my throbbing cock.

I pushed my ass harder against him, moving in rhythm with his hand sliding up and down my shaft. He moaned, pressing his mouth against my neck and gently biting me. His fangs grazing my skin sent a shiver down my body.

I pulled his hand out of my jeans so I could turn to face him. I pulled him down to kiss me, my tongue forcing his lips apart as if I could crawl into his mouth completely. He gripped my ass, lifting me up to sit on the table as if I weighed nothing.

"Stay here and don't lose your...mood," he said, pulling away from me. "Actually, get naked and stay here. I'll be right back."

Once he was out of sight my skin started to tingle. I jumped off the table, trying to distract myself from the feeling by stripping out of my clothes. Naked and erect, he came back in the kitchen with a condom and a bottle of lube. He practically threw himself at me, knocking me back into the table so hard I felt it shift about a foot.

He kissed me, once again lifting me and putting me on the table in front of him. He pulled away from me for a minute, studying my eyes as if I would show him fear or anger at the situation. But I had never been so sure of anything before. Even the previous times he'd had me naked, I hadn't known that it was right the way I knew it in that moment.

He ripped open the package with his teeth, spitting the stray pieces of foil to the floor as he rolled the condom down his shaft. He pulled me into another kiss, hard and quick, while he blindly fumbled with the lube bottle. He backed away from me swearing. I looked over to see that he had spilled the tube all over the table. I laughed until he scooped some into his hand and rubbed it onto my cock. My breath caught in my throat as he slowly slid his hand up and down my slicked shaft.

"Not so funny now...is it?" he asked, his voice low and gravely.

I shook my head, the idea of speech seeming absolutely ludicrous. He slid his hand down my balls, and ran two slick fingers up the crack of my ass. I shivered at the feel of it, which made him smile.

He reached over, putting more lube on his fingers before returning them to my body. He pressed gently against my opening, letting the muscles loosen for him. When he had two fingers all the way inside of me, he paused while my body adjusted to the feeling. I shivered on the table under him, wanting more than he felt I was ready for. I didn't know how to tell him I had never been more ready. I just writhed, staring at him and pleading with my eyes for him to take me already.

He finally moved, sliding his fingers in and out of me, crooking his knuckles slightly so that every time he pulled out the tips of his fingers rubbed against that sweet spot inside of me. I gasped, clawing at his arm, trying to pull him closer to me.

He finally removed his fingers, bending over to kiss me again. He grabbed my knees, pulling me closer to the edge of the table, closer to him. Heat radiated off of him like a fire.

He covered the condom with more lube then braced himself on my legs as he pushed the head of his cock into my ass. I hissed at the initial burn of the muscles stretching to accommodate him then forced myself to relax and let him push his shaft inside me.

When he was sheathed completely in my ass we both froze, staring at each other. I had an overwhelming sense of being whole for the first time in my life. It was as if the entire world stopped for us, for this moment. Like a tumbler in a lock, I felt the pieces of the bond fall into place. Click, our auras were entwined. Click, the spell was completed. Click, we were home.

Then we were moving. I wrapped my legs around him, letting him slam into me with so much force that the table rocked on its legs. I reached out for something to hold onto, finding only his arms within reach, and latched on to them, nails sinking into flesh, but both of us were too far gone to care.

The spilt lube had started to spread, and I felt it, cold and wet against my back. He tried to hold me still, but the smooth surface of the table combined with the slick lube made me slide further away from him. It would have been funny if we hadn't both been so close to the edge.

I came first, my screams echoing in the kitchen as thick streams of cum shot onto my chest, and Ethan followed immediately. Crying out as he filled the condom in my ass.

He collapsed on top of me, kissing me hard, his hands still covered in lube but trying to grip mine. I started laughing, Ethan joining in immediately. I heard a loud crack, and we both fell to the ground as the table collapsed underneath us.

I was stunned into silence for a second then burst out laughing again.

"Holy shit," Ethan said, also laughing. "You're lucky you didn't get staked."

For some reason, this was even more hilarious and I laughed harder. Tears ran down my cheeks, and I realised I hadn't felt this good in a long time. I tried to say something witty, but there was nothing. I was covered in lube, splinters and blood from a few of the pouches that had burst, and Ethan was crushing me against the busted table, but I don't think I'd ever been happier.

Ethan crawled off of me, pulling me to my feet out of the wreckage of the table. He kissed me quickly before leading me into the bathroom with him. I started the shower while he disposed of the condom and grabbed towels.

We took turns soaping up each other, both of us letting our hands linger and wander much longer than was probably necessary. The consummation of the bond was supposed to lessen our need to touch each other, but as his cock grew hard again in my soapy hand, I had to wonder if it would actually make it worse.

He was suddenly much more fascinating to me, his skin smoother and more fun to touch than before. To be honest, I wasn't sure if that was because of the spell or because I just felt closer to him now that we'd had sex. I wanted to ask him if he felt that way about me, but I couldn't talk around his tongue in my mouth.

His arms closed around my waist, holding me tightly against his wet chest, kissing me as if we would never see each other again. His mouth moved slowly but fiercely on mine. I held his neck in my hand, my fingers playing with stray strands of his hair.

We moved so that his body pinned mine against the wall, his erection sliding against my stomach in the bubbles that hadn't rinsed from my skin. He kissed a line down my cheek, sucking my earlobe into his mouth until I groaned against his shoulder.

"I want you," he whispered.

"Again?" I asked with a laugh.

"Always."

The confidence in his voice scared me. I was sure it had to be the spell making him say it. It had been nice, and we seemed to be tolerating each other well, but it was a little soon for him to be thinking about forever with me.

He apparently wasn't thinking about that, or anything other than being with me. He moved down my body, kissing everything his mouth could reach as he went. I had every intention of stopping him, of pointing out that maybe he wasn't doing this of his own accord, but I was too transfixed by the sight of him on his knees in front of me.

All thought stopped when he took my cock into his mouth. My head jerked backward, slamming into the wall behind me, but I didn't care. The feel of his tongue rubbing up the length of me while his fingers dug into my hips was the only thing I could focus on anymore.

Ethan moved with precision, almost reminding me about all of the men he had done this for in the past but it washed away with a million other ungraspable memories that flooded through my brain while he sucked me off.

"Ethan!" I came quickly, his throat convulsing around the tip of my cock as he worked to swallow me as much as he could. I looked at him in amazement, watching a slow smile spread over his lips when he released me.

"You taste like candy," he said, rising to his feet.

I gripped his hair tightly, pulling him down to kiss me. Our tongues fought against each other, each struggling to control the kiss. I wanted hard and violent while he tried to slow the pace, as you would kiss your spouse.

Just because we were bound didn't make me his husband. I didn't want to lose myself to the spell, especially since I feared it was happening to Ethan. We'd already lost so much control to the curse. I was terrified of sacrificing myself any more.

He finally broke away from me, looking confused but not pushing me about it. He reached over, turning off the water and climbing out of the tub without saying a word. I

stood there for a minute, trying to collect my thoughts before getting out as well and taking the towel he offered me.

We went into the bedroom and got into bed next to each other. We lay hand in hand, but I couldn't help feeling the distance between us.

"Ethan, I'm sorry," I said softly. "I don't know—"

"It's all right," he said. "You don't have to explain yourself to me. We should get some sleep. God only knows what tomorrow is going to bring."

I rolled onto my side and couldn't help smiling when he turned behind me to throw an arm over my waist. I laid awake for a while longer, enjoying the steady rise and fall of his chest against my back before I finally fell asleep to the rhythm of him.

* * * *

Ethan was already awake as I struggled to open my eyes the next night. He had the phone pressed against his ear with one hand and trailed the fingers of his other up and down my arm. I smiled at him, but he didn't return it. In fact, he looked angry.

He mumbled some form of acknowledgement into the phone then hung up before looking over at me.

"Good evening," I said, stifling a yawn.

"You might want to hold off a while before you call it good," he said. He blew out a sigh and climbed out of bed, walking into the closet and closing the door behind him.

I felt a small twinge at my temples, but nothing like the pain such a distance between us would have caused the night before. I waited for Ethan to come back, hoping that he would be feeling better, too. It seemed too good to be true that we would be able to function without being attached anymore.

When the closet door opened I sat up, watching Ethan for any sign that he was in pain, but he seemed okay, if a little lost.

"How do you feel?" I asked cautiously.

"I'm all right," he said as if it should have been obvious. Then he stopped, turning to look at me with his eyes wide. "It doesn't hurt."

I smiled. "Yeah, do you think this means we won't have to do everything one handed from now on?"

"That will be weird, huh?" He smiled too, sitting back on the bed next to me. "It couldn't have happened at a better time, either."

"Why is that?"

He blew out a sigh, taking my hand probably out of habit. "My parents wish an audience with us tonight."

I pulled away, looking at him in horror. He tried to grab me, but I slid off the end of the bed to get dressed. Perfect. We finally had some good news, and he had to ruin it.

"Jamie, come on. You had to know this would happen."

I tugged on a pair of jeans, keeping my back to him as I tried to calm down. I did not want to see the King and Queen. Not then, not ever. In fact, they were the last people I wanted to deal with. I was quite sure they would find a way to make this whole situation my fault. I had ruined their Prince's life, bonded myself to him for—

I didn't know what they would think, and I didn't want to.

I felt his hand on my shoulder and whirled around, pushing him firmly away from me. He stumbled backward, apparently not expecting the reaction. He put his hands on his hips and glared at me, but I just turned around and finished getting dressed. I could almost feel him counting to ten behind me.

"Jamie, they are my parents. They want to make sure we are okay, and I'm sure they want to help."

"Oh, I have no doubt. The royal court of Anaboris has never been anything but helpful when it comes to me. That would be why I'm still here at all."

I had petitioned several times over the years to break ties with the clan. I had hoped it would be easier for me if I joined another clan in a different city. Somewhere far from the memories of my parents, far from Ethan and the Connors all together. But every request was denied. There was never a reason, never a formal hearing, just a royal 'no'.

"I'm sure my parents had a good reason to keep you here. They probably just wanted to keep an eye on you, to make sure you were safe. No one wanted what happened to your parents to happen to you, too."

"Do not talk to me about my parents, Ethan Connor. Don't you fucking dare." I turned around, my anger lashing out at him, but he stood his ground.

"Don't do this," he said through clenched teeth.

I couldn't tell if I had hurt him, or if he was trying not to attack me. It had been like this since the day we'd met, one of us riling up the other until there was nothing left to do but fight it out.

Neither of us seemed to want the fight, both trying like hell to keep our tempers in check, and I was losing as I usually did—especially when it came to Ethan.

I closed my eyes and let out a shaky breath. I felt him move closer and let him take my hand again. The anger started to seep away, and the longer he touched me the more calm I felt. When I looked at him again, he was closer than I had realised. I looked up into his blue eyes and felt a smile tug the corners of my lips.

"Boy, this bond is giving you all kinds of super new powers," I said.

He leaned down, placing a chaste kiss on my lips. I moved into his arms, letting him hold me until my anger was so buried I almost forgot what we had been fighting about. I didn't like him having so much control over my emotions, but I could see where it would come in handy. If we were really going to see his parents I hoped that he wouldn't let go of me for the duration of the visit. It would probably be the only way I would get out of there without embarrassing myself...or him.

"We have to go," he said with his mouth pressed to my head. "They're waiting for us. I thought after the meeting, we could go pick out a new kitchen table."

I nodded, letting him go but not really wanting to. It might not have hurt to not touch him anymore, but I still felt better in his arms then out of them.

"Ethan," I said, stopping him before he walked out of the room. "I need you to do something for me."

"What do you need?"

"Don't tell your parents that the need to touch each other has lessened."

He crooked an eyebrow at me.

"I just, I mean, I don't want to lose it in front of your parents. I would prefer that they just assume that if I reach for you it is because I need to and not because I want to."

He walked over to me, tilting up my chin with his fingers so he could kiss me. I wrapped an arm around his neck, loving the warmth of his skin against my hand. He pulled back after a few seconds, dropped a kiss on the tip of my nose and smiled at me.

"I won't tell them if you promise to let me touch you when I want to, too." I started to nod, but he gripped my chin again. "It might be often, make sure you think about it before you answer me."

"Ethan, I have pretty much let you punch me in the face whenever you chose to for the last fifteen years or so. I think I can handle you holding my hand once in a while. We've managed the last few days just fine, and we'll get through the coming weeks, too. You were right when you said we were too fucking stubborn to let this thing control us."

I didn't mention that I had spent the morning wondering just how much control we had really lost to it. We would deal with that if it came up again. For the moment, I had enough to worry about without throwing in the spell's power over our needs and emotions. If I would have to behave myself in front of the Connors, I was glad Ethan could inflict some calm on me. It might make the evening go more smoothly than it would if I were left to my own devices.

"We should go," he said, pulling me towards the door.

I knew he was right. The sooner we got there the sooner we could leave. I could only tag along and pray that the visit would be a short one.

Chapter Seven

We were shown into the throne room when we arrived at Ethan's parent's house. Ethan had tried to argue with the butler about where the meeting would take place, but the orders had been issued, and this would apparently be a formal meeting.

There was a small table in the room with four chairs around it. Ethan and I sat next to each other so we could let go of each other's hands but bump legs under the table. After twenty minutes of waiting Ethan was fidgety and growing angry. I hadn't thought he would be the one to lose his temper first, but I had a feeling that, if his parents didn't show soon, I might be getting out of the meeting all together.

Unfortunately, just as it seemed Ethan had had enough, they walked through a side door. Ethan and I stood as his father held out his hand to me. I took it reluctantly, hissing as a sharp pain jolted up my arm.

"I am sorry, Mr. McHale. I forgot that anyone's touch except my son's would cause such a reaction." He didn't sound the least bit sorry, but I knew this would be the least of the insulting actions thrown at me, so I could let a few slide.

"Please call me, Jamie," I said, still rubbing my arm. "After all, I suppose for the moment you are in my in-laws."

Okay, so it was a low blow. But I had no doubt in my mind that Ethan's father had known exactly what he was doing when he took my hand. If he was going to be an asshole, then so was I. Oh, I wouldn't be overtly rude, but I wouldn't be their whipping boy, either.

"Of course," the Queen stammered. "I suppose you are correct. Boys, why don't you sit down? Would you care for...anything?"

Ethan and I shook our heads, sitting back down. I grabbed his hand under the table and returned the small smile he gave me. I never thought I'd prefer to be alone with Ethan Connor, but sitting across from his parents made me never want to leave the safety of Ethan's bed again.

"Mr. McHale, sorry, Jamie, we have been in contact with Shawnna for the last couple of days. She has filled us in on what happened between you and my son." The King stared at me, as if waiting for an answer of some kind.

"I'm sorry. Am I supposed to say something? You didn't ask a question so I didn't realise it was my turn to speak." Ethan kicked me under the table, but when I looked at him, I noticed his lips twitching as he fought a smile.

"Queen Tara and I are concerned about this bond. The two of you have been...feuding for as long as anyone can remember. In fact, if I recall correctly, the night Ethan left Anaboris the two of you engaged in a violent altercation that left you both injured for days." Again he paused, but I didn't say anything. I could let the silence hang all night.

"What Jafir is trying to say is that we are worried that you two will hurt each other if you are left alone to deal with this...problem on your own. We would like you to consider moving in here so that our guards can keep an eye on you. For your own safety."

"No," I said rising to my feet. "If that was all you needed then good evening." I tried to walk away but Ethan tightened his grip on my hand, trying to keep me at the table.

"Mother, Father, I appreciate the offer. Really I do, but Jamie and I are doing just fine. We chose to spend the duration of this bond alone together for a reason." He held up a hand to stop his father from interrupting. The King's eyebrows rose in surprise, but he stayed quiet. "And that reason is our business, not yours or anyone else's for that matter."

Ethan stood, too, but didn't let me walk away yet. Our hands were gripped together so tightly that our knuckles were turning white. I knew I was trying to keep from screaming, but I wasn't sure why he was suddenly so tense.

"Ethan, be reasonable. I can tell you two have engaged in violent acts together. You are both bruised to the point that the wounds haven't even healed yet." The Queen stood and walked around the table to examine a bruise on Ethan's jaw. "You are the Prince of Anaboris. It is inappropriate for this situation to continue as it is."

"And what would you have me do mother?" He knocked her hand away from his face, squinting at the pain he must have felt from that small contact. "Jamie and I are bonded. And we cannot break the bond for another month. I will not live here to save your sensibilities. I've done many more inappropriate things than this. Why are you acting this way towards us?"

"Because people are talking," The King stood, too, but stayed on his own side of the table. "Our family have been respected leaders of this clan for twenty years—"

"Fifteen," I said softly. I felt Ethan's hand tighten around mine again, but I shook him off, no longer wanting his calming effect.

"I'm sorry? Did you say something?" The King turned to look at me.

"Yes, I did. I *said* you have been leaders for fifteen years. Not twenty. Fifteen years ago tomorrow actually my parents were murdered. I may have only been a ten-year-old child, but I remember the night vividly. Next Wednesday your family will have been in power fifteen years." My voice was remarkably low. I had expected to shout, and judging from the look on Ethan's face, he had expected it as well.

But it didn't seem worth it anymore. His parents would never admit what happened the night my parents died, and even if they were responsible, they would never feel remorse for it. Raging against them wouldn't get me anything but killed.

"Right, well yes," the King stammered, looking unsure of himself for the first time I'd ever seen. "Fifteen years then, we have been respected by most of the members of this clan. We will not have rumours about the weakness of our Prince circulating."

He was trying, but the steam had gone out of his argument. Having reminded him of a bigger scandal seemed to have given him pause. I tried not to look smug, but I don't know if I succeeded.

I took Ethan's hand again. "Shall we? We should get to the furniture store before it closes."

His mother moved as if to kiss his cheek, but he moved out of her reach with his hand up. She nodded, smiling sadly at us before we turned to walk out of the hall.

"Boys," his father called after us.

We turned, hand in hand still, our bodies closer than they probably needed to be, but I for one enjoyed the King discomfort around us and would use every opportunity I could from that moment on to make it happen again.

"Please try for some discretion."

Ethan pulled me out the door without answering him. It was raining when we reached the sidewalk. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me deeply, his tongue forcing my mouth open and scraping along my teeth as he backed me against a light post. I gripped his shoulders tightly in my hand, hooking one leg behind his and kissing him back just as hard.

He pulled away but let me lick a trail of rain from his cheek. We looked towards the house, and I noticed a curtain closing in an upstairs window. I turned back to Ethan and grinned.

"You're kind of an asshole," I said with a smile.

He kissed me again, slower and more sensually than before. I put a hand to his chest, gently pushing him from me.

"Ethan, this really isn't the place. And if you don't stop, I'll have to bend you over and fuck you right here."

He crashed against me again, fighting with my hands to try to unbutton my jeans. I moaned into his mouth but struggled to keep him from getting off my clothes in the street. He moved one of my hands to feel how hard his cock was inside of his jeans. I rubbed him a few times before coming to my senses and pushing him back again.

"You're no fun," he pouted. But he didn't attack me again.

"Remember that later," I said with a laugh.

The joke earned me a small smile, but I could tell Ethan was pissed. I didn't think it was directed at me though. I took his hand, and we walked past a group of people who had stopped to gawk at our impromptu make-out session.

"Do you still want to get a new table tonight?" I asked, hoping to get him in a better mood before we went back to his place.

"Yeah. And I guess we should stop by The Kiss for some more pouches, I think we broke whatever was left when the table collapsed last night."

I nodded, letting him lead me where he wanted to go. It was his house, so I wasn't expecting to have much say in the table he chose, though he was nice enough to ask me my opinion on a few when we got to the store.

