



D. MCENTIRE

THE WATCHERS BOOK 1

MIDNIGHT  
*Reborn*

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# Midnight Reborn

*D. McEntire*

# Dedication

In loving memory of my father, James M. McEntire.  
December 1, 1938 – May 25, 2007  
You were with me all the way. I love you and I miss you.

Special thanks to Coffee Express-o in Charlestown, Indiana, for keeping their delicious java flowing into my cup as I worked.

To Lestrim at [myspace.com/lestrim](http://myspace.com/lestrim)—thank you for the use of Magistus' pictures for the Midnight Reborn trailer.

And...heartfelt thanks to my editor, Bethany Morgan with Samhain Publishing for all her hard work and for getting me through my first book with all of my body parts intact.

## Prologue

*Four years earlier...*

“Here’s the last box from the van, Mom.” Robyn Andrews walked into the small, one-bedroom apartment and dropped the box on the floor in exhaustion. She had been helping her mother, Rachel, lug boxes of their belongings from the rental van up two flights of stairs all morning. There weren’t that many boxes since they didn’t have much in the way of belongings, but it was exhausting nonetheless.

Robyn was fourteen, or *fourteen and a half* as she liked to remind everyone. She and her mother had lived alone since her dad walked out on them two years ago. Now, Robyn and her mother had to get by with only her mother’s salary as a cashier at the local Wal-Mart. Unable to continue paying the high rent for their house, they had to find cheaper housing, thus the move to the small apartment.

Robyn understood the reasons for moving and the situation they were in, and it broke her heart to see her mother struggle. She wished that she could help somehow, but she was only fourteen. Most places required the minimum age of employment to be sixteen.

They would persevere just as they had for two years, giving each other little pep talks every step of the way, but Robyn had found herself having to play the role of cheerleader more and more these days.

Out of the blue, it seemed their prayers were answered. Her mother was taking a lunch break from her shift at Wal-Mart when a friend of hers began talking about a waitress job at Chester’s, a bar and grill located in a small town just outside of Houston. Robyn’s mother didn’t hesitate to make a trip there to ask for the job. Chester Roy, the owner, hired her on the spot to work nights and weekends. She had come home excited about the new job and the prospect of good tips, especially on Friday and Saturday nights.

The waitress position at Chester's was what launched the search for rental property in the small town. As luck would have it, there was an available apartment only blocks away from the bar.

Although the apartment was extremely small, her mother called it a blessing and assured Robyn that everything would work out fine.

Robyn believed her mother, that was until her mother brought home Jake Carter, a man whom she met at the bar. They began spending more and more time together, which concerned Robyn. Not because she was feeling left out or that she was losing the attention of her mother to her new boyfriend. In fact, she would have been totally happy for her mother if the man had been anyone but Jake.

Jake made Robyn feel uneasy whenever he was around. He was nice looking with his long, dark hair kept pulled back into a ponytail, and his dark, sun-baked skin. But Robyn couldn't see any positive qualities beyond his looks. She was a firm believer that beauty was only skin deep. What you saw on the outside was not always what was on the inside.

It was his eyes that caused Robyn the most concern. He watched her every move like a predator searching for weaknesses in its prey and the perfect time to strike. She had never seen such cold, calculating eyes before. Saying that the man gave her the royal heebie-jeebies was an understatement. Jake frightened her. So much so she found excuses to leave the apartment whenever he came around.

The day she feared finally came. Her mother walked into the apartment after her shift at the bar with Jake on her heels as usual. They were laughing but quieted when they saw Robyn sitting at the table, eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Robyn could see the look of uncertainty in her mother's face and alarm bells started blaring in her head.

"Hi, sweetie. We've got something wonderful to tell you," her mother said with a bright smile.

*Oh please, please don't say you're getting married!* "What is it? What's going on?" Robyn tried to keep the panic she was feeling from her voice.

Her mother looked over at Jake adoringly, then turned back to her. “We’re going to stay at Jake’s ranch. He’s asked us to move in with him. Isn’t that great?”

Robyn’s heart sank and she had the awful feeling her nightmare was just beginning.

The outskirts of Houston were dotted with crop farms and ranches, each stretching out for hundreds of acres, and Jake’s ranch was no exception. It sat on acres of grass-covered rolling hills, flanked on one side by dense piney woods. A couple of outbuildings sat on the property.

Jake completed the drive up the long gravel driveway to the house. It was a beautiful log house with a covered porch and a red tin roof. Robyn looked up at the roof and wondered what it sounded like when it rained.

The truck pulled to a stop and she got out of the back. They had managed to pile everything into the bed of Jake’s truck. He had insisted they leave the furniture they owned behind and he would help her mother sell the mismatched pieces. Since his house was fully furnished, they wouldn’t be needed.

Jake ushered them inside and gave them the grand tour of the house. Robyn was ecstatic to find she had a room to herself. She had slept on the couch in the one bedroom apartment for more weeks than she cared to remember.

The fact that her mother would be sharing Jake’s room was not surprising, but now that she was face-to-face with the reality of the situation, it bothered her. Robyn told herself she was being silly and unreasonable. Of course her mother would be staying in Jake’s room. Her mother was a grown woman and made her own decisions. Robyn hoped that she was making the right ones.

The tables began to turn within days of their arrival at the ranch. She and her mother were told not to go beyond the area around the house. At first Robyn was suspicious about the sudden “rule”, but Jake’s explanation was the presence of many poisonous snakes on the ranch and that he was worried about their safety.

As usual, her mother totally agreed and as much as she hated to admit it, the reason did sound at least somewhat legit. Still, despite the snakes, which she had yet to see, his

order was unexpected. They had been at the ranch for several days and the topic had never come up. Not once had she heard Jake or any of his men say anything about snakes on the property, especially not around the house.

Unable to venture very far from the house, the rocking chair on the covered porch soon became Robyn's favorite spot. She stared out along the grassy, fenced-in area of the property where several head of cattle grazed. As she gazed at the sprawling, empty land, she couldn't help the escape of a heavy sigh. There was nothing here to occupy her time, at least not while having to stay so close to the house, she thought to herself with a groan of despair.

Robyn wished there was a dog, or even a cat, to keep her company. *What kind of ranch doesn't even have a few chickens running around?*

The squeak of the rocking chair seemed to echo on the porch, but Robyn found it soothing nonetheless. *At least it was something.* She turned her gaze to the ranch hands milling around the barn. There were three of them and they didn't look at all friendly, she thought with a shiver. Their faces were rough and their hard stares unnerved her. They seemed to do more smoking and drinking than ranch work. She wondered why Jake even had them there at the ranch.

One thing was certain. When the men were at the house, Robyn made it a point to steer clear of them. They smelled of whiskey, beer, smoke and chewing tobacco. *Gross!* she said to herself as she screwed up her face in disgust. The one thing that bothered her more was that Jake's behavior was no better than his men. She knew her mother really liked him, but she couldn't shake the feeling that coming here had been a bad idea—a very bad idea.

As soon as they moved in, Jake expected her mother to cook the meals for him and his men, but her mother didn't seem to mind. She told Robyn it was the least she could do since they were living there rent-free with meals included.

Robyn thought about that for a while and found her mother's words did make sense and no matter how much she didn't trust him, they were indeed better off thanks to Jake's generosity.

A couple of weeks passed, and just as Robyn had feared, the facade began to crumble, and the real Jake began to assert his control.

It started out small with little nitpicking here and there. Either her mother's cooking no longer suited him or she wasn't cleaning well enough. It didn't take long before the situation ballooned into more serious outbursts.

The first sign of trouble was when Jake accused her mother of flirting with men at the bar while she was working. When she denied his accusations, he called her a liar and backhanded her across the face, leaving an angry red mark on her cheek and a split lip thanks to his ring. He apologized, but much to Robyn's chagrin, her mother immediately forgave him. He swore it would never happen again, but it was only the beginning.

Robyn's fifteenth birthday came and went without much fanfare. Her mother gave her a pair of jeans she purchased during her lunch break, and the displeased look that flashed across Jake's face hadn't gone unnoticed, but she couldn't understand why.

Things seemed to quiet down for the next month, but soon Jake's true nature reared its ugly head once again. The accusations of Rachel was eyeing other men at the bar while she worked flew once more until finally, he forced her mother to quit her job and took Robyn out of school. "We're family now. I just want to keep an eye on you two," he explained, though Robyn couldn't understand his reasons. When she looked to her mother for help in making sense of it all, she got nowhere. Her mother seemed to be withdrawing from reality, pulling herself inward and closing herself off from everyone, including her own daughter.

They soon found themselves captives at the ranch. Jake cut them off from the outside world. There was no phone and no television in the house, and they were not allowed to leave the ranch. Actually, they were no longer allowed to leave the house.

The months at the ranch turned into a year with each day lived in fear of Jake's mood. Late one night, out of desperation, Robyn urged her mother to leave with her, and

to her relief, she agreed. They snuck out of the house, not bothering to take a single item with them.

Robyn had managed to sneak the keys of Jake's truck from his dresser as he slept off a drunken stupor. She had to help her mother into the truck and prayed her mother was able to drive after the beating she had withstood that night during another one of his drunken rages.

They hadn't gotten far, actually only to the end of the drive, before one of his men stopped them. Robyn and her mother had no idea the ranch was under guard each night, and something told Robyn the men had been told explicitly to guard them.

When they were forced to return to the house, Jake was standing on the front porch, waiting for them. Robyn almost cried when she saw the look of horror on her mother's face, not to mention how the woman's hands shook in fear.

After that night, Robyn was kept locked in a small room in the basement and both she and her mother were allowed to wear only thin nightgowns. She figured Jake thought it would deter them from trying another escape, or just another measure of his control.

Jake allowed Robyn out of her small cell only for cooking and cleaning and whatever he wanted done around the house. At first she was glad to see he was giving her mother a break, but soon began to realize an unsettling change in Rachel. Whenever she was upstairs, she noticed her mother no longer acted her normal self, and it wasn't long before she discovered why. Jake was keeping her mother drugged so she remained under his control, ready to do whatever he wanted for another fix.

Robyn's heart ached for her mother, for what her mother had become—a drug addict. It was clear Jake knew she would never try another escape and leave her mother behind.

It was late afternoon when a truck arrived at the ranch, pulling straight into the large barn. Robyn was washing the lunch dishes with the window open, letting in the warm, spring breeze. She had been cold all morning with nothing on but the thin gown.

Robyn glanced at the calendar and realized she had missed another birthday. She was now seventeen. A tear slid down her cheek as she thought about the last three years and her chest tightened when her mind screamed, *how many more?*

Each day droned on, one seemingly running into another. She went to bed late at night, exhausted, and awakened early to start another day of taking orders from Jake and his men.

As she rinsed the dishes, she picked up a conversation on the porch, recognizing Jake's voice but not the voice of the other man. The topic of their discussion almost made her drop one of the dishes to the floor. She managed to catch it just in time. Breaking anything that belonged to Jake would incur a punishment she didn't want to even think about.

One misstep was all it took to set him off, and she had the marks to prove it. Bending down to pick up the dish towel that slipped from the counter, she winced. She had taken a pretty hard kick to her back after knocking over a pitcher of tea during Jake's dinner last night. It had splashed unto his plate, making mush out of his mashed potatoes and he backhanded her before she could blink. As soon as she hit the floor, she felt his boot make contact with her back, knocking the breath from her lungs.

Robyn placed the towel back on the counter and continued with the dishes, listening to the voices outside.

Jake and the unknown man were discussing a shipment of drugs brought on the truck that pulled into the barn. In that moment, her fears about her and her mother's situation increased ten-fold. They were not only being held by a sadistic madman, they were being held by a drug runner. She knew he had them on the premises, as he was giving the stuff to her mother like candy, but never dreamed he was in the trade this deep.