He had it narrowed down to two, both black, both synthetic materials. He had tried shaking both of them, and when he couldn't gauge the stability he finally picked me up and set me on one. The salesman looked horrified, but I thought it was hilarious.

He spread my legs, standing between my knees and pushing me to lay back. He used his hips to shake the table a few times, and when he seemed satisfied, he helped me down. He paid in cash, which seemed to cheer up the salesman up, and set the delivery for the following evening.

We walked out of the store headed for The Kiss, both in a better mood. We had not bothered to talk about what had happened at the King and Queen's house. I think because neither of us was up to fighting with the other just then, and family discussions always took us to that place.

Beth wasn't working at the pub that night, so I went into the kitchen and loaded a bag with pouches and two bottles of absinthe, wrote her a note and met Ethan out front. It was sort of nice now that we could walk away from each other for at least a few minutes at a time. We hadn't tried for any longer than five minutes, but I thought we should try...tomorrow.

The house was suspiciously clean when we walked in. I noticed that the table had been removed, and the air smelled like bleach. Ethan walked into the living room and found a note on the end table.

"You've got to be kidding me!" He handed me the note before throwing himself down on the couch.

The note was from his mother explaining that she had hired a maid to help us around the house while we adjusted to the bond. I laughed, stopping quickly at the look on Ethan's face.

"I would say she's just trying to help, but I have a feeling she's just meddling in your life."

He nodded with his head in his hands. I sat next to him, pulling him into my arms. We stayed on the couch for a while, not talking, just touching and enjoying the silence. Finally he pulled away, bringing my hand to his mouth to kiss my knuckles before standing up. He pulled a few of the blood pouches from the bag, dropping them on the end table before taking the rest into the kitchen. I guess he thought they would be safer if we couldn't accidentally pop them again.

"So do you want to talk about what happened earlier?" I called to him.

"Not really. I can handle my parents," he said, walking around the corner. "Do you want to talk about it?"

I shook my head. If I started talking, the conversation would end up at my parents, and I didn't want to talk about them either.

Ethan turned on the stereo before sitting down and grabbing one of the pouches. We drank while listening to some crappy soft jazz music he had tuned to. When the bags were empty and the music had been going for about fifteen minutes, I thought I'd go crazy.

"You're not fucking serious?" I finally asked, blowing out a sigh.

"What?"

"This sucks." I stood up to find something else to listen to. He grumbled but didn't stop me.

I finally found a Bright Eyes CD hidden among more crappy soft jazz ones. I shot him an incredulous look which he chose to ignore. I slid the disc in before walking back over to him. He had slouched down on the couch, head back, eyes focused on the ceiling.

I dropped to my knees as the first lines of *Lover I Don't Have to Love* played through the speakers. I crawled between his legs, sliding my hands up under his shirt, splaying my fingers to touch as much of his skin as I could.

He looked down at me, one eyebrow raised and a crooked smile on his lips. I smiled back before dropping my face to his jeans, licking a wet line up his zipper. He slid his fingers into my hair, pressing my face tighter against his quickly hardening cock.

I unfastened his jeans, moving so he could lift his hips, then slid his pants to the floor. He pulled off his shirt, leaving me staring at his naked, solid body. I found myself wanting to taste every inch of him, neck to ankles, for as long as he would let me. I was starting to understand what Ethan had felt the previous night. The bond might have forced me to think about forever, but it wasn't as scary as I had found it before. Instead, a peaceful feeling settled over me. I was safe. I was home. I was where I belonged.

His cock was completely hard, pre-cum glistening on his thick tip. I licked a drop, smiling at the whimpering sound that came from him. I sucked his head into my mouth, rolling my tongue around it a few times then slid down to take as much of his shaft as I could before coming back up again. I took him down my throat a few more times, my hand cupping his balls and squeezing gently, until he begged me to stop.

"Fuck Jamie, how do you make me want you so badly?" His eyes were bright and wide and he stared down at me, amazement plain on his face. I blushed at that look, embarrassed

that anyone could look at me like that. "Don't do that," he said, turning my face up to look at him. "You're wonderful, and you should to be with someone who appreciates you. I am so sorry this happened. You deserve better than me."

"But I don't want better. I want you," I said, the words tumbling out of my mouth before I could stop them.

"Gee thanks," he said, laughing. I realised what I had just implied and laughed, too.

"You know what I mean. I'm not as sorry as I was that this happened, Ethan. I mean, I'm not ready to vow undying love to you or anything, but it seems to be working out pretty well for now. Don't you think?"

He nodded, bending down to kiss me. I rose up, straddling his legs so I could hold his head in my hands while our mouths moved against each other. I could taste the blood mixed with Ethan's flavour on my tongue, and I feared I would come without him ever touching my cock.

"You have on too many clothes," he growled against my mouth.

I raised my arms, letting him pull off the T-shirt before his hands fumbled with the buttons on my jeans. I stood, kicking off the pants before climbing back on his lap. I took his mouth with mine, revelling in the feel of his warm, wet tongue against mine.

A loud knock on the door made us both jump. I climbed off of Ethan, and we both struggled to get on our jeans. He went to the front door, and I heard him talking in hushed tones then the door slammed. I walked to the hallway to see him walking back to me followed by the blond mortal.

"What is he doing here?" I asked Ethan.

"Well, apparently he works here."

"Hi, my name's Jeremy," the blond said, holding out his hand to me.

I ignored it, standing with my hands clenched into fists at my side. I couldn't imagine why Ethan had let him in, or why he was suddenly so calm after the way he had acted at The Kiss the last time we'd seen Jeremy.

"What do you want?" I asked, looking from Ethan to Jeremy and hoping someone would clue me in as to what was happening.

"I had to drop off some papers for the Prince to look at, but I wanted to come in and say hi to you, too. I mean, it wouldn't do to be rude and not show respect to the, what do I call you...the little lady?"

I took a step towards him, but Ethan put a hand to my chest, stopping me from doing anything I might regret later. At the moment, I couldn't imagine that I'd regret punching Jeremy—just a few times. I was even willing to deal with the pain it would have caused me to do it.

"Jeremy, you really should leave now," Ethan said, holding up the envelope. "Thank you for bringing this by, but next time, you can just leave it on the table when you come to...do whatever it is my mother thinks you need to do here."

"Well I would have left it on the table, but you don't have one anymore. I hope you don't mind me throwing out the old one. It didn't seem to be repairable."

A blush crept up my neck as I remembered the previous night, and the fact that mixed in with the wreckage had been a condom wrapper and a bottle of lubricant that Jeremy must have disposed of, as well. The embarrassment deepened with the realisation that he must have told Ethan's parents about it, and that was what they had meant when they said we were engaging in violent acts against each other.

"Jeremy, please just go," Ethan said.

I glanced over to see that he was massaging his temples. His eyes squinted as they did when he had a headache. I reached out and took his hand, wondering why I hadn't been in pain yet if he was.

"Well, I'll see you later, boys. Don't do anything I wouldn't do." Jeremy laughed as he walked away from us. The door closed behind him, and Ethan sank to the floor.

"Are you all right?" I sat next to him, keeping his hand in mine.

"I'll be fine. You don't feel it do you?"

I shook my head, bringing his hand to my mouth and kissing it softly.

"Maybe the headache isn't related to us, maybe it was brought on by the twink," I said.

Ethan smiled, nudging me with his shoulder. I was glad that he wasn't as scared of Jeremy as he had seemed before, but I was terribly confused as to what was happening. I didn't understand how Ethan's parents knew Jeremy, why they would hire him as help for us, or what he had been doing at the house that night at all. I wanted to ask Ethan a million

questions, but he didn't look like he'd be interested in answering any of them for me just then.

"Maybe we should go to bed," I said softly.

He nodded, letting me stand first and help him up. I led the way into the bedroom, letting him crawl in bed while I pushed the dresser in front of the door. If Jeremy was going to be in the house, I didn't want him to be able to get into our room if I could help it.

I crawled in next to Ethan, holding him tight against me and placing a soft kiss on his shoulder. He found my hand in the dark snaking his fingers with mine.

I listened to his breathing finally even out and knew that he was asleep. I laid my head on his shoulder and closed my eyes, falling asleep soon after.

Chapter Eight

Ethan sat against the headboard, reading through a pile of papers with a grim look on his face. I watched him for a few minutes before he noticed that I was awake.

"Hey there, sleepyhead."

"Hi," I said softly as I sat up. "How long have you been up?"

"Not long," he said, leaning over to kiss my forehead. "I didn't want to wake you. You looked so cute...and silent."

"Ha ha. What are you doing?"

"Nothing really," he said, dropping the papers onto the table next to him with a sigh. "How are you feeling?"

I knew he was remembering what I had said the night before about it being the anniversary of my parent's death. The past few years had been easier. The older I got the better I had been at controlling my emotions regarding it. I never forgot, but I could get through the day without too much distraction.

"I'm fine, thanks. How are you? Do you want to talk about what happened at your parents' yesterday?"

"Not really." He blew out a sigh. "But I guess we should. I hope you're not mad at me for attacking you on the street when we left. Especially since you were already upset at how they talked to you. They just drive me so crazy sometimes, and I wanted to...I don't know, embarrass them I guess."

I took his hand, squeezing it softly. "I'm not mad. I figured you were trying to get at them with your little public display. I do sort of wish you had done it because you really wanted me, but I can understand your reason."

"Don't think I didn't want you, Jamie," he said with a laugh. "Wanting you doesn't seem to be much of a problem for me at all lately. But yeah, I was hoping to egg them on by doing it in their front lawn. Thanks for stopping me. I was so angry at them I might have really taken you right there."

"Well, it wouldn't have been that terrible if you had. You and I have done more embarrassing things than that to each other in public."

He laughed again, pulling me into his arms and kissing me. I moaned against his lips, my cock springing to attention at his touch. He rolled on top of me, never breaking the kiss. I wrapped my arms around his back, running my fingers up his skin while he ravaged my mouth with his tongue and his teeth.

He moved to the edge of the bed, rummaging through the end table and coming back with a condom and a bottle of lube.

"I don't get the big build up tonight?" I asked as he rolled the condom down his shaft.

"I'm not losing the moment again. I want you, and damn it, I'm going to have you."

He dropped down to kiss me again, fumbling with the bottle of lube as he did. I pulled back laughing.

"All right, calm down. I'm not going anywhere. I'm right here, and you can do whatever you want to me, okay? But I don't want another lube bath if you don't mind. So take your time. I'll be here."

He sat up, smiling down at me while he popped the lid on the bottle and poured some of it into his hand. He closed the bottle and put it back on the end table with an exaggerated sigh that made me laugh again before coating the condom with the slick liquid. He lowered himself to me, kissing me while his hand moved between us, sliding a lubed finger between my ass cheeks.

My breath caught in my throat when he pushed first one, then two fingers inside of me. Ethan kissed me harder as he fucked my ass with his fingers. I whimpered against him, wanting to beg him to fuck me but unable to speak around his tongue in my mouth. All I could do was bend my knees and raise my hips into him, hoping he would get the hint.

He did. His fingers pulled out of me and were quickly replaced by his cock. He was so hard, stretching me wide. I cried out into his mouth, using my hands to press him closer to me, our fangs cutting into each other's lips, blood seeping onto our skin. I was too lost to the feel of him inside of me to even think about any pain there might have been. It was all washed away with every thrust of his hips.

Ethan's head flew back as he started to lose his rhythm. He gripped my cock in his hand, jerking quickly until I came in thick, hot spurts up my chest. He cried out, coming with me hard and fast, his hands digging into the sheets next to my hips.

I fought to catch my breath while he pulled out of me, falling to the mattress with a contented sigh.

"So, what do *you* want to do today?" he asked with a laugh.

"Oh no, you have definitely earned the right to decide the rest of the day's activities."

"Well," he said, propping up his head on his hand to look down at me. "I thought we might practise spending time apart. We seem to be getting better at it, and if you don't mind trying, I'd like to see what our time limits are like now."

"I rescind my offer," I said with mock coldness. "You are a terrible decision maker."

He laughed and gave me a quick kiss before getting out of bed. I reached for him, but he pulled away to quickly.

"I'm going to take a shower...alone. But if you feel like you need me, come get me."

"What if I just want you?"

"That, too." He walked to the door, shoved the dresser aside and left me alone for the first time in days.

I listened to the shower run for a few minutes before getting out of bed. It felt strange not to be with him, but I was glad to find there was no pain or even discomfort yet. I got dressed, walking around the room feeling a little lost without Ethan there.

When I glanced towards the bed, I noticed that the papers he had left on the table had been scattered to the floor, probably when he had dug through the drawer for the condom. I picked them up, shuffling them neatly together again.

As I put them back on the table a name jumped out at me from the page. I looked closer and realised it really was my mother's name at the top of the paper. I scanned the rest of the document, sinking slowly to the floor with the stack in my hand.

The papers contained details of the day my parents were murdered. My eyes burned with unshed tears as I lost myself to the graphic descriptions spread in front of me. I was so horrified that I didn't notice the shower had stopped in the other room.

"Jamie," Ethan said softly from the doorway.

"What is this?" I didn't look at him, couldn't force myself to meet his eyes. "Why do you have this?"

He walked into the room, kneeling on the floor next to me. He tried to put his hand on my shoulder, but I jerked away from him. I scrambled to my feet, letting the papers fall to the floor around him.

"What are you doing with those? Where did you get them?" The volume of my voice rose with every word, and my body shook. I assumed it was my anger, but it could have been from not touching him for almost fifteen minutes. At that moment, the only touching I wanted to do involved worse pain for him than the curse could ever cause.

"Jamie, I need you to calm down. I'll tell you if you just come back here and listen to me." Ethan rose to his feet to and walked towards me.

"Don't you fucking come near me." I backed away until I bumped into the dresser.

"Don't touch me."

"That's going to be a little difficult, don't you think? Please don't freak out on me. I'm trying to help you."

I laughed, and it was a harsh sound that made Ethan flinch. He dropped the hand he had held out to me, but he continued slowly walking towards me anyway.

"I don't want your help, Ethan Connor. Not with this, not with anything. I mean it, stay the fuck away from me." I turned and walked out the door.

Ethan caught up with me in the hallway, grabbing my wrist and spinning me around to face him.

"Look, I get that you're pissed. But where are you going to go? You have to touch me eventually, Jamie. The spell isn't going to let you avoid me for long."

"Fuck you, and fuck the bond." I wrenched my hand from his and swung at him, clipping him in the chin so hard he was rocked backward into the wall. "You wanted to test how long we could go? Well, let's fucking find out."

I walked out the front door, not bothering to turn and see if he followed me or not. I didn't care. I couldn't remember ever being so pissed at him in my life. If he had bothered to tell me that he had those papers, I might not have freaked out. I might have even let him explain to me what was going on. But finding them like that, I just lost it.

I got almost to my apartment before the itching started. I rubbed my arms, trying to make it stop, refusing to go back to him yet. He was probably right, the bond wouldn't let us go too long without each other, but I was willing to suffer through quite a bit of pain knowing that he was suffering, too.

When I walked into the apartment, Beth stood in the kitchen on the phone. She shot me a dirty look while making small acknowledging noises into the receiver. She hung up and promptly punched me in the shoulder.

My whole arm exploded in pain, and I cried out in surprise.

"Good, I hope it fucking hurt. What the hell are you doing here, Jamie? You can't just walk out on your husband this soon after a bond. Are you trying to kill yourself? And him?"

"Him wouldn't be so bad," I mumbled.

I walked to the kitchen table, suddenly exhausted and needing to sit down. Beth sat next to me and sighed loudly.

"You have to go back."

"I can't go back," I said softly. My head was killing me again, and it made it difficult to think about why I had to stay there. "Was that him?"

"Yes, that was Ethan. He is on his way over. He's very worried about you. I tried to explain to him that you are an absolute prick and he should be more concerned with his own safety, but no. His thoughts are all for you."

"I'm sure." I struggled for a minute, trying to remember why I had walked out on him. Then it hit me, and the anger flared back, clearing some of the cloudiness the pain had caused. "Did he tell you what he did?"

"Yes. Did you let him tell *you* what he did? What he's been doing?" She sighed heavily. "Of course you didn't. You saw the reports, and you took off. Honestly, Jamie, sometimes you really are still a child aren't you."

"Fuck off, Beth," I said, laying my head down on the table. "I am too tired to fight with you right now. Why is it so cold in here?"

My voice got softer with every word, but I couldn't stop it. I couldn't even conjure the always pleasant anger I liked to wrap myself in. The world had started to go black around the edges, and all I wanted was to curl up in Ethan's arms.

Where was he? I couldn't remember, but I missed him so much.

"Ethan?" I wasn't sure I'd actually asked for him out loud until Beth answered me.

"Oh, Jamie. Damn it, you are such an idiot." She sighed, but it sounded muffled, as if she were in a different room. "I'll call Gran. Please don't fucking die on me."

Chapter Nine

I snuggled deeper into Ethan's arms, smiling at the feel of them tightening around me. I was sore, but I couldn't remember why. I knew we'd had sex recently, but it wasn't that kind of sore. He pressed a kiss to my temple, and I sighed. His body was so warm, I didn't ever want to leave.

"Well, that's certainly better than you two trying to kill each other," Gran said brightly.

My eyes snapped open, and I looked around in utter confusion. We weren't at home. We were laying on a mat on the floor of the Spring Temple, and Gran was standing over us smiling. I looked back at Ethan, but he looked as if he already knew what was going on.

"How are you feeling, sweetie?" Gran asked, feeling my forehead with the back of her hand.

I flinched before I realised it didn't hurt when she touched me. I waited for one of them to explain what was happening, but they just kept looking at me as you would a patient in the hospital who doesn't realise how sick he is.

"What's going on?" I asked, pulling out of his arms enough to look at him completely.

"How much do you remember about Thursday night?" Ethan asked.

I thought about it for a minute, and the memories started pouring back. I remembered running out on Ethan after finding the reports about my parents, feeling like I would die in front of Beth, and finally collapsing at the kitchen table in my apartment.

Once the memories started, it was like a flood gate had opened. The words on the pages burned the inside of my skull. Details I had either forgotten about their murder or had never even known before were suddenly full colour pictures behind my eyelids, and I was sure I would never be rid of. Ethan had gotten that report from that mortal boy Jeremy. They were in this together. And I didn't even know what 'this' was. I knew he had no right to get involved in something that had nothing to do with him but might very well have everything to do with his parents.

I started to puff up, trying to get enough energy to start yelling at him again as I had before I'd stormed out on him, but Gran saw me doing it and clucked her tongue at me.

"Don't you dare start with him again, Jamie McHale. Your temper is what got you here in the first place. I won't tolerate it right now. You're lucky you are still alive, and that you didn't kill your partner. This was all your doing, and you owe Ethan an apology for what you've put him through these last few days."

"Apologise? To him? After...wait a minute, what do you mean the last few days?" I asked, running out of steam instantly. "How long have I been here?"

"Almost a week," Ethan said.

"A week? We weren't even apart that long before I collapsed."

"Long enough," Gran said coldly. "You two keep forgetting how new and fragile your bond is. It can't handle too much stress in its early stages, besides the fact we don't know what else could be going wrong with it. Just because you've managed to get your auras aligned doesn't mean the spell is suddenly perfect. I don't know why I have to keep reminding you how delicate this magic is."

"Gran, I'm sorry." I was starting to feel weak again, like I could sleep forever. "I know that sometimes I overreact." I shot them both dirty look as they snorted in unison. "Can we move on, please? What day is it?"

"It's Wednesday," Ethan said.

"Wednesday? How is that possible? That means it's been a week since I've fed. I mean, I feel like shit, but I don't feel that bad."