In the world of drug dealers, no one was really safe. The suppliers, buyers and even competition could turn on you in a heartbeat. "Just like in the movies," she whispered to herself and her heart began to race.

## Chapter One

### *Present Day*

It was getting late. Exactly how late, Robyn couldn't tell since she was kept locked in the tiny room in the basement. There were no windows, no clock and no bed. Only herself, a thin mattress on the floor, a blanket and her journal. It was a small notebook she had found in the junk drawer in the kitchen, but it kept her sane. The pages were her lifeline, a means of releasing the fears, anger and sadness assaulting her on a daily basis.

Since the small rays of light shining through the cracks in the door from the basement window had faded, Robyn hid her journal behind a set of pipes, which led up the wall. It was her only piece of comfort and she didn't want Jake to take that away from her, just as he had taken everything else.

Leaning her back against the wall, she stared at the door, which she knew was locked. The four walls of the room had long since ceased to close in on her. She had grown accustomed to her cell. It was her sanctuary—at least that is what she told herself. When she was in here, no one touched her. No one looked at her. But, he would be back soon and he would come to get her tonight, a promise he had made earlier in the day.

This afternoon, as she served his lunch, Jake had eyed her every move, making her so nervous her hands shook. She had just set his second beer on the table in front of him when his hand snaked out and caught her wrist.

Jake had not missed the fact that another birthday had passed and she was now eighteen. With a smile that made her insides churn, he had promised to give her a very special birthday present when he returned from Chester's tonight.

She shivered, not only at the cold inside the room, but the thought of Jake's filthy hands on her, having no doubts of the *gift* he had planned to give her. She shivered again. The room was damp from the afternoon rain and she only had the thin blanket to keep her warm.

Robyn glanced around the room once more, recalling how horrifying it had been when he had first begun locking her in the small room. The dark and cold had almost driven her mad, not to mention not knowing who was on the other side of the door when she had heard the keys jingle in the lock, or what the person wanted of her.

She pulled the small blanket closer around herself and huddled under it as much as she could for warmth. The thin nightgown offered no protection against the cold.

She clamped her jaws tighter to stop the chattering of her teeth before they shattered. Tonight Robyn couldn't sleep and she was so hungry. She told herself that she should be used to the hunger by now. Jake used deprivation of food, blankets, even clothing as a means to achieve perfect compliance. But, despite what she told herself, her stomach rumbled loudly in protest.

Today was Friday, one of the nights Jake and his men left the ranch and went over to Chester's. They didn't eat before leaving, which meant no dinner for her even though it was her only allotted meal of the day.

*You won't hurt me anymore, Jake Carter!* She had gone through her plan in her head, over and over. She would wait for him, and she would escape.

Robyn lay there, staring at the wall and thinking of her mother. It had been just the two of them after her father left, and they had taken care of each other. When Jake stepped into the picture she couldn't get her mother to see that something wasn't right. Not until they moved into his house and the threats, beatings and his whiskey-driven outbursts. But, when Robyn had found out about the drugs, it had been too late. Her mother had already been hooked on whatever he was giving her.

It had been almost a month since her mother overdosed and what was left of Robyn's world shattered. Jake's answer to the situation had been to drive to the edge of the ranch and bury her in the woods. The man was without a conscience, which made him even more dangerous than Robyn had first thought.

*The drugs.* Robyn's heart ached. Maybe she had sought the high and oblivion as a means of escaping what Jake was doing to her—what he was doing to both of them. She would never know and that made the pain all the worse.

“Oh, Mom, I miss you so much,” Robyn muttered as hot tears slid down her face.

She must have dozed off when she heard the front door bang shut. *Jake was home.* She tried to remain calm, although her heart began to beat faster.

Heavy footsteps pounded down the stairs, then keys rattled as the door to her little room was unlocked. The sound of heavy breathing echoed in the room as he slowly crept inside.

Robyn lay still, as if she were asleep, one arm pillowing her head on the mattress and her hand close to her head, concealing the knife she had sneaked from the kitchen yesterday evening after cleaning up the dinner dishes.

The smell of whiskey was strong coming off his hot breath as he knelt beside her. Robyn fought down the panic rising in her chest. Her throat threatened to close and she wanted to scream, but she kept her control and lay as still as possible.

She waited and watched through partly closed lids until his face was close to hers. At that moment, Robyn swung her arm up and plunged the knife into the side of Jake’s throat. Then she brought her foot to his chest and kicked as hard as she could, sending him backwards into the cement wall with a hard thud.

Breathing heavily with the adrenaline rush at what she had done, Robyn scuttled backwards off the thin mattress and towards the door, then stopped. When she peered hard into the darkness shrouding the body that slumped in the corner, she realized that the man wasn’t Jake, but one of his men.

The realization it had been one of Jake’s men sneaking into her room while he was away brought a new wave of panic. The last time one of them had taken a notion to sample what Jake kept locked in the basement had ended up with a bullet hole between his eyes and his body dumped in the woods.

The worst part of the incident was Jake had blamed her. He had pulled off his belt and whipped her until she fell unconscious.

When Robyn had awakened, it had been to a pounding head, nausea and pain radiating throughout her entire body, making any movement excruciating and causing the room to spin.

Bile had risen in her throat and it had taken every ounce of strength to roll onto her side and vomit.

After the spasms had stopped, the pounding in her head had made her reach up to massage her temples. When her hands reached her head, she had found her hair was gone. While in his fit of rage, Jake had shaved her bald. Humiliated, she had cried herself to sleep.

Robyn pulled herself out of her horrible memories of that night. It had been hell enough to pull herself through the loss of her mother, then to suffer such abuse only a week later.

Blinking back the tears she didn't have time for and fighting the urge to feel the shag of hair which had been attempting to grow, though slowly, she looked once more at the man slumped against the wall and the blood pooling beside him—he was dead.

She sat with her back against the doorjamb and stared at the man's body for several minutes before she took a deep breath and inched forward.

With a trembling hand, Robyn gave a quick shove to his shoulder, but he didn't stir, so she poked him again. Assuring herself he was indeed dead, she pushed him face first onto the floor and searched the pockets of his jeans.

She found truck keys and a wallet, which she emptied of all the cash inside. Not bothering to count it, she balled up the cash in her fist and tossed the wallet aside, needing the money to get as far away as possible.

Quickly, she snatched her journal from behind the pipes, ran out the door, slammed it closed and locked it behind her so no one would notice she had escaped, at least not until they looked inside.

A few minutes were all she dared take to rummage through boxes of her and her mother's clothes Jake had stashed in the basement.

Robyn shoved what she could fit into a duffle bag, yanked on a pair of panties, jeans, a dark shirt, socks and a pair of tennis shoes. She found a light jacket, shoved her arms through the sleeves and pulled it around her, then headed for the stairs.

Suddenly, she stopped, swearing to herself. “Damn!” She was going to need a blanket in case she had to sleep outside.

Squaring her shoulders and mentally preparing herself, Robyn went back to the small room, unlocked the door and peeked inside. She knew the man was dead, but she couldn’t push aside her fear he would spring on her when she entered the room.

After taking one step forward, she bent and snatched up her blanket, backed out of the room and quickly slammed and relocked the door.

Robyn tiptoed up the basement stairs to the door, which the man had left wide open. She peeked into the kitchen, but the house was dark and empty. Straining to listen for any sounds, she heard nothing.

Slowly, she let out the breath she had been holding. Jake and the others were out—the house was empty.

She hurried into the kitchen to grab a few supplies for her escape and took the first things she could find, a box of crackers and a couple bottles of water, which she quickly shoved into her bag and turned to leave the kitchen.

As if someone whispered in her ear, she had a sudden thought. She opened one of the cabinet drawers and took out a large knife, telling herself that it was just for show if necessary.

She stared at the knife for a moment and thought about the man downstairs. She had killed him in self-defense, she reasoned though the guilt threatened to overcome her.

Robyn headed out the back door, letting it close slowly so that no one on the premises would hear. She didn’t know if all the men had gone to Chester’s, except the one who lay dead in the basement, or if a few had stayed behind to guard the ranch.

Making her way towards one of the outbuildings where Jake’s men stayed, she crouched low so she wouldn’t be seen.

As Robyn approached the spare truck she hoped the keys she had taken belonged to, she saw no one hanging around the grounds. After getting closer to the building where Jake’s men stayed, she peered into one of the windows. Thankfully, the building was empty and she let out a breath of relief.

Turning away from the window, she ran to the truck and slowly opened the driver's side door. When the keys fit the ignition, she sent up a silent *thank you* and started the engine. Still unsure if any of the guys were patrolling the property, she shoved the truck into drive and let it cruise down the driveway with the lights off, hoping no one would see or hear her escape.

Once she was clear of the ranch, Robyn stepped on the gas and did her best to keep the truck on the road. She had never driven before and prayed she would not kill herself, or anyone else on the road for that matter.

Driving the truck wasn't an easy task. With every bump, she was bounced around like a rag doll. It was pitch black outside and she wasn't familiar with the roads. She hoped she was going in the right direction to get to town as it had been almost four years since she had left the ranch. "Four years," she whispered with a hitch in her voice.

Robyn's mind was racing, but she had to keep focused. She had to get the hell away from there. Hopefully, it would be several more hours before Jake found out she had escaped. She had to head for Houston, ditch the truck so he would think she was still in the city and buy a bus ticket out of Texas.

There was no place to go and no one to turn to. She couldn't go to the cops. *She had just killed a man!* They would lock her up for murder and Jake would deny everything. Besides, she had heard him mention the sheriff's name and knew he had the man in his back pocket.

Robyn trusted no one around town or in the entire state of Texas for that matter. Jake was well known and had a lot of connections. The man could get away with anything. People didn't mess with Jake Carter. Those who did found themselves victims of unfortunate, and rather unpleasant, accidents. There was no other choice but to head north, as far away from Texas as possible.

Robyn did her best to keep the truck under control and not bring attention to herself. The last thing she needed was for someone to report a drunk driver swerving on the road.

*Backwoods country roads are enough to make me car sick, if they don't kill me first,* she thought to herself as she yanked the steering wheel to the left. It was pitch dark and

signs popped up suddenly on the side of the road to let drivers know of a curve or two ahead. By the time she caught sight of one sign she was already barreling down upon the sharp curve.

Robyn had no idea how many miles she had driven, but it felt like hours before the highway came into view and her heart slowed its frantic pace. At least now she would have better lighting as she drove. Veering to the right, she took the on-ramp and pressed on the gas pedal so that she was at least driving the speed limit

The adrenaline of what had happened in that basement and of the escape started to fade, and Robyn was getting tired. Her eyelids grew heavy and she fought to keep them open while the white lines on the highway, glowing from the headlights, went on and on in a hypnotic drone.

Robyn caught herself as she felt her eyes begin to lose focus. Smacking her face and pinching her cheeks didn't seem to help much. "Get a grip, Robyn. Pull out of it!" she yelled, trying to shake off the lethargy.

She rolled down the window, hoping the air blowing on her face would wake her up and bring her back to her senses. Luckily, it did.

The air was humid and sticky but felt good blowing on her head. Her hair had grown out a little, though not as much as she wished. At least she was getting past the Sinéad O'Connor stage. Now, it looked more like a really, really short buzz cut.

Finally, the faint lights of town glowed in the distance, but that did nothing to ease her fear and panic. "Okay, find a place to ditch this truck," she whispered in the dark cab of the truck as she exited the highway

Robyn drove up and down the streets of downtown Houston. It wasn't long before she passed the bus station. She continued to drive around the area in search of a place to stash the truck. After finding an alley several blocks in the opposite direction, she pulled into the shadows and parked behind a dumpster, then turned off the ignition.