"Language, please," Gran hissed. "Ethan has been feeding you in your sleep. I was able to cast a spell to make you ingest the blood even though you were unconscious. And his blood was able to give you more strength than the blood pouches had. So we've pretty much been left to watch over you and make sure nothing else happened. Your aura is in good shape. Mostly, I think it was the magic attacking you for being an idiot."

"Gee thanks, Gran," I said with a small laugh. I looked over at Ethan and gave him a sheepish smile. "Thank you for keeping me alive. I'm sorry I dragged you down with me."

"You should be," Ethan said with a smile. "But it didn't hit me as hard as it hit you. I mean, I was knocked out too, but not for as long as you were. And I didn't feel as weak as you do. So you really do seem to be getting the brunt of it."

"When did you come to?" I asked him.

"I woke up on Sunday, just as confused as you probably are now. Gran had to remind me what happened, then I explained to her how it had all started. We've just been waiting for you to regain consciousness so I could explain it to you."

"I don't want to hear it right now if that's all right," I mumbled, moving back into his arms. "I will. But I'd really like to go back to sleep for a little while."

"I know," Gran said softly. "And if I tell you why you're so exhausted, it's just going to upset you. But you're not going to feel better until you and Ethan...spend some time together."

I groaned, and Ethan laughed. The last thing I wanted to even think about, let alone discuss with my grandmother, was having sex right then. She was probably right, but I didn't have to like it.

"Not now," he said, kissing my forehead. "I thought we were going to lose you. And that scared me more than the thought that I might die with you. I won't let you do this to us again."

I nodded, too tired to talk. Being close to him felt wonderful, but at the moment, it wasn't exactly inspiring naughty feelings in me. Mostly he just felt warm and safe and made me want to sleep for another week. There were questions, so many questions, floating through my mind. But I couldn't grasp a single one and make myself care enough to ask it. I promised myself as I drifted off to sleep again that I would ask when I woke up next time.

* * * *

"You can't be serious," I whispered to Ethan. He was propped up on his arms over me, kissing a wet trail down the side of my neck. I'd woken to feel his cock hard and ready, pressed against my back, and his hand trailing lightly over my stomach.

When he'd realised I was awake, he had crawled over me, kissing me softly, waiting for my body to respond to his. But I was so tired it would take more than his hips grinding against mine to get me completely in the mood.

"It's been forever," he breathed against my ear. "How are you feeling?"

I inhaled sharply as his hand dropped to my groin, rubbing my cock to hardness with the palm of his hand. He sucked my earlobe into his mouth, gently nipping it with his teeth. Okay, so the man knew how to get me in the spirit.

"I'm suddenly feeling much better," I said as I shoved him off of me. "Ethan, I can't have sex in the Temple. What if Gran walks in?"

"She went home hours ago. She promised she wouldn't be back until tomorrow night. We've got the whole place to ourselves. And even she said we would have to do this soon. Don't you want to get better, baby?" He wrapped his arms around my waist his fingers resuming their soft exploration of my skin.

He really was a bastard, taking advantage of my compromised state to get me to have sex with him. I turned in his arms, preparing to tell him off, but looking at him full on melted any anger I might have felt towards him. He was beautiful, and for the moment at least, he was mine.

I kissed him, starting slow and soft, my hands snaking into his hair and letting the silky strands flow through my fingers. Our tongues slid against each other, tentatively tasting until we remembered what it was we were going to do.

He helped me roll on top of him, his hands gripping my waist while our mouths fed at each other, fangs clacking together and stray drops of blood mixing on our tongues. I pulled back, looking down at him with a crooked smile.

"I'm still pissed at you," I told him matter-of-factly.

"You're such an asshole," he said, his hand forcing my face back to his mouth, kissing my chin, my nose, my neck while he talked in clipped bursts. "You scared me so bad. I thought you were going to die. Don't ever do that to me again."

"I won't. I swear it. I am so sorry I hurt you." And I was. No matter how angry I had been at him, it was no excuse for what I must have put him through. Looking at him in the candlelight that lit the Temple, I realised I never wanted to hurt him again. There would never be a reason good enough to inflict pain into those gorgeous blue eyes. If I wasn't so terrified of it, I might have told him I loved him then, but I just couldn't do it. Not yet, and not like that. If I was going to admit it out loud I needed it to be at a time we weren't trying to have sex.

I don't know why I felt it would cheapen it, but I did. It had been my experience that people said things they didn't mean in the heat of the moment. I wanted him to believe me when I told him. And I wanted to be able to believe it, too.

My body jerked as he wrenched open the button on my jeans, bringing my attention fully back to him and what he was trying to do. His hand slid inside my pants, cupping my balls in his palm while his mouth found mine again. I moaned against him as his hand started to slide up and down my shaft.

"Stop, Ethan please, fuck stop." I grabbed his wrist, trying to keep him from moving again, terrified I would come before we'd even gotten our clothes off.

"No." He rolled us over so that he was on top of me then crawled down my body, pulling my pants down as he went. He looked up at me and smiled wickedly. "I want to taste you, Jamie. Can I? Can I suck that beautiful cock until you come in my mouth? Please? I want to feel it hot and thick over my tongue, taste you like candy. Please, Jamie? Please let me taste you."

His words affected me almost as much as his touch had. All I could do was nod and hope I didn't explode the second his mouth touched me.

It was difficult not to. My balls tightened almost painfully against my body as soon as he slid his wet mouth down the length of my shaft. He moved much faster than I wanted him to, but every time I gripped his hair to get him to slow down, he would knock my hands away and growl, the vibrations driving me crazy. I eventually found myself doing it on purpose, just to get him to make that noise against me.

He finally just hummed continually, apparently catching on to what I was doing. It didn't take long for the feeling to become too much for me to take. I screamed, the sound echoing through the deserted Temple as my cum pumped into his mouth. He swallowed hard, letting me fall from his mouth, and smiled widely up at me.

"You don't play fair," I said, my voice still breathy as I tried to calm down.

"I don't have to. It has been far too long since I've gone down on you. If it wasn't so close to dawn, I would do it to you a few more times. But I should let you get some rest. I have a feeling tomorrow is going to be a long night for both of us."

[&]quot;But what about you. I want—"

"Tomorrow," he interrupted, laying next to me and kissing me softly. "If we're still up for it after...everything that happens tomorrow, I'll let you do all kinds of things to me."

"Promises, promises," I murmured, sleep already threatening to overtake me. I was almost out when I realised that I might not be awake yet when Gran got to the Temple. "I need my pants."

He laughed but helped me get them back on before reclaiming his place behind me. I couldn't open my eyes anymore, and I hoped this exhaustion would fade the following night. But right then, laying in his arms, I found myself wishing we could just stay like that forever. Again I thought about telling him that I loved him, but I was just too tired to make the words come out.

Chapter Ten

We sat at the same table we had been at the night Gran told us Ethan and I were bonded together. But this time, it was Ethan's turn to talk, to explain to me—to us—what was going on with him and his interest in my parents.

"My parents have been investigating the murder of the McHales since the night it happened," Ethan said. "I won't pretend it was for any noble purpose, because it wasn't. They knew their taking over the clan would make a lot of members suspicious, and they wanted to clear their names."

"Then why did they keep the investigation a secret?" I asked coldly. I had promised to try to listen without too many interruptions, but I think we all knew that wouldn't really happen.

"No matter what you think about them, Jamie, the Connors are smart," Gran said. "I'm sure they realised that to come forward about the investigation would make it look like a political stunt. Plus, there would have been pressure to supply an answer. If they didn't tell anyone they were looking into it, they wouldn't have to answer to anyone." She turned to Ethan. "Am I right?"

"Yes," he said. "And fourteen years later we still didn't know the names of the hunters, let alone why they went after the King and Queen that night. My parents knew it would just make them look guilty if they had to regularly report on their lack of suspects or new information to the members of the clan."

I nodded grudgingly. It made sense, but I didn't have to like it. And knowing they had been looking into the case did not automatically clear their names in my mind.

"Last year, my father thought he'd finally found something," Ethan continued. "He received a book by courier. It was a mass-published work of 'fiction' set up to look like a biography. The novel was about a group of hunters, detailing certain cases they'd taken on, vampires they had killed, things like that. There were no names mentioned in the book. I would assume that was to keep the group from being prosecuted for cases that were still open."

"You say 'fiction' as if you don't believe it was," I said.

"I don't. Some of the details in it have been fact in our world for a long time. And even though none of the victims' names were given, my father was able to account for three of them for sure. One in particular made him think he'd finally found something. The details about a hunt that sounded suspiciously like the McHale case."

"Who sent him the book?" I asked.

"I'm getting to that if you would shut up," Ethan said, but he put a hand on my knee as if to show he wasn't actually angry at me. I squeezed his hand and vowed to stop interrupting.

"The book was written by a man named Jeremy Stiles. Well, I say man...but you've met him. He's hardly an adult. My father contacted Jeremy, who came to Royal Oak for a meeting. Jeremy admitted that the book had been mostly true, and that he'd gotten the details from his father, who was a member of the group the book was based on. His father was dead but had left enough documents in his possession for Jeremy to piece together the stories and market them as fiction."

I had to bite my tongue to keep from screaming. Ethan wasn't going fast enough for me. I found myself wishing we could just link mind to mind so I could absorb his knowledge faster than he would be able to tell me.

"I'm getting there, Jamie. Give me a minute," Ethan said with a laugh. It made me wonder if the mind to mind thing wasn't such a stretch of the imagination after all. "Jeremy agreed to take me to Chicago with him, to walk me through what his father had done and seen on that trip. I didn't want to go, but my father insisted, and so did Jeremy. At the time, I didn't realise how odd it was that this complete stranger was so anxious to get me to go with him. I shrugged it off as some kid wanting to show someone how proud he was of his murdering bastard of a father. I wanted to refuse, but I knew how important it would be to you to finally get some answers, so I went."

"That's why you took off? You really went all the way to Chicago to find out what happened to my parents? For me?" I was shocked. At the time, he'd left we had never hated each other more. "Why did you pick a fight with me the night you left if you were going because of me?"

"Well, that was part of it actually. You and I had never even been friends, but I was going to leave my home, with a complete stranger, just for you...and I couldn't figure out why. Then I ran into you before I left, and you were such a dick, and I lost it a little." He smiled at Gran who had clucked her tongue at him.

"A little?" Gran said. "Jamie had that black eye for three nights. You two beat the crap out of each other that night. If you hadn't left, I would have had some words for both of you."

We had done some serious damage to each other that night. It hadn't been the first time, and obviously wasn't the last. Violence and anger were things we had always been comfortable feeling around each other. It made me wonder for the first time if the bond was really a curse, or just a means to an end we hadn't realised would have come eventually anyway.

"Anyway," Ethan said. "I followed Jeremy to Chicago, and at first, he was open with me about everything his father had told him or written in his diaries. We went to the hotel your parents stayed at that night, we visited the old warehouse the hunters had used as a base, things like that. It was more sightseeing than anything else. It had been so long there was no physical evidence of any kind to be found."

"After about a week of this, I went alone to visit the King of Chicago, who was no help at all. He still stands by his word that he doesn't know what happened that night, and he seemed less than pleased that I was there at all."

"What?" Gran interrupted. "Why would Graham be upset to see you? Our clan and his have always been closely knit. Granted, the murder of our King and Queen in his city definitely hurt that, but he should have received the Prince of Anaboris with open arms."

Ethan nodded.

"That's what I thought, too. I sent a message to Father about it, but Father responded that the King was not under suspicion and to stick with the mortal boy. So I did. But after a few months it was going nowhere. Jeremy seemed more interested in sleeping with me than helping me. He had stopped discussing his father completely, and every time I brought up the case he would get angry. Violently angry."

"Is that why you were so worried when we ran into him at the bar the other night?" I asked.

"No," Ethan laughed. "No, what scared me, and what made me finally leave him there and come home, was that he wants to be a hunter like his dad. He had insisted I come with him so he could watch me, study me, and eventually make me his first kill."

I squeezed his hand again. His voice might have been even and calm, but I felt his pulse quicken through his wrist and knew he grew anxious with every word about Jeremy.

"My father was angry when I came back without any information, but to be honest, Jamie, I don't think there was anything to find. I know Jeremy's father and his group killed your parents, but from what I could figure out, there wasn't a contract or anything. I think they just stumbled upon a couple of vampires and killed them. I'm so sorry, sorry I couldn't bring you any answers, any names. But I believe everyone who was involved is dead now. The hunters were old at the time they did it. None of them lived much longer than a few years after."

I nodded, fighting not to cry in frustration. I had no reason to believe he was lying, but I realised I had spent the last fifteen years hating the wrong people. Blaming the wrong people. It was no one's fault that my parents were murdered that night, just a group of mortals out for one last round of kicks before they died. As fucked up as it was, it was almost poetic in its simplicity.

"Ethan," Gran said, taking his other hand. "It was a noble thing you did for my grandson and my family. If my son and his bride could thank you I know that they would. It means a lot to this old woman to finally get some peace and let my children rest."

Ethan looked uncomfortable, shifting slightly at the praise my grandmother showered on him. I believed he hadn't done it for that reason. I knew part of it had been to help clear his family's name but knowing that any of it had been for me made me feel guilty about...well about a lot of things. Not the least of which was all of the fighting I had caused based on a lie I had believed with my whole heart.

I didn't even know how to begin apologising for the years of anger and hatred I had inflicted on both of us. I glanced at Ethan again and saw him smiling softly.

"Don't do that," he said, reaching up to brush a strand of hair out of my face. "Don't look at me like you've just kicked me in the teeth. I don't want a single apology for anything that's happened in the past. I am not innocent of blame for the things that have gone down

between us, Jamie. I've been just as big of an asshole as you have been over the years. You knowing what I've been doing in Chicago doesn't change anything."

I nodded, but he was wrong. It changed everything. For me, at least.

"Jamie sweetie, are you feeling all right?" Gran asked.

"Yeah. I'm tired, and I'm starving. But other than that I feel pretty good. When can we go home?" I asked her.

"If you're up for it I don't see any reason you two have to stay here tonight. You'll probably sleep better in a bed anyway." She turned to Ethan. "You should let him sleep tonight."

"Yes ma'am," Ethan said with a blush creeping up his neck.

Gran stood and hugged Ethan quickly, dropping a kiss on his forehead then mine. She started bustling around the room, extinguishing candles, and I was again reminded of the last time we had been here, the night Ethan and I had been bonded. I didn't know if either of us were any less scared of what was happening now as we were then.

Ethan stood, helping me to my feet, and we walked outside into the cool night air. The dried leaves skating across the pavement reminded me that it was almost Halloween. Most vampires shunned the holiday, claiming it had deviated too far from its original purpose.

I didn't share this issue. I adored the holiday—had loved it since the first time my parents took me trick or treating in the mortal world when I was six. I'd eaten candy until I'd gotten sick...then went back for more. I loved the costumes, the sugar, and how excited the mortals got over all of it.

Since reaching adulthood, I'd found myself spending every Halloween out of the clutches of the clan. I would dress up and find a club to dance and hang out with the mortals. I wondered if Ethan hated Halloween. I told myself I would remember to ask him later, a little closer to the actual date so I didn't come across as a complete dork.

"You're so quiet," Ethan said, startling me a little. "What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing really," I said, taking his hand as we walked. "It's been a strange couple weeks."

Ethan laughed, pulling me into him so he could wrap his arm around my shoulder. He dropped an awkward kiss on my head without breaking stride. I liked that we had grown

closer, and even started to believe that almost killing myself, and him, might end up being a gift in disguise.

I realised that I was avoiding all thought of the actual conversation we'd just had regarding my parents and what had happened to them. I don't know if I was too tired to focus on it just then, or if I was unconsciously refusing to believe what had been said. I knew I would have to deal with all of it, but right now was not the time.

We were almost to Ethan's front door when he stopped so abruptly I ran into him. I looked from him to the house and back, wondering what he had seen to make him freeze like that. But there was nothing that I could see.

"I don't think I left the lights on," he said softly.

"Are you sure?"

He shook his head but moved in front of me anyway as if to protect me from some invisible danger he'd detected. I rolled my eyes as I shoved him, harder than I'd intended, and he stumbled.

"Hey Rambo, chill out. I don't need you to protect me from the evil lamp monster. We'll go inside and see what's happening."

"What if it's Jeremy?"

"Well, then we will have two vampires against one inexperienced hunter. I think we can handle the situation. And tomorrow, you are going to tell me what really happened between you and him to have you so fucking scared of him. Okay?"

He nodded, letting me take the lead and open the front door. If he hadn't been actually scared of the situation I might have made a joke of my entrance, dropping to a fake S.W.A.T. squat or something, but I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

When I saw who stood in the hallway waiting for us, I was glad I hadn't embarrassed myself in such a way.

"Your highness," I said to the Queen, bowing low with my eyes flicked up towards her, just in case.

"Jamie, Ethan. I wondered when the two of you would come home. High Priestess Shawnna informed me it would be this evening, but I thought you would return hours ago."

"I'm sorry, Mother. There were things that needed to be discussed before we could leave the Temple. Have you been waiting long?"

She shook her head and smiled at her son, her love for him obvious in her eyes. I was a little surprised when she turned that look upon me. I almost stepped back but felt Ethan's hand steady on the small of my back so I just returned her smile.

"I trust that whatever...problems, the two of you had are done now? I do not wish to hear of the two of you almost killing each other again. I'd have thought this bond would have cured you of that."

Her tone indicated that the day of our return was not the only thing Gran had discussed with her. I wondered what other details our High Priestess had been forced to tell her Queen, but I knew better than to ask.

"Mother, why are you here?" Ethan asked.

"I've come to apologise to you both."

I looked to Ethan but found he only had eyes for his mother. The look on his face indicated he'd never heard her utter those words before.

"Yes, Ethan, I am sorry," she laughed, which I had never heard from her before. I wasn't sure how many more surprises I could handle.

"Sorry for what exactly?" I asked. I wasn't intending to be rude, but a vague apology wouldn't cut it for me.

"For many, many things. But tonight, we will leave the apology at the way we treated you both last time we spoke. Jafir and I only want what is best for our son. And while I am beginning to think that it really might be you, my husband has reservations about the situation. But that was no excuse for us, trying to force you into our home. We were being selfish, believing that your only intentions were to hurt Ethan and leave the moment the bond is broken."

I felt a blush creep up my neck at her words. I couldn't even imagine what the King must think of me almost killing his son with my stubbornness. And it was even more surprising that, after what had transpired between Ethan and I, the Queen would be here to apologise to us.

"Is Father angry?" Ethan asked softly.

"Not angry," she said slowly. "Concerned. This recent stunt of yours has not eased his fears about Jamie. But I believe it was an accident. No one can expect you two to let go of twenty years of animosity in just a few short days. While you are not children, you are

young. This must be a very trying time for both of you, and sometimes we forget that. All I can promise is to try to do better from now on. You still have several weeks left together before the bond can be broken, and if Shawnna is correct, it is going to be difficult to get back to where you were before this latest...incident."

I felt my eyebrows raise and wondered why Gran hadn't bothered to mention that part to us before we had left. I would have to remember to ask her later.

"You said you would start with apologising for the meeting," Ethan said. "What else did you want to ask forgiveness for?" His voice was oddly cold, almost accusatory.

She sighed, looking from Ethan to me then back again before speaking.

"I want to apologise for Jeremy. I never should have let your father talk you into going to Chicago with him. I knew there was something wrong with the whole situation, but I allowed it anyway."

Ethan laughed, but it wasn't a happy sound.

"Then why on Earth did you hire him to 'help' us? Why would you allow him into this house, if you did not want me around him?"

She looked confused, then it finally sunk in. She hadn't hired Jeremy. He had come to the house on his own and tried to gain access to us without anyone's knowledge or consent.