Eyes closed, Robyn sat for several minutes, taking deep breaths to calm her nerves. She had to get her racing heart and trembling hands under control. She had to force

herself to stay focused so she could get out of there and as fast as possible. The more lead-time she had before Jake knew she was gone, the better her chance of escaping.

When Robyn opened her eyes she was back in control. She took the keys out of the ignition, then bent over and picked up her bag and blanket.

Something on the floorboard of the truck caught her attention and she reached down to grab it. It was a ball cap. *Just what I need*, she thought as she slapped it against her knee to shake off the dirt, then pulled it down over her head. If anyone was asked if he or she had seen a girl with buzzed hair that would be something a person would remember. She needed to blend in and remain unrecognizable, and hopefully the hat would help.

It was time to go. Robyn opened the door and got out, but before she shut the door, she had an idea. She shoved the keys back into the ignition, hoping that someone would take it as an opportunity to steal the truck and drive it further away, confusing Jake even more if it was found.

Robyn slammed the truck door and slowly walked out of the alley and headed towards the bus station.

Seeing the bus station eased her mind somewhat. She was almost out of here. There was also the added security of having people around her and being in a brightly lit area. Taking a deep, steadying breath, Robyn went inside the lobby of the bus station and set her bag and blanket on one of the chairs.

Sending up a silent prayer, she pulled the money she had taken from the wallet out of her pocket. Until now, she hadn't had time to count it and had no idea how much cash there was. Hopefully, there was enough there to buy a bus ticket out of Texas.

Slowly opening the wad of crumpled bills, she flipped through several twenties. "Twenty, forty, sixty..." She mouthed as she counted. One hundred and sixty-three dollars, she confirmed to herself as she let out a sigh of relief. Today had been payday for Jake's men and the man who lay dead at the ranch had not spent his entirely.

Looking around, she found an open ticket window and made her way over to the counter. A smiling middle-aged woman greeted her. "How may I help you?" she asked.

"Are there any buses leaving soon?" Robyn inquired.

“Well, the only bus leaving for the rest of the night is headed to Louisville, Kentucky. The bus after that won’t be leaving until the morning, and that one is headed to Tempe, Arizona.”

Robyn lowered her eyes and thought a moment while the woman looked at her expectantly. *What could I do in Louisville, Kentucky? But, if I wait around until morning, the bus station may be one of the first places Jake looks. He will most likely call the sheriff and then the police will be after me too.*

Robyn ended her worried thoughts and looked at the woman. “I’ll take a ticket to Louisville, please.”

The woman smiled and, after entering in the data on her computer screen, tore off the ticket and said, “That will be one hundred and fifty dollars, please.”

Robyn’s mouth gaped. The ticket was going to take most of the money she had, leaving little left for food and certainly not enough to stay anywhere.

Looking around her and to the street outside the big windows of the bus station’s lobby, she lowered her shoulders into a slump. She had no choice, so she handed over the money to pay for the ticket.

Robyn took her ticket, smiled her thanks to the woman then walked back to where she had left her things on the chair. She hoisted the straps of her bag over her shoulder, grasped her blanket in her hands and headed out the back of the building to the waiting bus.

The bus’ engine was humming and she knew it was ready to depart. Robyn hurried to the door and climbed aboard. She walked to the back and took a seat next to the window. As the bus pulled out of the lot, she laid her head against the window and closed her eyes, thankful that no one had taken the seat next to her.

## Chapter Two

Trigg walked up the steps of the well-lit Belvedere, avoiding the meandering of people around the hotel and those heading to and from the Wharf. The mighty Ohio River's dark water glistened as it cast the reflection of the city's skyline.

Music wafted up from a dinner boat taking passengers on a cruise down the river. In the opposite direction, the Belle of Louisville's red paddlewheel churned up the water as it slowly propelled the boat back to the Wharf.

The city of Louisville was alive tonight, Trigg thought to himself as he took in the goings on around him.

A couple passed in front of him as he searched the crowd for anything out of the ordinary. Since he was taller than most men, he didn't move from his spot. The couple didn't impede his view in the slightest.

With a sigh, he finally turned towards the hotel. It was time to get to work. He was here for a reason and it wasn't sightseeing. Trigg was a Watcher. He was also a vampire.

It was that time of year again. Time for the bigwigs from Headquarters and Cell leaders from this region to discuss the city's upcoming events.

Trigg had been called to attend the meeting in place of his Cell leader, Tank, who was currently leading a mission in Ohio. Rayne, Tank's Second in Command, was also out of the city on a recon mission.

One by one the Watchers filed into the small meeting room, which suddenly became overcrowded. Trigg was edgy as he sat at the conference table and listened to the various discussions going on around him. The voices and laughter echoed off the walls and made his head pound.

He lounged in a seat at the far end of the room with his feet on the chair next to him, mostly because he didn't want anyone sitting close. He had a thing about his *personal space*.

Everyone in the room was employed by Dr. Stephanus Olivia, one of the richest and well-respected men in the country. He was also the creator of the society known as the Watchers.

As Trigg glanced around the crowded room, he thought about the lengths Dr. Olivia had gone to get to this point. The legacy of the Watchers dated hundreds of years ago, when a vampire by the name of Damiano Polatori had saved Stephanus' life after the man's village had been attacked in the early seventeen hundreds by vampires, or Rogues as Damiano had called them.

The vampires had killed Stephanus' family and left him gravely injured. He agreed to be converted and hunted along side of Damiano for centuries until Damiano was ambushed and slain by Rogues.

From there, as the story had been told to Trigg during Watcher Orientation, Stephanus had sought out and recruited others, creating the first group of Watchers—vampire warriors.

To this day, Watchers were still sought and recruited to take part in the battle of eliminating Rogues and protecting the innocent and he had been honored to step up to the task, that is, until now. Now, he was sitting in a stuffy, noisy room when he should be out patrolling the streets, alone.

Trigg recognized everyone in the room, even the two from Headquarters—Jarvis Barone and Farah Styles. Everyone was talking at once and he silently groaned. It was a surefire way to get nowhere fast.

Unable to stifle it, this time he groaned aloud and let his head fall to the back of his chair. He didn't have all night to listen to them argue. In a few weeks, hundreds of thousands of humans and civilian vampires would be partying on the riverfront, a rather large all-you-can-eat buffet with the main course on two legs having no idea of the danger.

"We're bringing in two hundred Watchers to police this area during the upcoming festivities. Those numbers will decrease after the fireworks show, as the festival winds to

an end, culminating with the horse race.” Jarvis addressed the group, using his baritone voice to reverberate above the voices, silencing them.

Silent curses, shaking heads and quick shifting of bodies relayed the group’s displeasure at the declaration.

“What the hell, Jarvis?” demanded Alexa, a female Watcher assigned as Cell leader in the Lexington, Kentucky, area.

“Alexa,” Farah began soothingly, “we met extensively with Dr. Olivia and the other leaders on the Council and went over the stats and information several times. Two hundred Watchers were all that could be allotted to this one area. There are so many other pressing situations going on right now and certainly not just here in the United States.”

Farah turned from Alexa and looked around the room. “I’m sorry, but this is the best we can do.”

Jarvis broke in, “Yes, so let’s not brood over it. We need to take what we have and get a plan of action settled.”

Jarvis walked over to the board on the wall and picked up one of the markers. Spread out on the left side of the board was a map of the entire city. On the right was a map of the downtown and riverfront areas.

Over the next few hours, the plans for the placement of the Watchers during one of the city’s biggest events, the fireworks show, began to take shape.

Farah had made notes on suggestions for technological and communication equipment, as well as transportation and lodging needs, promising she would get those approved through Headquarters and have them in place in time for the festival.

This mission had been tackled year after year, so nothing was really new to any of them. Having people on the inside, in areas such as police, medical, legal and even on the festival committee was certainly an asset. They weren’t Watchers, but civilian vampires and humans who were deemed trustworthy, and all were on Dr. Olivia’s payroll.

The meeting concluded, and Trigg gathered his notes and a copy of the waterfront festivities map which included his notations and patrol layout for his Cell. He would sit

with them and go over their orders within the next couple of days after some of the concerns brought forth this evening were ironed out with Headquarters.

Jake was enjoying himself as he sat in a booth at Chester's. Every Friday and Saturday night, he and his men would head there for a good time.

He was listening to the jukebox wailing George Strait's "A Country Boy Can Survive" and nursing a whiskey when one of the waitresses sauntered up to his booth.

"Evening, Jake," she said with a smile.

"Evening, Carla," Jake returned with a smile of his own. He always enjoyed stopping in for a beer and watching Carla make her rounds. She intentionally swayed her butt underneath her short skirt, and her huge breasts threatened to pop out of her blouse every time she bent over the table, which was something she did quite frequently.

Jake stared at Carla as he rubbed the stubble on his jawline with the back of his fingers. He figured she was at least in her mid-forties, though she wore her clothes as revealing as possible as if she were in her early twenties. No doubt, he told himself, that she liked to put on a good show for tips.

Carla's ruby red lips moved with the chomping of her gum. "So, how's Rachel doing?" she inquired. "You know, I sure do miss her around here."

"Oh, she's doing just fine. She's enjoying it on the ranch," he said with a grin.

"And how's her girl, Robyn?" Carla continued.

"She's growing into a fine, beautiful young woman, just like her mother," Jake answered with a wink.

"Well, you take care of those two gals of yours, and you drive careful tonight, you hear?" Carla replaced his empty glass with another shot of whiskey and walked back to the bar.

"Yeah, I'm taking *real* good care of them," Jake muttered to himself with a slow smile. *In fact, he thought, I think I'll head back to the ranch and take care of Robyn right now.*

After flinging back his shot of whiskey, Jake motioned to his men to let them know it was time to return to the ranch. He stood and dropped a couple of bills on the table, then walked out of the bar, his men following close behind. They loaded into his truck and headed to the ranch.

As he drove, Jake recalled how he had gotten to this point in his *career*. He'd started out on the bottom of the ladder of the drug running business, working in the warehouse for a while before moving into shipping. When the former runner in the area was caught taking a little off the top here and there, his position quickly became available and Jake had been the perfect man for the job.

The ranch represented the culmination of all his hard work and his fight to climb that ladder. One look at the place five years ago while running a shipment up from Laredo was all it took. He had wanted that land and his mind had been focused on nothing else. Now, it was finally his.

Jake smiled at the thought, then turned off the road and on to the long, gravel drive that slowly wound its way up to the main house. He pulled up and parked.

Giving his men a sly smile, Jake said, "Now, ya'll don't bother me before noon. I plan on sleeping in."

With a chuckle, they all got out of the truck and sauntered off through the grass, making their way to their bunkhouse.

Jake grinned wide as he took the porch steps two at a time, opened the door and stepped inside.

"Honey, I'm home!" he bellowed, laughing at himself before closing the door behind him. *Robyn*. Just the thought of that young, soft skin...

Sauntering through the kitchen, he made his way to the basement door, which was open. Normally, the door was closed, but he didn't think much about it. Robyn's door was kept locked, and she wasn't smart enough to get away from him, he mused.

"Robyn, Daddy's home and he's got a present for you!" he called as he clonked down the stairs in his boots, making as much noise as possible to announce his presence.

He was feeling good having everything he wanted right at his fingertips—good whiskey, a nice home, an expensive truck and about to break in a new toy. She would surely take the edge off, the edge that had been growing ever since Rachel saved him the trouble of getting rid of her worthless ass, he thought to himself, holding back a laugh.

Jake made it to the bottom of the stairs and sauntered over to the door. “Rooooobyyyyn,” he cooed, just to get under her skin. The power trip was turning him on, pushed even higher knowing the fear he would see in her eyes.

He put the key in the lock and slowly pulled open the door. What he saw left him speechless.

Jake stood in the doorway with the light spilling into the room from the basement light fixture. In the far corner of the room was the man he had left guarding the ranch while he and the rest of the men headed out to Chester’s, lying face down on the concrete floor in a puddle of blood.