"Damn it," Ethan said. "I'm sorry. I should have known you would never—"

"Do not apologise to me, Ethan. There is no need for it. I have made mistakes. It is not so wrong to think I could have done such a thing. But no, I did not, would not, give Jeremy further access to you. I know now that he is a dangerous man. I do not believe you have any more to fear from him though. He left the night the two of you collapsed. He is back in Chicago and King Graham has promised to alert me if he leaves the city limits again."

A tension I hadn't even realised Ethan was holding melted out of him. His body relaxed, and his hand found mine. I squeezed it softly and smiled. With Jeremy gone, and things going better with his parents, perhaps the next few weeks wouldn't be so bad.

"I will go now. I am sure you are both exhausted. Please call me and let me know if you need anything. Either of you." She kissed Ethan's cheek then surprised me again by kissing mine, as well.

As the door clicked behind her, I spun Ethan around to look at me.

"What the fuck?"

He laughed, finally with real humour. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me, his mood considerably lighter.

"Let's go to bed," he said.

I nodded and let him lead me to the bedroom. We climbed up onto the massive mattress and lay in silence, fingers entwined staring up at the ceiling, lost in our own thoughts until sleep finally took us both.

Chapter Eleven

"You should always wake me up like this," I said, gripping Ethan's hair in my hands while he slid his mouth up and down my cock.

He mumbled what I assumed was an agreement without slowing the rhythm he had found. Every time he pulled back, he would swirl his tongue over my tip a few times before slamming himself down to take me into his throat.

"Ethan, I want to fuck you," I said.

He let me fall from his mouth and smiled up at me. More gracefully than I could have ever managed, he climbed up my body, straddling my hips and bending down to kiss me. I could taste myself on his tongue and groaned into his mouth.

He reached over to the nightstand, pulling out a condom and some lube. I held out my hand for them, but he knocked my hand away with a smile. He ripped open the foil with his teeth and slid the condom down my shaft, then coated it with so much lube that it dripped between my legs.

He gripped my cock at the base and lowered himself onto me slowly. I moaned at the feel of the tight muscles in his ass clenching around me while he hissed at the initial intrusion. When I was completely inside of him, I held onto his hips to keep him still.

He looked at me with a crooked smile on his face, and I smiled back. I let go of him, so he could move up and down my shaft, wanting him to decide a pace that was comfortable for him.

He put his hands on my chest for balance while he moved, steadily increasing his pace until he practically bounced up and down on me. I wrapped my hand around his cock, jerking him quickly, wanting him to come with me, and I knew that wouldn't take long if he kept slamming down on me the way he was.

He cried out, his cum shooting in hot, thick spurts up my stomach. I screamed, the heat of him exploding on me bringing on my orgasm instantly. I reached up for him, pulling him down to kiss me fiercely.

When I finally let him go, he climbed off of me and lay down, an arm thrown over my chest. I played with the soft hairs on his forearm while we both caught our breath. I got up to dispose of the condom, coming back to bed quickly to snuggle back under his arm. After a few minutes, he looked over at me with a wide smile on his face.

"So, what would you like to do tonight?"

"I want to keep you in this house for days, I want you naked and touching me."

He laughed, leaning over to kiss me. I held the back of his head in case he tried to pull away before I was ready for the kiss to end, but he didn't even try. His tongue made little circles around mine in my mouth, our fangs nicking each other, teeth clinking against each other, and still, we kissed.

My hands gripped his hair, tugging hard enough he made a small sound against my lips. He scooted closer, and I was amazed to find him hard again, his erection pressing against my leg. My own cock twitched in interest, and his hand found it, stroking me to full hardness again.

I pulled away, looking at him for a minute before reclaiming his lips with my own. He climbed on top of me, his hands holding my wrists tightly against the mattress until all I could do was grind upward and try to find some friction against my cock to relieve the tension he'd instilled in me.

"Patience," Ethan whispered against my mouth.

"No," I growled, making him laugh.

"As you wish," he said.

He rolled off of me, reaching for the nightstand again. I heard him fumbled with another foil packet and turned to watch him slide it down his enormous cock. I was already slick from the lube he'd poured on me earlier, but he poured more into his hand as he forced his knees between mine, spreading my legs so he could slide two fingers in my ass.

As he had done for me, I hissed softly, but I wanted him so badly there wasn't much resistance against him. He moved up, positioning the head of his cock against my ass, slowly sliding inside me until his face was even with mine.

I wrapped my legs around his waist and my arms around his neck, pulling him down to kiss me again while he slammed in and out of my ass, the tip of his cock finding that special spot inside of me every time he moved. He moved his hand between us as to grab my cock, but I pulled his hands into mine, holding them to the mattress to keep him from touching me. I was so close to the edge, I wanted him to make me come with only the feel of him inside of me.

He dropped another kiss to my lips as he increased his speed, slamming into me so hard his balls made a wet slapping sound against my ass with every push.

I screamed, the sound tearing from my throat so strongly it felt as if I were choking on glass as I came, my cock spasming harder than I could ever remember, pumping my seed up to my chest.

Ethan lost his rhythm quickly, crying out his orgasm over me. His eyes squeezed shut, a grimace on his face, while his nails dug into my hands.

He collapsed on top of me, my skin sticky with sweat and the evidence from the morning's activities. He moved enough to find my lips, kissing me in quick bursts. I laughed as he nuzzled my neck, his breath tickling the skin behind my ear.

"I need a shower," I said with a groan.

"Yeah, I guess. Can I join you?"

"You'd fucking better. I don't want you out of my sight today. I want to fuck you until neither of us can move."

He made an "mmm" noise into my ear, sucking my earlobe into his mouth and biting it gently between his teeth until I cried out. He let me go, kissing a line across my jaw and my lips again before climbing off of me.

He walked into the bathroom, and I heard the water start in the shower. I lay on the bed for a few more minutes, trying to get up the energy to get off the bed and make my way to Ethan. I closed my eyes. The picture I had of him naked with soapy water cascading down his smooth flesh was enough to get me up.

Ethan had the water so hot that when I opened the door a wall of steam hit me in the face. I stepped into the room, closing the door to keep in the heat and climbed into the shower behind him.

"Where were you?" he asked.

"Trying to get up," I said with a yawn. "I think you already wore me out."

Ethan turned to look at me, lifting my chin up as if studying me. "You look pale."

I put my hands on his hips and moved in to kiss him. He let me for a minute but pulled away much too quickly.

"Jamie, I mean it. You don't look so good."

"I didn't hear you complaining this morning," I said with a small laugh, but he didn't seem to find it funny.

"I think you need to eat. You've been running on nothing but my blood for a week. You'll need to find a donor tonight. I don't want to risk losing you again. I just got you back." He sounded genuinely worried, but I didn't really understand why.

I knew I was tired, but having just had two amazing orgasms, I didn't think exhaustion was that out of the ordinary. But I supposed if it was that important to him, I could try to eat a little someone.

He handed me the soap, apparently not willing to get me in the mood again until he felt I was well enough. I blew out an exaggerated sigh which finally earned me a smile from him, but he kept to his own side of the shower while I cleaned up. He turned off the water and helped me out of the tub.

I walked into the bedroom to get dressed, leaving him alone in the bathroom. I wasn't angry, just slightly frustrated that he seemed fine while I just wanted to spend another week in bed. I wondered if the exhaustion could be left over from the previous week. Should I have stayed in the Temple a few more days, not tried to push myself so quickly?

As the thoughts flew through my mind, I barely had a moment to wonder why the floor was racing so quickly towards my face, then the world went black.

* * * *

"What the hell did you do to him?" Beth's voice was too loud as I struggled to open my eyes.

I wondered what she was doing at Ethan's, but when I inhaled deeply through my nose, I smelled burning sage and knew I had somehow ended up back at the Temple.

"What's going on?" I asked groggily.

"Jamie, are you all right?" Ethan was next to me, and I smiled when his hand brushed the hair on my forehead.

"I'm fine. I'm just a little tired," I said. I struggled to sit up, and Ethan pulled me against him so I could lean into his shoulder and not have to hold myself up yet. "What happened?"

"I came into the bedroom, and you were passed out on the floor. I swear, if you don't stop doing this to me, I'm going to kill you myself and get it over with," Ethan said.

"Don't you threaten my brother!"

"Beth, shut up," I said softly. "He's kidding." At least, I was pretty sure he was.

"Beth, stop yelling. I'm quite sure your brother could use some quiet. And I need to talk to them alone. You should go. I think I can handle it from here." Gran's voice sounded strained, as if she were having a hard time keeping from shouting herself.

Beth's heels clicked away, then the door to the Temple slammed. Ethan and Gran both blew out sighs, and I laughed.

"So, what have I done now?" I asked. My eyes didn't seem to want to stay open, but I didn't feel all that bad anymore.

"It wasn't your fault," Ethan said, kissing the top of my head. "Gran agrees that you probably need fresh blood. None of us are equipped to live on blood pouches and other vampire's blood for an extended period of time."

I nodded. The thought of anyone but Ethan near me made my stomach flip a little. I had thought the bond was getting better, and I didn't understand why Ethan was fine, but I still seemed to be a big old mess. It didn't seem fair, and a little resentment filled me at the thought.

I opened my eyes and realised that there was another person in the Temple with us. The too-young-looking boy from The Kiss stood next to Gran. He looked scared, as if I would attack him at any moment. It made me wonder what kind of stories had been circulating the city about Ethan and me, but I wasn't interested enough to actually ask.

"I don't want to bite him," I said.

"Okay," Ethan said. "If I bite him, do you think you can handle drinking from him?"

I nodded, the small movement of my head making me nauseous. I hated feeling so weak, especially in front of Ethan. For some reason, having him witness this made it so much worse. I felt like an absolute pussy, and even though I didn't hate him anymore, I still wanted to believe I was stronger than him.

The boy seemed to relax at the realisation that I wouldn't bite him. I didn't understand why he was so skittish of me. The last time I had seen him, he'd offered his wrist to both of us, but now he didn't seem to want my fangs anywhere near me. This was fine with me. His fear made me feel a little more manly.

Ethan pulled the boy closer, his fangs piercing the boy's wrist so gently he didn't even flinch. I smelled the blood as soon as it hit the air, and something about it made me angry. It felt like I was moving in slow motion as my head turned towards the source of that bittersweet scent. Ethan softly sucked at the boy's wrist, and I felt heat fill my face. A fire grew in my heart at the sight of Ethan with another man near his mouth. Something about the situation seemed so wrong, so filthy to me. And I was angry at the boy for letting him do it, for encouraging it.

Ethan had barely pulled away from the boy when I threw myself forward biting into the wound Ethan had already made and gnawing at it like a dog with a bone. The boy's screams just made me hold him tighter.

I gulped huge swallows of blood down my throat, not even tasting it over my tongue in my need to suck the kid dry, growling and hissing like an animal as Gran and Ethan pried me off of the boy who continued to shriek in terror. His fear did more to raise my anger than seeing Ethan with him had. I lunged again, but Ethan knocked me completely to the ground, holding me with all of his weight, and still he looked as if he wasn't sure it was enough.

"Jamie," Ethan screamed. "Snap out of it. Fuck! Gran, what's wrong with him?"

"It's blood lust," Gran cried. I could hear her struggling and softly telling the boy to get out of the Temple.

I fought against Ethan's hands, trying to get him off of me, wanting to go after the kid and his sweet blood, to tear him apart for allowing Ethan to bite him.

Ethan's hand came up and slapped me hard across the face. I snarled, using his slackened grip on me to flip him onto his back. I held him down, staring down into those bright blue eyes, and realisation of what I was doing seeped into me.

"Jamie?" Ethan's voice was soft, and I was happy to hear a little afraid. "Jamie, are you all right?"

"Yeah," I said. I climbed off of him and stood. I felt stronger, better than I had in a while. I wasn't sure why the sight of Ethan touching that boy had made me snap. I waited to

feel guilty about attacking the boy, but I didn't. There was no remorse, only a deep hunger and a thirst for the revenge that had been denied me.

Ethan stood up, facing me. He reached out to touch me, but I slapped his hand away, taking a step backward. From the corner of my eye, I saw Gran take a step forward, but she stayed carefully out of my reach.

"Jamie, are you going to be all right?" she asked tentatively. She sounded more scared than Ethan had. Scared of me. That brought me back a little more. I didn't want her to be afraid.

"Yeah, I'll be fine." But my voice sounded funny, even to me, lower and more angry than it should have. My hands clenched into fists at my side, and I felt as if I might strike the next person to come near me. "What the hell is wrong with me?"

"I think that you need more blood, but I don't think you are going to be able to...take it from the source for a while. I don't know how we are going to do this, but until you are able to control the blood lust, you can't be around people," Gran said.

She kept calling it blood lust, but I didn't think that was it. Even while I was drinking the blood, feeding hadn't been my goal. I'd wanted to kill.

"What do you mean by that?" Ethan asked.

"I think you'll be okay," she said with a smile. "I don't think he is going to flip out on vampires, just humans. You can't take him out in public for a while."

"Can you please not talk about me like I'm not here," I said.

Ethan reached out for me again, but I was still pissed, and I didn't want him to calm me down. I pulled back and swung at him, clipping him in the eye and knocking him backward into the altar behind him.

"Jamie!" Gran yelled, taking another step towards me.

"No," Ethan said. "Gran, you'd better just go. I'll take care of him."

I laughed, a cold hard laugh that made Ethan rub his arms in discomfort. I turned to see Gran hurrying towards the door. I turned to go after her, not really sure what I would do when I caught her, but Ethan tackled me, knocking me to the ground as the Temple door slammed shut behind Gran.

"Jamie, please stop this," Ethan said into my ear. "I don't want to hurt you."

I threw him off of me, and his body rolled down the steps with a loud thud. I turned, walking slowly towards him as he scrambled to his feet.

"I wouldn't worry about hurting me, Ethan. I'd worry about yourself if I were you."

"Don't do this," Ethan said. His eyes were shiny as if he would cry, and the sight of his tears made my anger stronger.

I swung at him again, but he was ready for it. He caught my wrist and used my momentum to flip me to the ground. He landed on top of me, his hands pinning me to the floor while his tears dripped onto my face.

I managed to get an arm up, the heel of my palm slamming into his chin and knocking him off of me. I rolled away, getting to my feet again, but he was faster and ran full force into me, knocking us backward into the table. It broke under our weight, and we crashed to the floor.

He brought back his fist as if to hit me, but I reached up to grab his neck and pull his mouth to mine. My fangs sank into his lower lip, the blood sliding down my throat and his cry of shock drowning in my mouth.

His hands slid into my hair, pulling hard while his crotch ground painfully against mine. I pulled my fangs out of him and sucked greedily at the puncture wounds I had left in his skin. The more I drank the clearer my head became, and the harder my cock grew in my jeans.

Ethan's tongue forced its way into my mouth, his saliva mixing with his blood on my tongue. I nipped at him again, gentler this time, while his hand jerked between us, pulling open the button on my jeans and sliding around my cock.

I dug my nails into the back of his neck so hard blood seeped onto my fingers. He hissed against my lips, pulling away to bite at my throat while he jerked me off. His fangs sank into my flesh, and I sighed. There was no pain, just that incredible feeling of home I'd never known until the bond had connected us together.

His hand struggled between us again, undoing his own jeans. I kicked off my shoes and used my feet to get remove his, as well. I lifted my hips, letting him slide my jeans clumsily down my legs, kicking gently so he wouldn't have to remove his mouth from my throat.

He had to pull away so he could get out of his own jeans. I heard the unmistakable crinkle of a foil packet by my ear. He moved over, forcefully rolling me onto my stomach and

holding me down with one hand on the back of my neck while he rolled the condom down his cock with the other.

I heard him spit into his hands a few times before a warm, wet finger slid into my ass. I lifted my hips towards him, the movement making his hand tighten at my neck as if he were afraid I would try to get away from him. But I felt calmer under him than I had since I'd woken up again.

He pulled his finger out of me and spit in his hand again before I felt the tip of his cock pressing against my asshole. I let out a contented sigh as my muscles stretched to take him completely inside of me. As had happened the first time we'd had sex, I was consumed by the feeling of tumblers in a lock clicking into place.

Ethan's arm around my waist was the only thing that kept me from collapsing under him. He lowered me gently so that my face rested on my arm against the floor, my ass in the air as if I were a cat in heat. He felt so good inside of me, but I couldn't make myself move to meet his thrusts.

His hands dug into my hips, and he cried out my name as he came, the sound echoing through the Temple around us. He fell forward, and I was too weak to hold us up, so we ended up crashing back into the wreckage of the table we'd destroyed earlier.

"You know, maybe we should stay away from tables," I said softly, glad that this table didn't seem to be made of actual wood. I felt small wounds on my chest from where splinters had cut into me.

"You're going to make jokes now?" Ethan sounded angry yet tired at the same time. "What the fuck happened to you earlier?"

"I don't know." It was the truth. The anger and violence I'd felt earlier were gone. Now, all I felt was calm and a little tired, but not as exhausted as I had been at home.

"You scared the fuck out of me," he said. He got to his feet and helped me stand. When we were both sure we could walk without falling over we started getting dressed.

"Apparently," I said with a small smile.

"Stop it." He turned me to face him. He looked like he wanted to scream at me, but he didn't. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me again, his tongue swiping against mine violently, as if trying to find any traces of his own blood that might be left there.

I wanted nothing more in that moment than to be able to kiss him forever, and that thought of our future scared me.

"What's up?" he asked. "You look like you just thought of something."

"I don't think Gran was right about the blood lust." I said quickly, not wanting to admit what had really bothered me. "Seeing you with him made me snap. I was so angry with him—and with you for touching him. I hated it. I lost all control of myself when you bit him. I couldn't have cared less about the blood, Ethan."

Ethan smiled at me, reaching out to cup my cheek in his hand. I leaned into it, completely unprepared for his other hand to swing up and punch me in the face.

I staggered backward, rubbing my jaw and glaring at him.

"What the hell was that for?" I asked.

"You almost killed that kid because of *me*? You got jealous and freaked out? What the hell is going to happen when the bond is broken, Jamie? When I don't *belong* to you anymore? Are you going to go around beating up every vampire who lays a hand on me?"

I hadn't expected this. I had to wonder if it was the bond that had made me feel jealous over what I'd seen, or if it was just me. But I didn't know. It had become convenient over the past few weeks to blame the bond for everything that happened between us, but as the magic faded around the edges, I wasn't sure how much of our actions and feelings were our own.

"Ethan, I don't know how to answer that. I'm sure things will be different once we're unbonded. This is probably just a side effect."

"Right, just another thing that can be blamed on the spell. Well, that's fantastic. I guess we'll only have seventeen more days of juvenile behaviour before everything goes back to normal between us, right? Whatever the hell normal for us is, or was."

It stung a little to realise he had a running tally in his head of the days left until he would be free of me. I couldn't have casually thrown out that number in the manner he had. But it just proved that he didn't feel the same way about me that I did for him. In seventeen days, apparently, we would be done. He would go his way and I would go mine.

I blew out a sigh. "Now that I know it could happen, I promise not to watch when you feed in the future. And in seventeen more days, it won't be an issue anyway."

[&]quot;Jamie, don't—"

I held up a hand to cut him off. Whatever he would say, however he planned to defend himself, I didn't want to hear it. I knew that things between us were broken, not the bond, that seemed well and truly fixed at this point, but we as a couple wouldn't last longer than seventeen more days.

Ethan stayed where he was, and I didn't turn to look at him. I just walked out into the cool night air and headed back to the house. I don't know how I knew it wouldn't hurt to be separated from him again, I just did. I would stay in his house, but I had a feeling we wouldn't ever be as close as we had been before that night.

I lay in bed alone for almost an hour before Ethan came in. He didn't talk to me, didn't reach for me. Just climbed in and turned his back on me. In my heart, it felt that he had just turned his back on *us* and anything we could have been together.