“Son of a bitch!” Jake yelled. He plowed his fist into the door in anger, almost going clear through. “Robyn! Girl, you better come out if you know what’s good for you!” He called, loud enough to be heard throughout the entire house.

Jake heard the front door bang open and footsteps run through the house. “Jake?” he heard someone call. “Jake, where are you?”

“In the basement,” he barked.

Bounding down the stairs to meet him was Rico, his lead man, who had a rather concerned look on his face and seemed hesitant to approach.

“What?” Jake snapped.

“When we got to the bunkhouse we couldn’t find Tony and the truck is missing.”

“Shit!” Jake spat. He turned to look at Rico and pointed into the small room. “The dumb ass is in there! Looks like he got an itch and came down here to scratch it. Got a knife in the throat for his trouble and the bitch got out!”

Rico moved around Jake to step inside Robyn’s room. “Damn!” he bit out. “What’s next, boss?” he asked.

“Get him out of here and take care of him in the woods with the others. I’m going to check the house to see if the little slut’s really gone or just hiding. Have the men check the property.”

Rico nodded to Jake and went back into the little room to remove Tony’s body.

Jake headed upstairs to search the house.

“Nothing, boss,” Rico told Jake an hour or so later.

Jake was sitting at the kitchen table, stewing. He looked up at Rico and narrowed his eyes. “So, you’re saying she drove off with the truck?” he asked.

Rico nodded.

Jake slammed his fist down on the table. “Great! Just great!” he barked.

“Boss, you want me to call the sheriff and get him out here?” Sheriff Mason was a long time friend of Jake’s and knew all about his drug business. He was also highly compensated for his silence and blind eyes.

“No, I’ll handle this myself.” Jake sighed loudly as he stood. “Robyn won’t go to the cops. She knows that I’ve got eyes and ears everywhere. We’ll just wait and see what turns up.”

Aggravated, Jake ran his hands through his hair. He knew there was nothing else they could do tonight about the situation. “We’ll head into town tomorrow to see what we can find. I’m hitting the sack.”

Rico gave Jake a nod and headed out the door. Jake turned out the light and went to his room. “You sly little bitch,” Jake cursed. “No one makes me look like an idiot!”

He silently vowed that when he found Robyn she would regret leaving the ranch. He *owned* her.

After removing and checking the pistol he kept in his shoulder holster, he unbuckled the holster and laid them both beside his bed.

Jake tried to sleep off his whiskey and rage, still feeling the ache that had come upon him at the bar. The ache of wanting Robyn. No, sleep would not come easy this night.

## Chapter Three

Robyn passed the long trip on the bus gazing out the window and listening to the conversations around her, which were mostly gossip.

One elderly lady was showing pictures of her grandbabies to a woman seated next to her who looked on intently.

“The oldest, Sarah, is going off to college next year to the University of Kentucky. She wants to be a pharmacist. She says that college is big on research and such.”

“I bet her parents are proud of her too!” said the other woman.

The bus stopped several times for meals and for two transfers. For each meal stop, Robyn had to control her hunger and her urge to satisfy it with a big meal. Instead, she munched on her crackers and drank the water she had taken from the ranch. She needed to save what little money she had left to get her through until she could find work and a shelter when she got to Louisville.

Robyn knew what it was like to be hungry. Food had been a luxury item while she was kept at the ranch. Hiding food in the kitchen and sneaking bites when she was cooking had kept her from starving.

During the last stop, Robyn heard the driver tell one of the passengers they were on their last leg of the trip and would be arriving in Louisville in less than two hours.

Feeling somewhat relieved and with a need to quell the anxiety rising in her chest, Robyn tried to nod off as it was dark outside. She would be arriving in the city in the dead of night.

During the long trip, Robyn had desperately hoped that it wouldn't take her long to find a place to settle until morning. But, since it appeared they would arrive during the late evening hours, her chances of that were slim.

She planned to find a shelter tomorrow that would take her in as well as offer her some assistance in getting her feet planted somewhere. Her only skills were cooking and

cleaning, but surely there would be some job around the city she could do. She could only hope.

Robyn had been lucky to find her birth certificate and social security card within the stack of boxes that were in Jake's basement. Her mother had brought everything with her when they moved to the ranch. *Mom.*

She missed her mother so much that her heart ached. Her mother had loved her dearly and always did her best to make sure she had everything she needed. What had her mother seen in Jake Carter? How had she gotten mixed up in drugs? Robyn forced back the tears that were behind her eyes.

As the bus hummed along the highway, Robyn closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep. The dreams came. Actually, they were nightmares. Nightmares that replayed the past few months of her life in hell, all coming back to her in vivid detail.

*Robyn was released from her room by one of Jake's men and was told the clothes needed washing.*

*She made her way up the stairs and into the laundry room to piles of clothes that needed sorting, so she grudgingly got to work.*

*An hour or so passed and she began to get concerned about her mother. Rachel had not come out of the bedroom all morning and the door was closed. She couldn't push aside the nagging unease that had settled in her stomach.*

*Finally, not able to stand the worry, Robyn went to the window and peered out to see where Jake was. She spotted him standing outside the bunkhouse talking to one of his men.*

*Seeing her chance, she ran to Jake's bedroom, but when she put her hand on the doorknob, she found it locked. Something wasn't right.*

*The doorknob held one of those flimsy locks that locked from the inside and had a hole on the outside where something small could be inserted to unlock the door.*

*Robyn went back to the window once again to see if Jake was headed towards the house. After making sure he was still busy with his men, she went to the junk drawer to*

*find something small enough to fit through the hole in the doorknob to unlock the door. Finding a small screwdriver, she went back to the bedroom door and inserted it into the hole in the knob. After turning it several times, she managed to unlock it.*

*Robyn slowly opened the door, expecting to find her mother bruised and battered from another beating at the hands of Jake. All morning she had told herself that her mother was hiding in the room so Robyn wouldn't see what he had done to her once again.*