Chapter Twelve

"So," Ethan said, startling me.

We had spent the last fourteen days in almost complete silence with each other. We'd gone out to feed separately, spent time with our families apart, and though we still slept in the same bed, we hadn't touched each other since leaving the Temple the night of our last fight.

The bond really did seem to have steadied. There was no pain, no itchy feelings when we were apart. There had been no need to attack each other in any way, sexually or in anger. It was a shame that such a blessing had to occur right as we had decided to be finished with each other.

"What?" I asked. I tried to keep my tone neutral, not wanting to piss him off before he'd even completed a sentence.

"Well, tomorrow is Halloween." He stopped, as if waiting for me to say something. He had been acting strange all night, even more strange than was usual for him.

"And?" Again I tried for an even tone.

"Well, I remember you used to like Halloween, and I wondered if you wanted to do something. With me. Tomorrow." He watched me closely, and it made me scared to make any expression, not sure which would be the right one in his eyes.

"Um, sure," I said slowly. "That would be nice. Did you have anything special in mind?"

His shoulders sagged in relief, as if he had been afraid I would lash out at him or something. He sat next to me on the sofa, something else he hadn't done in weeks. I really wanted to ask him what was going on, but I didn't want to spook him. He seemed like he was really trying to make an effort with me, and spoiling it would just be stupid.

"Well, The City Club is having a party. I thought we might dress up and go downtown. I remember you always used to go to the mortal clubs on Halloween, but I've never been. So if you have a better idea..." He trailed off, looking at me with a small smile.

"No...no, that sounds great. Do you have a costume?"

"Well, I am a vampire," he said with a laugh.

"You can't go as a vampire!" It came out louder than I'd meant it too, but luckily he laughed again. "I mean, you have to dress up as something...else."

"I'm sorry. Are vampires cliché?"

"A little."

"What if we went as each other?" He smirked at me and I laughed.

"So, can I ask what's gotten into you today without pissing you off?" I asked.

He blew out a sigh and took my hand in his. It was nice to be touched by him again. I had been so angry at him that I had almost forgotten how soft his skin was, how warm his hands always felt on me.

"Jamie, I'm sorry. I really am. I don't know what my problem has been. I mean, I do, but it shouldn't have gotten this bad between us. I've...I've missed you."

"I've been right here," I whispered. I watched his fingers make small circles in my palm.

"I know. And that makes it worse. There were so many nights I woke up and fought with myself to just reach out and touch you. Hell, some nights, I even thought about picking a fight with you just to get you to talk to me." He smiled, but there was no humour in it. "I fucked up, I know that. I just hope we can get past it. I don't...I don't want to lose you."

I wanted to ask him what he meant by that, but I think that no matter what his answer had been it would have been wrong, so I just let it go. I would ask another time. He was touching me, and he was talking to me, and that was more than I'd gotten from him in weeks. I refused to be the one to fuck it up.

I nodded, unsure what to say to him but wanting him to know I'd understood at least part of it. I'd missed him, too. There had been plenty of nights I'd woken and reached for him, barely catching myself before stroking his shoulder or running my fingers through his hair.

I knew for me it wasn't about the bond anymore. I wanted to touch him because...well because I wanted to. Not because I had to. And it scared the hell out of me that he would never feel that way about me.

I had sent another request to King Jafir while Ethan and I had been apart, asking again to be let out of the clan once the bond was broken. I had asked him not to mention it to Ethan

before November second but to please consider it. I knew I would never be able to stay in Anaboris and watch Ethan dating other men. It would kill me, and we would both be better off if I left.

"So," he said again, reluctantly pulling away his hand. "Is that a yes? For tomorrow I mean?"

"Yes," I blurted out. "I would love to spend Halloween with you. We need to go costume shopping. I just hope all the good costumes aren't taken."

"Next year, we'll go earlier," he said, getting off the couch and walking into the bedroom.

I don't know if he'd even realised what he'd said, and I didn't want to call him on it. But he had to know that this would be our only Halloween together.

I fought not to get depressed at the thought. We were finally speaking. I would walk on egg shells for as long as it took to keep it that way. I knew it would be hard to watch my mouth around him. I'd never been any good at it.

Ethan came back wearing a sweater and handed me his jacket. I smiled, sliding it on and inhaling his scent mixed with the leather. He saw me do it and smiled at me. He reached out his hand, and I took it, letting him pull me into his arms. We held onto each other for a few minutes, just standing in the middle of the living room wrapped in each other's arms. As if we were both trying to make up for the lost time we had so selfishly thrown away the past two weeks. I knew I would always regret not forcing him to talk to me sooner.

He let go of me slowly, using one hand to tilt up my face to look at him. I closed my eyes as his lips touched mine. I forced myself to keep my tongue in my own mouth, wanting to let Ethan decide how far we went and when. I wouldn't risk our last few days together if I could help it. I wanted to have something positive to look back on when the bond was broken.

He sucked my lower lip into his mouth, sweeping his tongue across it for just a second before releasing me. I opened my eyes and smiled at him, hoping our truce would continue at least until we broke the bond. I didn't want to waste the rest of our time together.

"We should get going," he said, his voice breathy. I nodded, letting him take my hand and lead me out the door.

We walked to the Halloween mega store a few blocks from the house. The store popped up every year, complete with huge gargoyles on the roof and millions of costumes inside. Anything you wanted to be, you could find a costume for it in that store.

We pawed through racks and racks of bagged polyester costumes. Holding up one ridiculous outfit after another to make each other laugh but not really finding anything we were interested in dressing up in.

"How about a sexy hobo?" I asked him after about an hour.

"They don't really have that," he said with a bark of laughter.

"They have 'sexy' everything, I'm sure if we looked hard enough we would find it." I hung up the priest costume I had held up next to the pregnant nun outfit. I had feared the options would be slim so close to Halloween, and I was right. The store was pretty picked over. The only costumes that were any good were for women who wanted to look like prostitute pirates or prostitute fairytale characters.

"What were you last year?" Ethan asked, coming around the corner of an aisle wearing round glasses with a fake wooden wand in his hand.

"Cute," I said approvingly. "Last year I was Freddy Krueger."

"Wow," he said with a whistle. "That must have been difficult."

"Yeah, it took three hours to do the makeup, and Beth had to help me. It was fun though, I scared the hell out of some kids downtown."

We made another pass through the store to no avail. None of the costumes seemed remotely interesting.

"Can we please go as vampires?" Ethan asked finally. "We can be all over the top with it if you want. Liquid latex bumpy foreheads and special effects contact lenses. Please?"

I sighed, he was right. We wouldn't find anything. And it wasn't like vampires weren't popular costumes anyway. I nodded, and his shoulders sagged in relief.

"We don't have to go over the top though. We can just dress in black, throw on some baby powder and go to the club. We don't need fancy costumes to have fun."

"That's right," he said, taking my hand. "We make our own fun."

I headed towards the door, but he pulled me to a stop. I raised an eyebrow, but he just grinned and led me over to the section of the store dedicated to decorations. And by decorations, I don't mean streamers and plastic skulls. No, the one thing the Halloween store did better than any retail outlet could ever do was their decorations.

Life size animatronics of movie monsters, fog machines that could fill a stadium with mist in less than five minutes and everything in between was available to decorate your house and scare the hell out of people.

We had fun setting off Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, and the Wolf Man. And laughed at the grave markers for 'Myra Mains', 'Hugh Jass' and 'Al B. Back'. We spent another hour wandering this section until they announced that the store was closing.

"What do you want to do now?" Ethan asked as we walked down the sidewalk.

We were headed back towards his house even though neither of us seemed to have planned it that way. I didn't answer, just kept walking. I wanted to go home. I wanted to be alone with him, touching him and talking to him.

I really had missed spending time with him. I wondered briefly how hard it would be when we were no longer bonded to each other, but pushed the thought from my mind. There would be plenty of time for that thinking later.

When we got to the house, there was a package on the front step addressed to both of us. Ethan picked it up and unlocked the door, ushering me inside. He looked down at the envelope then back at me, handing it over.

The return address showed that the package had come from Jeremy. I crooked an eyebrow, but Ethan just shrugged and walked into the living room. I followed him, dropping my jacket on the floor before sitting next to him on the couch and staring down at the envelope.

"What do you think it is?" Ethan asked.

"Only one way to find out, I guess." I ripped it open, pulling out the papers inside.

The top sheet was a short handwritten note from Jeremy. Ethan leaned over me and we read it together.

Dear Ethan and Jamie,

I first want to apologise for the way that I treated you both, but especially Ethan. You were so kind to me, and I was using you. I want you both to know that this will be my last contact with either of you. I do not plan to become a hunter after all, having recently learned some terrible things about

my father and the people he associated with. I have realised that this profession is not the noble act my father pretended it to be.

I came across these papers when cleaning out my father's desk and thought Jamie might like some actual closure. I want to assure you that this has been taken care of, and I hope that you do not mind that I have done it for you.

I hope that you are able to find peace now, something that I am afraid I will never have in regards to my own parents.

Sincerely,

Jeremy

I read the letter three times, knowing without even looking that he had sent me the contract Ethan had gone in search of in Chicago. The truth about who had ordered the death of my parents sat in my hand, and I was too terrified to look though I knew I would have to.

"Do you want me to do it?" Ethan asked softly, placing his hand on my arm.

"No, we'll do it together."

I turned the page, and when I saw the name on the letterhead, I realised I had probably known who had killed my parents for a while and was just too stubborn to admit it. It hadn't made sense for him to want my parents dead, at least not to me. But things in the vampire world do not always work in black and white, and I knew that Jeremy really had just sent me peace in a small manila envelope.

From the Desk of Graham Whitmore, King of Chicago was bold across the top of the page, and I suddenly found that I didn't want to read the letter. Didn't want to pour through the contract and find any meaning behind it all. My parents were dead, and it was Graham's fault. And if Jeremy was to be believed, the King of Chicago was dead now, too. It was over. My parents had been avenged, and I wasn't sorry I hadn't been the one to do it. I would tell Beth and Gran, and it would be done.

"Are you all right?" Ethan asked.

"Yeah," I said, surprise evident in my voice. "I'm fine. How are you?"

He grinned at me, pulling me into a hug. I let the papers fall to the floor and hugged him back, holding tightly to him and not wanting to let go. Not ever, but definitely not anytime soon. It felt so good to be in his arms again, and I didn't know how to tell him how happy I was that he had been with me when I'd found out the truth, the whole truth. I didn't tell him, just held on and let my body show him what it meant to me that he was with me.

"Jamie." Ethan's voice was suddenly husky, his warm breath on my ear for a moment before he sucked my earlobe between his lips.

My breath caught at the feel of his warm mouth on my skin. It had been so long since he'd touched me like that. In fact, right then, I would have believe an eternity had passed. I turned to look at him again, with every intention of telling him everything, how much I'd missed him, that I loved him, that I wanted him to touch me like that until the end of time.

Before I could even open my mouth to begin he fell on me, pinning me to the sofa and kissing me with an urgency that made me wonder if he knew what I would say. I didn't fight him, just wrapped my hands behind his neck to run that silky black hair through my fingers.

He moaned into my mouth, the feel of it vibrating through my whole body until I wanted to scream for him. Even with all of our clothes on, I felt moments from losing control.

"Too long," I growled into his mouth while I forced my hand between us to open the button and zipper on his jeans. "It's been too fucking long."

He nodded, kissing me harder, his tongue rubbing against my fangs until they finally nicked it and faint drops of his coppery blood found my taste buds. I pulled away, having only recently stopped craving his blood. I didn't want to fall back into the habit of drinking it again.

"What's the matter?" he asked, moving to lay next to me instead on top of me.

"Nothing," I said quickly, kissing his forehead and smiling. "I just don't want to get a taste for your blood again. I think that was part of my problem, the reason I was so angry at you...before."

He nodded, giving me a crooked smile in return. His head was propped on my shoulder, and he had his arm thrown over my chest. I played my fingers in his hair again, resisting the urge to tug on it and force his neck back, to kiss him and lick his skin, to sink my fangs into that beautiful throat.

Even after spending two weeks pissed at him, I still wanted to be with him. It made me worry again that breaking the bond would hurt more than it would ever help. But there was nothing to be done about that. Even if I were willing to spend eternity tied to Ethan, he had done nothing but look forward to the day he could be free of me...of us.

"You're thinking awfully hard," he said softly. "Are you still thinking about Jeremy and that letter?"

"No, not really. I'm glad he's going to leave us alone, and I doubt I'll ever be sorry that he killed Graham. I can't even say I'm surprised Graham was the one to take out the contract, even if I can't explain what he would have to gain from my parents' death. I'm just relieved it's all over. It hurts, and it always will, but at least I know now what happened."

"Do you need me to do anything?" He hooked his leg over mine, and I smiled at the feel of his erection against my thigh. What I needed him to do was distract me from thinking about it all.

"Hmmm...let me think," I said. Right then, I just wanted to forget everything. Ethan and I were running out of time together, but I could mourn my parents forever.

I gave into my earlier urge and gripped his hair in my hand, pulling his head back and kissing him deeply. Our tongues wrestled against each other as I struggled to climb over him. I finally got my leg over his hip, straddling his lap while my hands slid down his jaw to keep him kissing me.

"Oh," Ethan moaned. "What the hell is that?"

I laughed, realising my cell phone was ringing on vibrate in my pocket. "Do you like that?"

"It doesn't suck," he said with a smile.

"Do you want to call me?"

"Oh honey, I want to call you all night long," he said, pulling my face back down to kiss him.

The call went to voicemail, bringing another round of vibrations from my pocket. Ethan reached between us, shifting the phone so that it pressed against my balls, and I groaned when the voicemail reminder went off again. He was right. It didn't suck.

"What are we going to do when I get your pants off?" he asked before moving his face to suck my earlobe into his mouth.

"I think we'll manage," I said, hissing sharply when his fang punctured the delicate flesh.

"Oh, I have no doubt." He kissed a trail across my jaw, flicked his tongue over my lips then rolled us both off the couch onto the floor.

We landed hard with him on top of me, his mouth on mine stopping the surprised 'umph' that tried to escape my lips. His hands gripped my shirt and tore it open, the movement scattering the buttons across the room. He splayed his fingers over my chest, slowly moving them down my stomach to tug at my jeans.

"Off," he said so forcefully it sent a chill down my spine.

I lifted my hips, letting him pull them off, leaving me naked on the carpet under him. I grabbed his sweater and the T-shirt underneath, lifting them up to bare his stomach and chest to me. I kissed wet trails over his skin while he pulled the shirts off, tossing them aside before gripping my hair in his hands.

He forced me back onto the floor, kissing me awkwardly while he kicked off his shoes. His jeans were rough against my naked erection, but the feeling was not uncomfortable. He ground his hips into me as if he could fuck me through the fabric.

"Ethan," I said between kisses. "Ethan, you're not naked."

"I know," he growled, kissing me again.

"I want you naked."

He made a noncommittal sound against my lips that frustrated me more. I tried to get my hands to his pants, but he grabbed them and pinned me down, his nails digging into my wrists hard enough to draw a sound from my mouth.

"What do you want?" he asked softly. "If you could have anything, anything at all from me right now, what would it be?"

I choked back the words I wanted to say, not wishing to ruin the moment by telling him that all I wanted from him was to promise an eternity with me. Instead I said what I knew he wanted to hear.

"I want you to fuck me. I want to feel you inside of me, stretching me, filling me completely. Please Ethan, I've missed you so much." I stopped talking, afraid that if I didn't, everything I didn't want to say would come pouring out anyway.

He looked at me, as if trying to read my mind through my eyes. I could tell he knew there were things I had bitten back. He crooked an eyebrow then smiled, whether because he knew what I had been thinking anyway or because he had liked what he'd heard, I didn't ask and he didn't say.

He stood, reaching out his hand to help me to my feet. I followed him to the bedroom, climbing up onto the mattress while he dropped his jeans to the floor and grabbed a condom and the lube from the bedside table.

I watched him roll the condom down his cock then slide a slicked hand up and down the shaft a few times. He set the bottle down before crawling onto the bed over me. His hand slid between my legs so he could slide first one, then another of his lubed fingers into my ass.

The muscles relaxed against his intrusion, my body reacting as quickly as my mind to my need for him to be with me again. It had been so long, I'd missed his skin against me, inside of me.

He used his hips to spread my legs further apart for him then lifted me up slightly until my body was at an angle he liked. He slowly pushed his cock inside me, that familiar cool burn sending shivers up my spine with every inch he moved.

When he was fully inside of me, he stopped, his hands on my thighs and the softest look I had ever seen in his eyes. I was too scared to tell him I loved him out loud, but I tried like hell to make it show through my eyes. I caught a glimpse of it returned from him, but it was so brief I wasn't sure if I'd imagined it or not.

It didn't matter, within seconds the look was gone, replaced by a heat that only meant sex, and I was more ready for that than for any emotion he was comfortable showing. I braced myself, trying to keep my muscles relaxed but failing as he pulled out slowly and slammed his cock back inside me.

I cried out, gripping the headboard as he pounded into me harder than he ever had before. He moved so fast it was as if the tip of his cock never left that sweet spot inside of me, pushing and pulsing against it until it felt as if my whole body would explode.

"Is this what you wanted, Jamie?" he asked, grunting with every thrust. "You said you wanted me to fuck you. Is this hard enough for you? Can you feel my cock stretching your ass? You're so fucking tight, so warm. I want to fuck you like this forever."

I screamed, my hands moving from the headboard to dig my nails into the flesh on his arms. I came so hard it splattered up my chest, but Ethan kept pounding away at my ass. His hands still locked forcefully on my legs, and his eyes burning with liquid fire as he stared down at me.

"I love you," I whispered, unable to hold it back anymore.

He came, screaming my name as his pumped his seed into the condom inside of me. He pulled out of me then rolled onto his back next to me on the bed. His hand grabbed mine and he kissed it quickly before dropping our arms back to the mattress.

"You are amazing," he whispered between panting breaths.

"You're not too bad yourself."

"Thanks," he said, turning to look at me.

"No, thank you. Do you want to take a shower?"

He nodded, running his fingers through his hair before rolling off the bed. "Meet me in there?"

"Yeah, I'll be right there."

I watched him walk from the room, following his cute ass until he turned into the bathroom and shut the door. It seemed that we would both ignore the words I'd let slip, and that was just fine with me. If he didn't feel the same way, I'd rather not discuss it at all.

I climbed out of bed, walking into the living room to see who had called me before I joined Ethan in the shower. I heard the water start and reached for my jeans, pulling out my phone to check my voicemail.

"Hey bro." Beth's voice was low as if she were whispering into the phone. "I need you to be at The Kiss tomorrow at eight-thirty. King Jafir wants to meet with you. Please don't stand him up. I'm not dealing with whatever it is that you've done now. Just have your ass here on time. And he said not to bring Ethan with you. Love you."

I closed the phone, staring at it for a minute while her message registered. I couldn't imagine what Jafir would possibly want to talk to me about. His Prince would be free of me in a few days, and I hadn't done anything offensive to their family lately. Hell, I hadn't even seen them in weeks.

"Jamie, are you coming in here with me?" Ethan's voice was muffled through the bathroom door.

I dropped my phone onto the sofa and went to join him. I didn't know how I would get out without him knowing where I was going the next day. Especially since we had plans.

I climbed in the shower behind him, kissing his shoulder distractedly and grabbing the soap from him. I lathered up my hands, rubbing the suds down his back while I thought about what the King wanted.

Ethan turned to face me, bending down to kiss me, and all thoughts of the meeting went out of my head. Nothing mattered right then except Ethan touching me as often as possible before I lost him.

The water was warm but his hands were warmer as they slid up my wet back, his fingers tangling in my hair and his cock twitching to hardness again as it pressed against my stomach. I fought a strong urge to scream as I realised that in just a few short days I would never get to feel this way again.

Chapter Thirteen

We'd fallen into bed after the shower completely exhausted. He hadn't brought up the fact that I'd told him I loved him, and I didn't push it. I knew it would be easier for both of us if we just forgot the whole thing.

I woke up alone the next night, only realising he was gone when I reached out for him and found his empty pillow. I got dressed and walked into the living room, expecting to find him there, but he wasn't. I called out for him, but there was no answer.

I finally found a note on the kitchen table saying he had to pick up a few things and would be back by nine. I glanced at the clock. I only had fifteen minutes to get to The Kiss for my surprise meeting.

I scribbled him a note at the bottom of his, telling him that I would be back as soon as I could and rushed out the door.

The weather had grown chilly over the last few days, and I faintly smelled snow on the air. It wouldn't snow that night, but soon there would be a thin dusting of it everywhere. It made the city smell clean and fresh as I walked. I hadn't worn a jacket, but the cold had never really bothered me anyway. I wouldn't even pull out sweaters until mid-December. I'd only accepted Ethan's coat the night before because it smelled like him.

I made it to the pub with a few minutes to spare. I caught Beth's eye, and she made her way over to me, kissing me on the cheek and smiling.

"It's nice to be able to touch you again," she said.

"You've been able to touch me for weeks," I said with a laugh. "You've just chosen to wait for an opportunity to offset how pissed I am at you to use it to your advantage. Now, what the hell is going on?"

She blew out a sigh before bringing her hand up to smack me upside the head.

"Ow," I said in mock pain which earned me an eye roll from her.

"I'm glad you came. I would have been severely pissed if you'd bailed. The King is going to meet you in the office. I told him he could use the back entrance. He might even be there already."

"I doubt it," I said with a sigh of my own. "Jafir likes to keep people waiting."

I twisted through the crowd making my way to the offices we had in back. I had assumed Beth told him to meet me in my office. As I never did any work in there, it would be the cleanest...if a little dusty.

I opened the door, jumping about a foot when I realised Jafir stood in the middle of the room.

"Your Highness," I said shakily. "You startled me. I apologise. I didn't realise you were already here. Have you been waiting long?"

"Not long," he said. He moved to sit in the chair in front of the desk. This move surprised me a little. I had figured he'd be the kind of man to sit behind the desk as a sign of control. But then, it didn't matter where he was, Jafir was always in control of every situation he put himself in.

"Is this about my request to leave?" I had decided this could be the only reason he would want to see me though in the past, I had only ever received a letter telling me no.

"As a matter of fact, it is, Jamie," he said. "Please sit so we can discuss this matter."

I sat behind the desk, folding my hands on the blotter and trying to look calm, though I was pretty sure that would never be possible in the King's presence. I stared at him, waiting for him to speak, but he just stared back.

"So," I said quietly. "What are we going to discuss?"

"Jamie, I understand you've heard from Jeremy Stiles about the King of Chicago?"

I felt my eyes widen in surprise. This was not how I would have imagined the conversation starting. I nodded, unable to speak for the moment.

"I have been in contact with Queen Stephanie, and she has decided to give up the throne, as well, though she swears she had nothing to do with the death of your parents. This leaves a rather large city without a ruler. Stephanie has agreed to stay in the city, to be an advisor to the new King, and to help him for as long as he requires her services. She has asked for someone from our clan to take over her city."

Of course, he had wanted to tell me in person that I would not need to leave Anaboris. If Ethan was going to Chicago to be their King, I would have no reason to leave. I could stay under the Connor's thumbs for the rest of eternity.

"I have told her that permission will be granted for you to go to her and take over. She is holding the crown until after your bond is broken, at which time you are free to leave."

"I'm sorry," I said, staring at him in shock. "Did you just say that the Queen of Chicago is giving *me* her city?"

"You are of royal birth, and the previous crown has dishonoured your family name. The city is rightfully yours."

"But I don't know anything about being royalty. I haven't been part of a ruling family since I was a child. I am horrifically unqualified for this position. I mean, I appreciate the offer...but there is no way in hell I can accept this. Why wouldn't you give it to Ethan?"

"She asked for you." He shrugged as if that made all the sense in the world. Which it did not. It didn't make any sense at all.

"Sir, I apologise if this sounds rude, but are you out of your fucking mind?"

He smiled which shocked me more than if he had screamed at me or even attacked me. Just a small twitch in the corner of his mouth, but it was there.

"Not rude at all," he said, humour even evident in his voice. "I thought the same thing when she first made the request. But the more I thought about it, the more sense it made to me. You are a born leader, Jamie McHale. And she will be there to offer you guidance. I would even be willing to give Ethan permission to leave our clan to assist you if you wish it."

"No," I said quickly. "No, Ethan wouldn't want to come anyway. I think he will be happy when the bond is broken, and he can go back to his life here. It will be nice to be able to give him his space, I will admit that."

I was confused, and scared, and more than a little excited by the idea of running my own city. When the Connors had taken over Anaboris, I'd though any chance of being a ruler was gone. Yet here was King Jafir, handing me the perfect situation on a silver platter.

"Have you told Ethan—"

"No," he cut me off. "I had assumed you would want to keep this to yourself until the time was right for you to tell him. Should you not wish to do it, I will talk to him when your bond is dissolved. It will be easier to take when there is no magic tying his feelings to you."

His words stung like a knife to the chest. He, too, believed that only magic gave Ethan feelings for me. It wasn't my imagination, Ethan would never love me. I took a deep breath before saying.

"I accept the position of King of Chicago, King Jafir. I thank you, and I will call on Queen Stephanie before I set out for my city next week."

Jafir smiled again, but it was an odd, sad sort of smile. Almost as if he were disappointed in me. The look was gone in a moment, making me wonder if I had imagined it.

"Very well. Then I guess I will see you on Monday for the un-bonding ritual...King Jamie." He stood and walked out, closing the door behind him with a soft click.

The silence in the room seemed unnaturally heavy, as if he had just shut the door to more than my office. I should have been thrilled, but I felt more empty than anything. My cell phone buzzed in my pocket, making me jump.

"Jamie, where are you? I was only gone for like an hour. When are you coming home?" Ethan sounded more than a little put out and harassed.

"I'll be home soon," I said. "I had to come talk to Beth. About Graham."

I felt bad lying to him, but I didn't want to ruin Halloween. We only had a tonight and tomorrow left together. I didn't want the weight of me leaving town hanging over us. I vowed to push it from my mind and just enjoy being with Ethan while I could.

"All right," his tone softened. "What time do you want to go downtown?"

"Well, the club doesn't open until eleven, so we still have plenty of time to get ready. I'll be home soon, all right?" I hung up the phone with a sigh.

Beth walked in as I was putting the phone back in my pocket. She closed the door and leaned on it, her hand still on the knob.

"Did you get a letter from Jeremy?" she asked.

"Yes. I didn't realise he'd sent them to everyone. Did Gran get one, too?"

She nodded, her eyes filling with tears. "Why would Graham do that? I always thought he was friends with our parents."

"I don't know," I said. I walked over to her and pulled her into my arms. I hadn't seen Beth cry in a long time, and I can't say I liked it. She and Gran were the most stable people on the planet, and when one of them was hurting, I always felt completely lost.

"What did King Jafir want?" she sniffed into my shoulder.

"If I tell you, you have to swear not to tell anyone. Especially Ethan."

She nodded, looking up at me as she wiped her tears on the palm of her hands, drying them on her jeans. "I promise not to say a word."

"Queen Stephanie, Graham's wife, asked me to take over the city in their place."

"What?" Beth's eyes widened making a couple more tears run down her cheeks. "You're going to be King of Chicago?"

I nodded, smiling half-heartedly when she hugged me. I would be happy later, I supposed.

"You can't tell Ethan I'm leaving. Please. I only have two more nights with him. I don't want to waste them fighting."

"I promised I wouldn't, Jamie. But you are going to tell him, right?" Her eyes were drying now, and she looked at me reproachfully.

"It's not like I can keep it a secret forever. I just want tonight and tomorrow to go well. We've wasted the last two weeks already, I just want to enjoy being with him before I have to leave."

"You really do love him, don't you?" she asked softly.

"Yeah, I really do. But you can't tell him that, either. In fact, why don't you just stay completely away from him until Monday night?"

She rolled her eyes. "You do know that he loves you, too, right?"

It was my turn to give her the reproachful look. She was out of her mind. She barely knew Ethan. It was ridiculous for her to think she knew anything about him.

"Fine. Don't believe me. I don't care. It's only my brother's happiness. Why should I give a fuck about that. Well, King Jamie, if you don't mind, I'm going to go back to work. Congratulations."

She walked out of the room, leaving me alone and even more confused than I had been after talking to Jafir. It had been a strange Halloween, and the night had barely started yet.

* * * *

"I cannot fucking believe you didn't want to dress up," Ethan said for the twentieth time since we'd arrived at the club.

When I'd gotten back to the house, I was so preoccupied with the nights events that I had tried to get out of going to the club, at all, but Ethan wouldn't hear it. He had finally given in to letting us go in normal clothes, not making me wear makeup or leather. That had been enough of a compromise to at least get me out of the house.

"Will you please let it go?" I asked, yelling to be heard over the thumping bass, blaring from the speakers. The party was in full swing, costumed mortals dancing and drinking and having fun while Ethan and I stood at the bar in jeans and T-shirts waiting for the bartender to pay attention to us.

"I just don't understand what's wrong," he said, moving to the other side of me when I looked away from him. "You're the one who loves Halloween so much. Is this about—"

"Look," I said loudly, "I've just informed what's left of my family about Graham. Today is the thirty-first already, and I may not be in the best mood. Okay?"

The bartender finally came over to us in time to stop Ethan from replying. I ordered a couple of beers, gave the man a huge tip and stalked off with Ethan trailing behind me.

We found a grimy table in a dark corner and sat across from each other. We weren't talking, but I smiled when Ethan's foot ran up my leg. He smiled back, and I hoped I could get through the whole night without picking a fight with him.

None of the earlier events had been his fault. And it wasn't really his fault that we only had one night after tonight together. I had been just as guilty as him for squandering the last couple weeks. It wouldn't do either of us any good to start picking at each other.

We drank our beers in silence, listening the music and bumping our feet together occasionally under the table. When we had both finished, Ethan held out his hand to me. I took it and let him take me out onto the dance floor.

The music was so loud that the songs were indistinguishable, but it didn't matter. The only thing you really need to be able to dance is a steady bass thump. And the club had that in full force.

We made our way to the middle of the floor, surrounding ourselves with men and women in all states of dress and undress. On any given night, you can't tell if these people were dressed in a costume or if they just dressed that way because it was a Saturday. And Halloween was no different. Black-leather-clad men danced next to half-naked women and

the requisite stripper Snow Whites and Cinderellas. It was a party, a chance to dress up and dance without fear of being judged. The City Club was always great for that.

The thumping bass slowed for the next song, and Ethan put his arms over my shoulders, pulling me tight against him to sway with me to the music. I held him close and tried to fight the thoughts that this would be our last night dancing together. That I was running out of time to hold him.

I ran my hands up the back of his shirt to feel his muscles shifting under my fingers. I turned my face up to him and smiled when he kissed my nose. I knew the smile probably looked as sad as I felt, but he didn't try to say anything.

If Ethan was worried about our bond coming to an end that night, he didn't show it. We spent three hours drinking and dancing. It was too loud to try to talk a lot in the club anyway, but I had thought that once we got in the car to drive home, he would become more sombre.

Quite the opposite actually happened. He was almost giddy. Talking and laughing and trying to make me smile. He didn't ask again what was wrong with me, just tried to pull me out of my funk with bad puns and witty remarks about the mortals that had been at the club.

It was almost three a.m. by time we got home, and he hadn't calmed down a bit. He bounded into the house and went straight to the stereo, surprising me by putting on an upbeat, non-jazz CD. He turned it up as loud as he dared and pulled me into him, trying to get me to dance again.

"Ethan, did you take something at the club tonight?" I asked, finally laughing at his ridiculous behaviour.

"No," he said, taking my hand and spinning me before pulling me tight against him again. "Can't I just be in a good mood? It's Halloween, Jamie. It's supposed to be your favourite night, and you've been a sour puss all night."

"A sour puss?" I cocked an eyebrow at him.

"Yes." He kissed my forehead. "Look, I know what you've been thinking about, but worrying isn't going to help anything. Can't we just have fun? Please? Enjoy our time together tonight? Everything doesn't have to be dark and gloomy all the time."

I blew out a sigh. He was right, of course, and I hated that. I was doing exactly what I had sworn not to. Wallowing in my own head instead of trying to make the most of the time

we had left. I guess I was just afraid of falling more in love with him before he left me. It would hurt enough as it was, I didn't need to feel even more like my heart was being ripped from my chest when he walked away.

But watching him do his exaggerated bump and grind dance in front of me, I couldn't help but smile. They say it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. I've always believed that was absolute bullshit, but I decided there was no help for it. I loved him, and I was going to lose him. I might as well get my money's worth while I could.

"Come here," I said reaching for his hand.

He smiled, the movement lighting up his whole face. I pulled him against me, moving my hips with his as we danced in the living room. We swayed and bumped against each other, laughing and singing along with the pop-candy lyrics of a song that really didn't make sense.

"Jamie," he said after I pulled him up from a dip. "I want to make love to you. Right now."

I nodded, the request so out of the blue I wasn't sure how else to react. He pulled me into the bedroom, leaving the music on to blare through the house as if he wanted it to be our soundtrack for the rest of the night.

Ethan, slid his hands under my shirt, pulling it off and tossing it across the room before dropping to his knees in front of me to trail kisses across my chest. I ran my fingers through his hair while he unbuttoned my jeans and slid them down my legs. I used a hand on his shoulders to balance myself while I kicked them off.

He looked up at me and smiled. I was standing completely naked in front of him, and for the first time in a while, I felt self-conscious about it. But the feeling was washed away on a wave of pleasure as he took my cock in his mouth, sucking me to full hardness in seconds. My nails dug into his shoulders while I watched him slide my cock between his lips, moving in quick, wet movements up and down my shaft.

"Ethan." My voice was soft, but he flicked his eyes up to me. "You have too many clothes on."

He let my cock fall from his mouth and stood so I could pull his T-shirt over his head while he undid his jeans and kicked them to the side. He was already hard, and I wanted to

go to my knees, to taste him as he had just done to me. But his hand on my hips and his mouth on mine kept me standing where I was.

I tasted myself mixed with his saliva on his tongue and groaned into his mouth. His cock twitched against my stomach at the sound he drew from me. He urged me backward with his body until I fell back onto the mattress. I scooted up as gracefully as I could while he crawled over my body.

He kissed me again, his fingers locking with mine as he held my hands against the mattress. I raised my hips to him, my cock rubbing against his until he let go of my hands and moved one of his own to cup my chin.

"That's cheating," he said before kissing me again. "I said I want to make love to you. And if you make me come now, I won't get to. So stop moving."

"Yes, sir." My voice was hoarse, and I wanted him so badly my body ached with it. I was terrified he would spend hours torturing me with his hands, his mouth and his body. I was already flush with need for him. I wasn't sure I could handle a lot of foreplay.

Luckily, he moved to the nightstand and prepared himself for me quickly. He came back to rest on top of my body just as a slow song started on the stereo from the living room. His eyes met mine, and he gave me a small smile before spreading my legs apart.

Two of his fingers pressed gently against my ass, entering me agonisingly slowly. His eyes never left mine as he loosened my muscles for a few minutes. I relaxed into the mattress as much as I could, waiting for him to be ready to enter me as I felt I was always ready for him.

Finally, he moved closer to me, raising my hips enough to be able to push his cock inside of me. I wanted him so badly there was very little resistance for him to push against. He moved every inch of himself inside of me as slowly as he could, taking what felt like minutes to stretch me completely open for him until his body met mine.

He bent forward, and I met him halfway, propped on my elbows to be able to kiss him while he moved in and out of me. He sucked my lower lip into his mouth, swiping his tongue over it, gently nicking it with his fangs. The taste of the blood in our mouths drew small noises from both of our throats.

I pulled out of the kiss, laying back on the pillow to be able to watch his face as he continued the slow movements in and out of my ass. He used one hand to hold himself up

and the other to trail his fingers down my throat and over my chest before resting it on my hip.

His rhythm faltered as his nails dug into my skin. I watched his eyes fill with tears, and I reached up a hand to wipe away a few stray ones that slid down his cheek. His eyes squeezed shut, a few more tears falling as he came inside of me.

He slowly pulled out, kissing a trail down my chest, his tears leaving small wet spots on my skin. He moved as if to take my cock in his mouth, but I stopped him with a hand on his jaw.

"Hey, no. Come here and kiss me," I said softly.

"But you didn't..." He trailed off.

"Don't worry. I'm fine. Please come here."

He climbed back up my body, his face dry now and no more tears coming. He kissed me as I'd asked him to, but they were small, almost chaste kisses. A mere brush of his lips a few times before he moved off of me.

He walked out of the room and closed the door behind him. The stereo stopped a few seconds before I heard the shower start. I didn't know if I should join him, but figured he probably wanted to be alone for a minute.

Turning on my side and staring at the wall, I couldn't help but wonder if anything would change between us. I knew I couldn't be the one to bring up the fact that he had cried, and I was pretty sure he wouldn't talk to me about it. My mind spun with possibilities for what would happen next.

I fell asleep to visions of Ethan asking me not to unbond from him and promises of happily forever after dancing in my head.

Chapter Fourteen

I woke up Sunday morning to the feel of Ethan's hand stroking my cock. His chest pressed into my back, and his hand was over my hip to better grip me in his strong hand.

"What are you doing?" I mumbled.

"Making up for last night," he whispered in my ear.

I didn't think he had anything to make up for, but I wasn't about to stop him from trying anyway. His hand was warm and even dry it felt amazing sliding up and down my shaft. I shifted my ass, finding his own cock hard as well as it pressed against me.

"I'm sorry I was asleep when you came to bed," I said.

"Don't worry. I'm sorry you didn't get off last night."

I moved his hand so I could turn and face him. He kissed me. I think he had planned to make it quick, but I didn't want him to move. I gripped his hair and held him to my face, my tongue forcing his lips open to find his.

I shifted more, using my body to press him back so I could climb on top of him. My hands slid up his arms, finding his wrists and pinning them above his head while I ravaged his mouth. My fangs nicked his tongue, but I didn't pull away. I sucked his tongue hard, drawing out more of that sweet coppery taste, rolling it between our mouths and savouring the flavour for what I knew might be the last time.

It was Sunday, the first of November, and tomorrow night, Ethan and I would go our separate ways. I growled in response to thoughts he couldn't hear, kissing him harder to try to force them from my own mind. I had forever to mourn losing him. Right then, I would take what was mine while it was still mine to have.

I pulled from his mouth, my body taught with the need to be inside of him. I climbed over to the nightstand, opening the drawer and fishing around its contents. I finally had to move completely off Ethan to look inside when I couldn't find the condoms by touch alone.

I found the last foil packet towards the back of the drawer and smiled a little. It was so tragic and yet poetic that we would be using his last condom for our last time together. He looked at me oddly while I ripped open the packet with my teeth, and I just shook my head

as I rolled the latex down my shaft. If necessary, we could talk about it later, but I didn't think it would matter to him the way it did to me.

"Turn around," I said hoarsely.

He cocked an eyebrow before giving me a small smile. I squeezed lube onto my hand, coating the condom with it while he settled on his knees in front of me. I moved behind him, using my fingers to stretch his ass open for me. I shoved them inside of him for a few minutes until his muscles relaxed against the intrusion.

I pulled them out, quickly replacing them with the head of my cock. I pushed inside him slowly, the tight ring of muscles gripping my cock tightly as I pushed inch after inch of my shaft inside of him. When I was completely sheathed in his ass, I stopped and enjoyed the feel of his muscles constricting around me for a moment before I started to move.

My hands went to his hips, pulling and pushing him around me rather than moving my own hips for a few minutes. When he caught the rhythm I wanted, he started to move for me, so that I could free my hands to touch other parts of him. One hand slid up his spine while the other reached around him to grab his cock.

I moved my hand up and down his shaft at the same speed he was moving his ass up and down mine. His breathing quickened before mine and I could feel his balls drawing up against my hand a moment before he cried out, spraying my fingers with his hot come.

My hands roamed back to his hips, trying to hold him steady as his shoulders collapsed to the bed, his body racked with heaving breaths. I increased my speed, nails digging against the sharp bones in his hips as I fucked him so hard I could hear our bodies slapping together. Pressure built low inside of me, and I knew I wouldn't last much longer.

I got an arm under his stomach, pulling him up against my body so I could sink my fangs into his shoulder as I came. I drank his blood as my cock spasmed inside of his ass, my cum shooting, hot and thick, into the condom.

I let him go, and he fell to the bed, small shudders of what I hoped were pleasure shooting through his body for a moment before he lay still, face buried in the pillows. I pulled out of him, groaning at the feel of my own hand on my sensitive cock. I rolled over onto my back and lay next to him, catching my breath and smiling over at him.

"Good evening to you, too," he said with a shaky laugh.

I kissed him quickly before getting up to dispose of the condom. I grabbed a pair of jeans from the floor and pulled them on, never taking my eyes off his gorgeous body lying naked on the bed. I would definitely miss looking at him whenever I wanted. Chicago had never seemed as far away as it did right that moment.

Ethan climbed out of bed, pulling on his jeans from the night before and sitting back down on the bed. He ran his fingers through his hair and gave me a small smile.

"So, I guess we're going to have to talk about it now, huh?"

"I guess so," I said. I sat next to him and put my head on his shoulder.

"You know, a month ago I never would have imagined this would be so hard," he said softly.

I wanted him to tell me he didn't want to go through with it, that he wanted to stay with me forever. But I knew he wouldn't. Hell, he had been counting down the days. Why would he change his mind?

"I know what you mean." I looked around the room and realised my clothes had become mixed with his in the weeks I had been staying with him. I would have to pack, but then I had to pack a lot more than the things I had brought to Ethan's.

I thought about telling him then, asking him to come with me. It was selfish not to tell him. I knew that the only person's feelings being spared by my silence were my own. Hell, it might have made the whole situation easier on Ethan if I told him I was going to be leaving town in a few days.

I turned to say it, but he was looking at me with such a sad smile on his face I couldn't do it. I couldn't make it worse, not then. I decided I would tell him at the unbonding ceremony. Or sometime before I actually left town, knowing it would be better for him to hear it from me than from someone else.

"So, what should we do tonight? Do you want to fuck until the sun comes up?"

"That sounds amazing," I said wistfully. "But we just used the last condom, and I should probably find all of my stuff tonight. Then you can be rid of me right after..." I trailed off, unable to say it out loud.

"Well thank goodness for that," he said, giving me a gentle shove. "God knows I want you out of here as quickly as possible." I was pretty sure he was kidding, but I didn't ask for clarification.

"Are you staying here, or was this the last time I get to wake up with you?"

I blew out a sigh. "I think tomorrow will be easier if I stay at Beth's. Don't you?"

"Probably." He sighed, too. "Do you want me to help you pack?"

"No, I can get it. Thanks."

We were being so over-the-top polite, so blasé, it made me want to scream. I wanted to cry, shout, hit him, something to break the horrible distance we were putting between ourselves with every word. Every minute that passed in that room, it felt as if the bond was dissolving on its own. We were putting up walls at every turn, shutting each other out. I knew I was trying to protect myself, but I wasn't sure what his excuse was.

I had told him I loved him, and he had ignored it. If he wanted me, he'd had ample opportunity to tell me, and he hadn't. So while he might not have been looking forward to our parting, it couldn't have been killing him the same way it was me. I was dying inside.

"Well, I think I am going to stay at my parents' tonight," he said, the sound of his voice making me jump since I'd been so lost in my own thoughts.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I'll come back after the...after. If I come across anything of yours, I'll just bring it by Beth's okay?"

"Yeah, that would be fine."

We had both referred to my apartment as Beth's. As if it wasn't my home anymore. It didn't feel like it was. Ethan's house was my home, and when I left for good, it wouldn't be to live at the apartment anymore. I would be living hundreds of miles away, and Ethan wouldn't be able to just stop by.

I wanted to ask him to come with me. I thought about it. I almost had my mouth open, then he turned and kissed me and all thoughts of coming clean with him were washed away by tongues and lips and fangs crashing against each other.

It was goodbye. I felt it so deep inside of me, it was as if his fangs pierced my heart. He was kissing me goodbye, and there was nothing I could do to change it. Our time was up, and he didn't love me...not enough to want to keep me.

He broke the kiss first which was good because I might have let it go on for days. He stood, sliding his feet into a pair of shoes and grabbing a sweater from a pile on the dresser. I

watched him finish dressing, trying to detach myself from the thought he was about to walk out on me. On us.

He leaned over me and kissed me again, just a quick peck on the lips.

"I'll see you at the Temple tomorrow?"

I nodded, not trusting my voice to answer out loud. He smiled, but there was no happiness in it. He walked out the door. A moment later, the front door slammed, and I knew I had squandered the last chance I had to ask him to stay.

The silent depression creeping through the house finally got me to my feet to pack. I threw my clothes into a box, and without really thinking about why I grabbed Ethan's leather jacket and threw it on top. I figured I would be gone by time he realised I'd stolen it, and he would have quite a drive if he wanted to come get it back from me.

I thought about wandering around the house, remembering all of the good times we'd had together there but realised it would be as useful as shoving a spoon in my eye socket, so I just put my key on the kitchen table we had bought together after breaking Ethan's table the first time we'd had sex then walked out the door with my box of clothes and heart full of pain.

Beth wasn't home when I got to the apartment, and I was glad to be alone. I didn't really want to deal with her yet. I knew she would probably be back soon—she rarely worked on Sunday nights—but it was nice to have some quiet for a while.

I went into my room and threw the box of my stuff on the floor, pulling Ethan's coat off the top and crawling into bed with it. I breathed deeply, smelling his cologne and skin on the leather and feeling that need to scream rise up in my chest again.

This was not what I had expected to feel like. Ethan was right, when the bond was new all either of us wanted was for it to be over. It was hard to believe that in such a short span of time I could have grown to care for him so much.

As I thought about it, I had to wonder if my feelings for him were really that new. We had gotten to where the bond wanted us pretty quickly for two people who claimed to hate each other the way Ethan and I had. Even with the magic guiding us, it had been so sudden and so complete. For me anyway. I had no way of knowing how he felt about it, as talking still hadn't been easy for either of us.

I remembered his tears from the previous night and wished I had pushed him for an answer as to what they had meant. Asking him couldn't have made the situation any worse—I was still back in my old room, alone, and he was out somewhere without me. If I had only opened my mouth maybe the situation would be different.

But it was too late to think like that. I had let the moment pass and would probably spend the rest of eternity wondering, kicking myself for wrong choices and missed opportunities with Ethan. I was glad that we were able to leave things amicably. I didn't want to leave the bond as we had entered it, kicking and clawing, fighting each other as we had our whole lives. It was a small comfort as I rolled onto my side, still clutching the only piece of Ethan I had been able to take with me.

* * * *

I woke to Beth gently shaking me.

"Is it Monday?" I mumbled as I struggled to open my eyes.

"No, it's still Sunday. It's just pretty late. Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Yeah," I sat up, yawning, and looked for the clock. I finally saw the red glowing numbers and had to blink a few times to see it was three in the morning.

"I wanted to let you know I set up the rental car for Wednesday night. I can help you pack if you want, but the Queen of Chicago is expecting you that night."

"Okay, thanks." Right, Chicago. I would be King. And Ethan wasn't coming with me. Reality crashed into me as the thoughts brought me fully awake. I was King of Chicago. It didn't seem possible how quickly things had changing for me. I was losing Ethan the following night, and two nights later, I was taking over an entire city.

"How are you?"

"I'm all right," I said. "No, really. It will just take some getting used to, that's all. It will be better when I get out of Anaboris. When I don't have to worry about running into Ethan with some other guy every night."

"Jamie, I think you are both being really stupid about all of this. I just want you to know that."

"Well thanks, Sis. 'Cause that's exactly what I need right now. Look, he doesn't want me, and I can't make him come with me to Chicago."

"Did you tell him?"

"No."

Beth hit me so hard I fell backward a little, catching myself just before hitting the wall behind me. She jumped to her feet with her hands on her hips and glared at me.

"You selfish bastard," she yelled. "So what? You're just going to take off and not even give him the choice to come with you?"

"Beth, please stay out of this. None of this has anything to do with you."

"Right. No, of course it doesn't. You're just my brother. I only love you and want what's best for you. What business is it of mine if you are going to sit there and ruin the best thing that has ever happened to you? You know, I kept thinking you two would realise that this bond was a blessing, but neither of you took the time to really look at what was happening between you. And now it's over. God, you two are such...such...fuckwits!"

She stormed from the room before I could reply. And since I wasn't in the mood to fight with her, I didn't chase after her. As I had done with Ethan earlier, I just let her go, let her walk away and kept my mouth shut.

I flopped back on the bed, my hand absently petting the leather coat still lying there, wishing it was Ethan's body under my touch. Beth was probably right. I was selfish, and I had fucked up. But it was too late to change it. I would have to live with my mistakes forever, and that was my choice.

I closed my eyes and prayed for sleep to come back to me, but stared at the inside of my eyelids for a long time before that finally happened.

* * * *

The next time I woke up, I knew it was Monday, and my heart hurt so badly I thought it had completely died in my chest during the day. I struggled to get out of bed, didn't even bother to change my clothes and stumbled out into the living room.

I hadn't looked at the clock but knew it must be late because Gran and Beth were sitting at the table together, drinking tea.

"Are you going to change?" Beth asked as she walked into the kitchen to put their cups in the sink.

"No, I'm ready. Is it time?"

Gran walked over to me and pulled my chin down to look in my eyes. "You look like shit, Jamie."

"Gee, thanks, Gran," I said, pulling her hand away. "Is it time?"

"Yes," Gran said with a sigh. "It's time. The Connors are going to meet us there, but I need to set up some things first to get ready for the ceremony."

I nodded. I felt lost, confused, like I was walking around in someone else's life. This couldn't be me heading to a Temple to get unbonded from the only man I'd ever really loved. It couldn't be my life that was getting completely turned upside down and inside out in less than an hour. I couldn't be feeling this much pain and still be running full tilt into my own nightmare. These are the things that happen to other people. Hadn't I lost enough in my lifetime? It was enough for a few lifetimes, actually.

But no, I realised as we walked into Spring Temple that night, it was all happening to me. I was giving up without a fight. I was too tired to fight. Besides, fighting with Ethan Connor was what had gotten me into the mess in the first place. I knew I would stand there and watch my happiness slip away with a figurative wave of Gran's wand. She would say some words, burn some stuff, and my life in Anaboris would be over. Clean and neat like a razor blade through flesh.

I sat at the small table with Beth and watched in silence as Gran set up her altar, started burning her sage and myrrh and lit candles all over the room. Beth had tried to talk to me a few times, but there was a faint buzzing sound in my ears, and I couldn't make out the words. Eventually she gave up and watched Gran too, though she did cover my hand with her own and squeeze it occasionally, which I appreciated.

We both jumped when the Temple doors opened behind us. I turned and felt my stomach flip at the sight of Ethan walking down the aisle towards us. If I looked like shit, then he looked like walking death. There were dark circles around his eyes, and he had obviously slept in his clothes, too. He walked past me his parents following him to greet Gran.

The King and Queen talked to Gran in hushed tones while Ethan and I stared at each other from across the room. I wanted to run to him, to pull him into my arms, kiss him and tell him that I refused to let him go. But of course, I didn't move, not even to stand, until Gran softly said it was time for the ceremony to begin.

Beth prodded me to my feet, and I stood on wobbly legs, holding onto the table for support until I was sure I wouldn't fall over. When the world finally steadied, I walked over to Ethan, and we turned to face Gran together.

"Gentlemen, this should only take a minute. Please face each other and take hands. I won't speak out loud until I tell you it is time to let go of each other. All right?"

We both nodded before turning to each other. I held out my hands, and Ethan took them in his. His skin was as cold as ice, and my arms broke out in goose bumps at the feel of it. He smiled a crooked smile at me, and again, I had to fight the urge to kiss him.

It was good I was leaving. If I stayed, I would no doubt make an ass out of myself every time I saw him. Tackling him in alleys, begging him to take me back. Yeah, it would be a disaster if I didn't get out of Anaboris soon. I couldn't handle seeing him and knowing I could never have him again.

We stared into each other's eyes while Gran moved around us. It was so quiet in the Temple all I heard was my blood rushing in my ears. Ethan's hands tightened on mine for a moment, and I opened my mouth to call an end to the ceremony, but as I did, Gran spoke again.

"You may let go of each other. The bond is broken."

Neither of us moved. We stood there looking at each other, hand in hand, and I was sure that at any moment my heart would beat out of my chest completely.

"I said you may let go," Gran said again softly.

I loosened my hands, but Ethan gripped me even tighter, pulling me against his chest. He kissed my ear quickly before whispering the words that made my heart stop beating all together.

"Congratulations on Chicago, King Jamie McHale."

He let me go and walked quickly down the aisle towards the door. I wanted to run after him, to apologise, to throw myself at his feet and beg forgiveness. But the door slammed shut behind him, and he was gone.

I turned to find Queen Tara, standing next to me and crying softly into a lace handkerchief.

"Jamie, I am so sorry. I did not realise you hadn't told him. I never would have done that to you on purpose. I already fear that I have done more to hurt you than I have ever done to help."

She gripped my hand in hers for a moment before letting her husband guide her towards the door. It closed again with a solid thud, and I turned to face my family. Beth looked horrified but Gran wore her blank face.

"Fuck Jamie," Beth whispered as she ran to hug me.

"Language," Gran said, but her voice was too soft to be reproachful.

I put an arm around Beth's shoulders, holding her against me while she cried. I thought it was funny that she should be the one driven to tears as I was the one who had ruined my own life. But I let her cry. I only wished I had some words of comfort I could offer her...but there was nothing. Just an empty void in my chest where my heart had been before Ethan walked out the door with it.

Chapter Fifteen

"What did Queen Tara mean when she said she had done more to ruin my life than to help it?"

Gran, Beth and I were sitting at The Kiss sharing a bottle of wine and not really talking much. Beth had shut the bar down for the night, and it seemed as good a place as any for my divorce party.

"Girl, you'd better tell him," Gran said softly, looking at Beth over the rim of her wine glass. "If you don't, then I will. I've said all along that you should have told him from the beginning."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, looking from Gran to Beth in confusion.

"Fuck," Beth whispered. She drained her glass then filled it again, sucking half of it down before turning to me. "Jamie, I have to tell you something. I would have told you sooner, but I was ordered not to. Now that Queen Tara has broken the silence, I guess that leaves me to clean up after her."

She blew out a sigh, taking another quick drink while I continued to stare at her confused.

"Jamie, I bonded you and Ethan together."

Silence fell over us all. I stared at her, waiting for the punch line to what was being set up as a terrible joke, but she just looked back at me with a terrified look on her face.

"Beth, what the fuck are you talking about?"

"Well, I mean you two really did it to yourselves —" $\,$

"Bethany McHale!" Gran shouted, making Beth and I jump. "Now is not the time to get defensive. You tell him what happened right now."

"Okay." Beth drained her glass again but left the bottle on the table. "When Ethan left for Chicago last year, after you two beat the piss out of each other, Queen Tara came to see me. We talked about you and Ethan, and why you two act the way you do. And she, well she sort of ordered me to put a curse on you two so that the next time you got into a physical fight...well it would activate the bond."

"Why the fuck would you do that? Why would she even want it?"

"Jamie, you two almost killed each other in that fight. We were all afraid of what would happen when Ethan came back. I know you two have had problems in the past, but I never thought either of you would have gone as far as you did that night." Gran reached out for my hand but I pulled away from her.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Our own families had done this to us. They had planned it behind our backs and hadn't told us. They had apparently planned on keeping it a secret forever. I felt absolutely violated.

"It was a fight Gran," I said quietly, unsure what else to say. "It wasn't the first fight we'd ever had."

"Jamie, Ethan tried to stake you," Beth said incredulously. "That wasn't just any fight."

"For God's sake, we were fine. A little banged up maybe, and he wouldn't have really staked me. Would you care to explain to me how our hatred and violence towards each other led you and the Queen to decide we should be married?"

"No, I wouldn't care to explain anything to you, actually," Beth said coldly. "Would you like to explain to me why you and Ethan fought that night in the first place?"

No, I really didn't want to explain myself to her either. That night was a pretty big blur for me anyway. I know I'd gotten drunk. I had seen Ethan walk into the pub with Jeremy and had picked a fight with him. We had screamed horrible things at each other for a while, but no one really paid attention as Ethan and I had been fighting since we were in school. Before I really knew what was happening—and I had never really been clear on how—we'd ended up on the sidewalk by way of crashing through the front window of The Kiss.

We had thrown punches, kicked, bitten and clawed at each other and somehow Ethan had gotten a chair leg into his hand and he may have tried to stab me with it...but he wasn't aiming for my heart. I know because I still had a small scar low on my ribcage from where a splinter had ground into my flesh. The scar was tiny, and we'd both healed eventually.

The whys of the fight had never really come up. And I think I had fought like hell to keep from thinking about it for a year. But being asked point blank what had caused it made a little bit of truth finally seep in about that night. I was pissed because Ethan was leaving town with Jeremy. And I didn't want him to go, least of all with someone else.

He had explained that he fought back because he hadn't wanted to go at all, and he had gone to get answers for me, but instead of being grateful I'd attacked him. It was a fair reason for him, but I didn't want to give voice to my reasoning to anyone. Least of all to my sister who was already convinced that I was in love with him anyway.

"I can't believe you did this to me," I said softly.

"Fuck off Jamie, you did this to yourself. And you know it. You and Ethan deserve each other, you're just too fucking blind to see it."

Beth stood, grabbing the bottle from the table and walking towards her office. A minute, later the door slammed behind her, and Gran and I were alone.

"I know you can't tell, but Beth has felt awful about this since it happened. She didn't want to do it at all, and she didn't want to keep it a secret. But Queen Tara gave the order, you know she had no choice Jamie."

I put my head in my hands and groaned. She was right, but that wouldn't keep me from being pissed at Beth for a while anyway. She should have at least warned me.

"Why didn't the Queen do it herself?"

"She doesn't have the power to do it. She needed a female of our bloodline to cast the spell. And she knew that I wouldn't do it, no matter how many orders or threats she issued. Beth is young, Jamie. She must do as her Queen bids her to do."

"I have to go," I said. I kissed the top of Gran's head and walked to the door. I thought about going to talk to Beth, but I was too pissed just then. I would forgive her, but not yet. Right then there was no way I could have a reasonable conversation with her.

I walked home quickly, hands in my pockets and my brain hurting from the night's events. All I wanted to do was climb into bed and sleep until Wednesday. Actually, what I wanted was to crawl into bed with Ethan and never sleep again, but that wasn't an option anymore.

I left the kitchen light on in case Beth came home later that night, but I had a feeling she would avoid me for as long as she could. I walked into my room, slipped Ethan's jacket on over my clothes and crawled into bed, not even bothering to kick off my shoes before I fell asleep.

The ringing of my cell phone woke me up that night. I glanced at the clock and saw that it was after eight pm. The number on the phone display was blocked, but I answered it anyway.

"Jamie, this is Queen Tara. I hope I didn't wake you."

"Good evening, Your Highness. Um, no...no it's fine. How can I help you?" I sat up, leaning my back against the wall while stifling a yawn.

"I'd like you to come by the house when you get a chance tonight. I need to talk to you about my son, and about what I've done to you. Can you be here by nine?"

"Well," I looked down at my clothes and grimaced. "Would nine-thirty be all right?"

"That would be fine. Thank you." She hung up, and I closed the phone, dropping it to the mattress and staring at it in confusion. I didn't really want to talk to her, and I wasn't sure I would be able to hold my temper. But I figured she might give me answers to questions Beth wouldn't, so I crawled out of bed with a sigh and headed into the bathroom to take a quick shower before going to meet with her.

It was strange to shower alone with one crappy showerhead after a month of the best bathing I'd ever known. But I managed to get done much faster than I could have at Ethan's, so there was a small silver lining to it.

I got dressed quickly, throwing on Ethan's jacket and hoping he wouldn't be there when I met with Queen Tara. Among the million reasons I didn't want to see him just then, I really didn't want to have to give the coat back.

I made it to the Connor's just in time, and was shown into the parlour off to the left of the entryway. Unlike last time I'd been there, Queen Tara was waiting for me when I entered the room.

"Please sit down, Jamie," she said, gesturing to pale yellow chintz chair across from her. I sat down, my hands clasped together and my mouth shut, waiting for her to start.

"I assume that Beth told you it was my fault you and my son ended up in the situation you were in?"

I nodded, not wanting to speak until I was sure I wouldn't scream at her.

"I want to apologise, and I would like the opportunity to explain why I came to the decision that I did. Would you like some tea?"

I shook my head, leaning back in the chair and gripping the arms tightly. I hoped this wouldn't take long, I wasn't very good at keeping my mouth shut, and the last thing I wanted to do was yell at the Queen in her own sitting room.

"I guess I will begin with the night Ethan left for Chicago. You two had fought for years. We were all used to it, but that night you two frightened us. I have never seen anything like the viciousness you showed towards each other. I believe you were both lucky to come out of it alive. That night was proof of what I had suspected for years—you and Ethan were in love with each other."

"Excuse me," I said, fighting to keep my voice low and even. "Can I ask where you get the idea that beating the...tar out of each other means that we are in love, please?"

She gave me a soft smile. "You were angry at Ethan for leaving with another man. All of those times that you fought over boys...it wasn't the boys who made you two mad. It was the fact that the other had been with someone else." She held up a hand to stop me from interrupting again. "Think about it Jamie. Ethan didn't actually steal any of your boyfriends in school. Did you ever see them together? No. He just made the boys leave you. If he couldn't have you, he felt no one should be able to.

"Anyway," she continued. "That night was really the last straw for me. When Ethan left, bruised and damaged by more than just your fists, I decided that it would not happen again. I asked—okay I told—your sister to cast the spell over the two of you, so that when Ethan returned the spell would bind you, if you ever showed violence towards each other again. I had hoped being bonded would make you see what the rest of us have known for years."

"And what is that?" I asked coldly.

"That you two love each other. Unfortunately, I underestimated what your combined stubbornness would lead to. I have always known my son was bull-headed, but I didn't realise that you would make it worse. You were forced together, but rather than using the time to understand your feelings for one another, you fought more, railed against the curse, and almost destroyed each other." She gave me that small smile again. "If I had known how strongly your relationship was rooted in violence I never would have done this to you. I thought you fought each other because you were afraid to be together. But I think that you both just have very fucked up ways of showing your emotions."

I stared at her in disbelief. Besides the fact that I had never heard her curse before, she believed that her son and I got off on being violent towards each other. That was fucked up on a whole new level, but I bit back the comment.

"Queen Tara, with all due respect, while it may be true that I have feelings for Ethan, I can assure you that your son does not feel the same for me. He has never once, even in the month that we lived together, shown any interest in being with me past the termination of the bond."

"Oh, I don't believe that at all. I think that if you were to look back on the last month with him, you would be able to see quite a few instance when my son has done his best to show his true feelings for you. And you forget, while you lived with him for a month, I have been with him his whole life. I know things that you are not aware of, and I know my son loves you just as much as you care for him."

"Really?" I asked, unable to keep the sarcasm from my voice.

"Oh yes. Have you never wondered why Jafir forced you to stay in Anaboris after the death of your parents? When you so desperately wanted to escape, when we let others leave without complaint, when Jafir has practically shown outright contempt for you?"

I wasn't sure where she was going with this, but figured I should play along. She seemed positive that she knew some deep, dark proof that her son loved me, and if she did, I wanted to hear it.

"I always assumed it was so Jafir could keep me under his thumb."

"No, believe me Jafir would have loved to have you out of his clan and as far away from his son as he could get you."

"Then why would he have made me stay for so long?"

"Because our son begged him not to let you go."

Chapter Sixteen

I excused myself from the Connor's after the Queen dropped that bombshell on me, and ended up wandering around the city for an hour thinking about everything that had ever happened between Ethan and I.

If he had loved me for so damn long, why hadn't he ever told me? Why had he spent our month together counting down the days until he could be free of me? Why had he fucked everything that crossed his path except me until he was forced to?

These were the questions I wanted answers to, and no one but Ethan would be able to tell me. Which, I guess, is how I ended up in front of his house at eleven o'clock staring at his window as if I could make him come talk to me without actually having to make an effort.

I walked up the path to the house but stopped at the sight of a strange car in the driveway. If he was already fucking someone new, it would be a little difficult to believe that he really loved me. I turned to go then turned back. I hoped like hell he wasn't watching me as I probably looked like an idiot just standing there turning in circles in his front yard.

Finally, I decided that I couldn't leave town until I heard the truth from Ethan. I took a deep breath and walked up to the door, ringing the bell before I could chicken out completely.

He opened the door, and it took every ounce of willpower I had not to throw myself at him. He only wore a pair of faded blue jeans and his hair was tousled as if he hadn't bothered to comb it in a few days.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he asked, closing the door against his side as if he didn't want me to look in the house.

I don't know why, but I kicked him as hard as I could in the shin.

"Ow!" he yelled, shoving me hard in the chest. "What the fuck was that for?"

"You're an idiot," I said, which for some reason was the only thing I could think of to say at the moment.

"What are you doing here?" he asked again, stepping out onto the porch.

[&]quot;Are you alone?"

"Yes," he said with a sigh. "Not that it's any of your business anymore."

He was right. It wasn't. But I felt better knowing that the car didn't belong to some twink he had brought home to have sex with in what I now considered *our* bed.

"Can I come in?" I asked, taking a step towards him. "I need to talk to you."

"Now's not really a good time, Jamie. Just tell me what you want to say and go. Please."

He was acting weird, glancing at the door and not wanting to meet my eyes. Even for Ethan it was strange.

"Why don't you want me in your house?" I asked, taking another step towards him. "If no one else is in there, what do you care?"

"Why do you want to come in?" He backed up a step, reaching behind him for the doorknob, but I moved faster, opening the door all the way and walking around him into the hall.

There were boxes everywhere. Since I'd already forced my way past him, he didn't try to stop me from going into the living room. I looked around the room and felt my heart constrict. There were more boxes in there, his shelves were bare, and he was obviously leaving.

"Where are you going?" I asked softly, not turning to look at him.

"As I said before, that's not really any of your business. What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to talk to you," I said, still not looking at him.

"No, I mean why are you still here? I thought you would be in Chicago by now. Don't you have a city to run?" His voice was harsh, and it felt like a whip against my skin.

"I don't leave until tomorrow, but I couldn't go without seeing you again."

I finally turned to look at him. His face was neutral. He wasn't going to give me anything if I didn't ask him for it. And since there were so many questions in my head, I was having a hard time figuring out what to ask first.

So I kicked him again.

"Ow!"

"You're an idiot."

"I think we've already established your opinion of me, Jamie," he said. "Will you stop fucking kicking me and tell me why you're here?"

"Will you tell me why you asked your father not to let me leave the clan?" I hadn't really planned on starting with that, but as I wanted to know the answer to it more than any other question, I figured I might as well.

"Who the hell told you that?"

"Your mother."

Ethan rolled his eyes and walked into the kitchen, asking if I wanted a beer as he went. I said yes, glad he wasn't forcibly kicking me out of his house yet. I followed him, taking the beer, and we sat across from each other at the table.

"Why would she have told you that?" Ethan asked after taking a drink from his bottle.

"Because she was explaining to me why she had my sister bond us."

Ethan gave me a small smile, which wasn't the reaction I had been expecting. I thought he would be as pissed as I had been, but instead it was as if he'd known all along that it had been their plan.

"Did you know?" I asked coldly.

"I didn't know, but I kind of knew, you know?"

"No."

"Well, I couldn't really think of who else would have done it. Very few clan members are born with the magic anymore, so I figured it had to have been Beth or Gran. And Gran wouldn't have done that to you, but Beth...well she's special. And I knew that if my mother had her way, you and I would have been together a long time ago. She's always been afraid we would kill each other if we didn't just fuck and get it over with. So yeah, when I thought about it enough it was the only thing that made sense."

"Don't you think you could have mentioned any of this to me?"

I couldn't believe he was being so calm about the situation. I didn't know if it was because he'd had longer to process all of it than I had or what, but I didn't like it.

"Are you kidding me? You are so fucking hot-headed I was afraid you might kill us all. If you had bothered to think about what we had, rather than fighting against it the whole time, I might have told you. But you just wanted out, so I wasn't going to push it."

"I wanted out?" I yelled. "You were the one counting down the fucking days 'til you could be rid of me."

"That wasn't how it was," he said, his voice rising, too. "I was trying to be realistic. I knew you wouldn't stay."

"I told you that I loved you," I said, trying to calm down a little.

"You said it while I was fucking you!" He stood, knocking his chair over. "You say all kinds of things when I'm fucking you. I was so angry at you, Jamie. Jesus, I have waited for years to hear you say that to me, and you chose then. Then of all times. How was I supposed to know you actually meant it?"

I was so confused, and he was so angry again. Maybe Queen Tara was right, maybe the only thing we understood was anger and violence. It wasn't a great way to nurture a relationship, but if it got us where we needed to be, we could work on it later.

I rose to my feet, swinging my arm and punching him in the face. I think he had been expecting it, as soon as I connected with him he fell back harder than he should have, grabbing my wrist and spinning me into the fridge so hard it rocked behind me. Before I could get out of his grip, his body had pinned mine, and he was kissing me.

"Stop," I said, shoving him hard away from me.

He let me go, staggering back a little but catching himself on the table before he fell.

"We can't do this." I took a step towards him but stayed just out of his reach. "Ethan, I need to talk to you. Please."

"All right." He sat down again, and I walked around him to sit down, too. But rather than talk, we just sat there for a few minutes in silence until I couldn't take it anymore.

"Why didn't you ever tell me? You just let me fight with you for all these years."

"I don't know. I mean, I kind of like fighting with you. Maybe not the punching each other part, but arguing with you is kind of fun."

I rolled my eyes as I took another drink of my beer. Of course, he would think it was fun to fight with me. I couldn't find some nice, normal guy to fall in love with.

"So where are you going?" I asked again.

"Look Jamie, I don't want to talk about that right now, okay?" He was getting skittish again, looking around the room and not wanting to meet my eyes.

"All right."

"So, why didn't you tell me? Other than when I was fucking you?"

"I didn't know," I said softly. It sounded ridiculous because once I'd figured it out even I knew that it had been obvious. I guess I was just as dense as he was sometimes.

He laughed, and for some reason, I felt the anger boil up in me again. Even if by some miracle he and I ended up together, I would never be okay with him laughing at me.

He must have seen me move because he dove across the table before I could get out of my chair. We toppled backward with him on top me, and the chair smashed to pieces under us.

"Your furniture sucks," I said before he quieted me with his mouth on mine again.

I didn't pull away this time. I opened my lips to him, letting his tongue wrestle against mine, my fingers gripping his hair for a minute before he pulled back.

"Don't talk about my furniture, right now," he said before kissing me again.

I smiled against his lips while I tried to shift under him. His hip pressed against my crotch, and the more he touched me the more painful it became as my cock tried to grow hard between us.

"God, I want you, Jamie," he growled against my lips.

"We used your last condom yesterday," I said, trying to keep the disappointment from my voice.

"I bought more," he whispered as his mouth trailed across my jaw and down my throat. "I didn't want to be out if you came back here."

"How did you know I would come back?" I asked, sliding from under him.

"I didn't," he said as we both sat up, our backs against the wall. "But I was hopeful."

I kicked him, my shoe connecting with his ankle. "You're an idiot."

"So I've been told," he said with a wry smile. "I guess I should have told you sooner. But, I don't know. I guess I was really scared you didn't feel the same way. I mean, you've been a dick to me our whole lives."

"Yes, cause you've given me so many reasons to be nice to you," I said with a laugh.

He grinned. "Fair enough."

"So what now?" I asked. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"I know," he said softly. "I guess we'll figure it out."

He still hadn't told me where he was moving, and I didn't want to push him. We were sort of getting along at the moment, I didn't want to start fighting again if I could help it. But I still wondered why he wouldn't talk to me about it.

The mood had calmed between us, and I wished I hadn't brought up the fact that I was moving in less than twenty-four hours. I wanted to kick myself but kicked him again instead.

"You really need to stop that," he growled. "It's getting annoying."

"Yeah?" I asked, kicking him again as I scrambled to my feet. "Well, you should stop being stupid and get up here and do something about it."

He stood, much more gracefully than I had. I watched the muscles in his arms and chest work as I backed away, and he came after me. His eyes were dark and full of sex, and I wanted him more than I had in a while.

When I backed into the opposite wall, he trapped me against him, kissing me again while his hands fumbled with the button on my jeans. He pulled the zipper down and reached up to pull the coat off of my shoulders.

"You stole my coat," he said against my ear.

"I was hoping you'd come get it back from me," I said with a smile.

He threw it to the floor then raised my T-shirt over my head. When my arms were free I reached for his jeans, pulling them open and sliding them as far down his hips as I could reach.

He dug into his pocket, sticking a small foil packet between his teeth before removing his pants the rest of the way. I kicked out of my shoes and pants while he walked across the room to a box he had on the counter.

"Come here," he said.

I walked over to him, and he grabbed my wrist, twisting my arm behind my back and spinning me around so I couldn't look at him. He pressed himself against my back, his hard cock pressed against the top of my ass and used his mouth to drag the sharp edge of the condom wrapper down my neck.

I heard him tear it open as he backed up a step. He moved against me again, his arms going around my waist to grip my cock.

"Wait," I said a little louder than I meant to.

"What's the matter?" he asked quickly.

"I love you," I said.

He kicked me hard in the back of the knee, grabbing my elbow as I fell to the ground to keep me from hurting myself on the floor.

"You're an idiot," he said, but I could hear a smile in his voice.

I felt something cool and slick being poured over my back and my ass just before the strong smell of olive oil filled my nostrils.

"What are you doing?" I asked with a laugh.

"The lube is packed," he said before he dropped the floor behind me.

His hands slid through the oil on my ass, working it down my crack until his fingers slid inside of me. I inhaled sharply as he added a third finger, then I relaxed against him, letting him finger fuck me until he finally pulled away and placed the head of his cock against my opening.

Our knees slid in the oil that had dripped to the floor, and I clung to a chair in front of me to keep us steady as he pushed his cock all the way inside of me. I hadn't realised until he was completely sheathed in my ass how scared I'd been that I would never be with him again. And when he started moving in and out of me, I knew that I wanted to spend the rest of eternity with him.

If I hadn't known better I would have thought the bond wasn't broken between us, but it wasn't the bond. Being with Ethan really was being home.

He moved one of his hands to grip my shoulder while the other held onto my hip, and he started pounding into my ass with such force I thought for sure we would break the chair if not ourselves when we fell. But when his hand reached around and gripped my cock, the slick oil making it slide quickly up and down my shaft, I didn't care anymore. I just wanted to feel like that forever.

I came, screaming his name and gripping the chair so hard I heard it splinter and crack under the pressure.

"I love you," Ethan said as he came, too, his cock twitching in my ass a few times before he pulled out of me.

"We're a mess," I said, letting go of the chair and sliding in the oil until I fell on my side laughing.

"Yeah, but why should that change," Ethan said, slipping as he got to his feet with the help of a hand on the counter for support.

He helped me to my feet, and we walked to the bathroom together, covered in oil and laughing together.

"I'm glad I kept the towels out," he said as he started the water.

"So, you know I have to ask you again," I said, climbing in the tub with him. "Where are you going?"

"Well, it's embarrassing now that you're here," he said with a sigh. "But I'm moving to Chicago."

I turned him around to face me, my eyes wide with surprise.

"For what?"

"Well," he said, grabbing the soap from its tray and lathering his hands. "I'm sort of in love with the new king." He rubbed his sudsy hands over my chest reaching around to soap up my back and pulling me closer to kiss me.

"Oh really?"

"Yeah," he said, kissing me again. "I really thought you would just leave me here. So I packed up my stuff, rented a car and I was just going to go there and ask you to take me back."

"You were going to give up everything here, and you didn't think that I even loved you?" I asked incredulously.

"It didn't matter," he said with a shrug. "I love you, and I would give up anything for you. If you'll have me, I'd like to come with you."

I stared at him for a full minute, wanting so badly to believe it was really happening, terrified that I was dreaming and would wake up alone again in the apartment, wrapped in his coat and feeling like death had come early.

"Of course," he said, his face falling a little. "I understand if you don't. I mean I guess it was stupid to just assume you'd want me to come with you. Ow!" I'd kicked him again.

"You're an idiot," I said before pulling him back down to kiss me. "Of course, I want you to come with me. I want to spend eternity with you, that would be pretty difficult if you didn't come to Chicago with me."

"Yeah well, if anyone can do difficult it's you, Jamie McHale."

"I learned from the best," I said with a small smile. "So, how are we going to do this? I mean, do you want to get re-bonded before we leave? That is, I mean, if you even want to go through that again."

He ran his thumb along my jaw giving me a soft smile.

"Jamie, I would love nothing more than to be bonded to you again, to be your husband forever. But I think, for now anyway, we should probably hold off before jumping right back into it, don't you? I mean, you have a city to run and I don't think you can do that if you are going through what we went through a month ago."

I grinned. He was right about that, though I believed all of the bad parts of the bonding were probably because Beth hadn't cast the spell correctly in the first place. But it might be better to hold off until I knew what was expected of me in Chicago before I risked it.

"But you are going to marry me again, right?" I asked hopefully.

"I swear it. And we will come back to Anaboris to be bonded in front of our families by Shawnna as soon as we can."

I kissed him hard and fast, knocking him backward, his head hitting the wall with a soft thump.

"I love you Ethan. I love you so fucking much."

"Right back at you, scumbag."

About the Author

Dakota lives in Detroit Michigan because she loves the city at night and the shopping during the day. She loves David Bowie and vampire movies, The Beatles and Dolly Parton.

She is partial to pixie sticks and cannot stand nuts...in her food. She will always believe that pizza is the perfect food. She is as much in love with her partner as she is with herself. And she will be the first to tell you how incredibly witty she is.

She doesn't believe in lipstick but won't leave the house without eyeliner. She still won't admit whether or not she really believes that vampires exist. And if you let her, she can convince you she doesn't know how to ride a bicycle.

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