*What she saw made her blood run cold. Her mother was lying on her back, her feet hanging off the bed towards the floor. One arm was draped across her chest. Robyn couldn't see her face as it was turned away from the door.*

*A sick feeling came over her and her heart started pounding in her ears. Sucking in a ragged breath, she walked into the room and stood at the side of the bed.*

*Her mother lay there with her eyes closed, mouth open and a needle lying by her side.*

*Robyn felt the blood drain from her head. She reached for her mother and tried desperately to feel for a pulse in her neck, but there was nothing. Not willing to believe she was dead, she laid her head on her mother's chest to listen to her heart. Nothing.*

*Her mother was gone. She had overdosed on the drugs that Jake kept her doped up on.*

*Robyn felt a surge of anger and grief erupt through her like a volcano. She grabbed her mother's hand and fell to the floor.*

*"No!" She wailed at the top of her lungs. "Mama, no! Get up! You can't do this, Mama. Get up!" she cried.*

*Jake burst into the room followed by a few of his men. He looked at Rachel sprawled on her back on the bed, then turned to see Robyn hunched over on the floor, screaming and crying as if she had lost her mind.*

*"Christ!" he spat.*

*He walked over to check Rachel's pulse, thinking she was just passed out or stoned. "Damn whore done killed herself!" he cursed.*

*Suddenly, he turned to Robyn who was still wailing on the floor. With a backhand that sent her head thumping the wall hard behind her, he yelled, "Shut the hell up!"*

*Robyn stopped crying by pure force of will, but continued to shudder and draw in short, ragged breaths.*

*"Get her out of here," he growled. "Take her downstairs and lock her in until we get this shit cleaned up."*

*One of his men nodded and pulled Robyn from off the floor and dragged her out of the bedroom.*

*As the man hauled her down the hallway to the basement steps, she looked over her shoulder to see Jake carry her mother, wrapped in a sheet, out the door and toss her into the bed of his pickup as if she were a piece of trash.*

*Robyn felt the bile rising in her throat and her mind go blank without thought or emotion. It was as if she were floating in a dream. No longer able to take in the reality of what was happening.*

*The man pushed her into her room, then shut and locked the door. Robyn crawled unto her mattress, lay down and pulled her knees up to her chest. It was then that the dam broke and the wrenching sobs overtook her.*

A car horn blew outside her window, startling Robyn awake. Her face felt hot and wet. She reached up and quickly brushed away the tears she had cried in her sleep while dreaming about what had happened to her mother.

She quickly looked around the bus to make sure no one was looking at her or had seen her tears. Relieved that no one was paying any attention to her, she turned her face back to the window beside her. Thankfully, they were in the city.

The lights from the city's buildings lit up the night sky. People were walking down the street and in and out of shops and restaurants as the bus angled by. *I'm finally here*, she thought, as the bus rounded a corner and headed down a one-way street.

They came to a stop at a red light. As Robyn continued to stare out the window, she noticed a brick-lined street covered with a high ceiling. It was streaming with people and she could hear music blaring.

After the light changed, the bus proceeded down the street, then slowed before turning into the bus terminal. The brakes squealed and the familiar *chuuurrsh* sound signaled that the bus had come to a stop.

Robyn gathered up her bag and shoved her blanket inside as she stood to stretch her legs while waiting until it was her turn to join the exodus. She stepped off the bus quickly and into a drizzle of rain.

She made her way inside the terminal to inquire about maps of the city and directions to a local shelter, knowing the shelter would probably not be accessible until the next morning.

The woman at the service counter was busily assisting passengers seeking information and directions to hotels. Robyn's eye caught a wooden display holding local bus schedules and city and state maps. She perused the information, snagged one of the local maps and headed to the street. The first order of business was to find a place to hole up for the night before finding better arrangements in the morning.

The drizzle turned into a steady rain as she made her way down the street, dodging deep puddles as she walked. After a few blocks, she heard music and recalled the stone-paved street the bus had passed earlier. As she got closer, not only did the music become louder, the scent of food filled her nostrils and her stomach rumbled.

Putting her hand to her belly, Robyn stopped and checked her cash. Although she hated to spend any of it, she hadn't eaten at the last stop. Her crackers and water had only lasted so long during the trip.

Her funds were extremely tight, but if she didn't get something to eat, she was going to be sick.

Stuffing her cash into the back pocket of her jeans and pulling the collar of her jacket up around her neck, Robyn continued to walk towards the sound of music and the aroma of food.

At the end of the block, it looked as though she had stumbled upon the city's center of action. After rounding the corner by a large bookstore, she stopped. The street was crowded with people walking around, talking, laughing and drinking. *So many people.* She grimaced. Large crowds had always made her nervous.

Taking a deep breath and steeling herself, she continued up the stone-paved street, thankful that it was covered by the high ceiling, stopping the rain that had relentlessly poured down the back of her ball cap and inside her jacket.

Speakers blasted music and huge television screens showed the accompanying music videos. Robyn stopped in front of a restaurant. It looked warm and comfortable inside, something she longed for—a place to sit and melt away.

After several minutes of staring through the window of the restaurant, she decided to go inside and hoped there was something cheap on the menu she could get to soothe her grumbling stomach.

“Hi! How many in your party and do you prefer smoking or nonsmoking?” The perky hostess walked up to Robyn as she entered the door. Her smile seemed genuine and warm, which almost made Robyn smile in return, but she didn't. She was too tired and hungry to smile.

The hostess wore a very short, black skirt and a black button down shirt, which bore the name of the restaurant. She had her hair, which was black and tipped with red streaks, up in ponytails on each side of her head. Her tanned legs were bare and she wore little black socks with black boots. *Stylish*, Robyn thought.

“Uh, just me and nonsmoking please,” Robyn said so quietly it was a wonder the hostess heard her over the music and all the talking and laughing going on in the restaurant.

The hostess replied, “Follow me,” and led Robyn through the tables to a booth near the back.

Once Robyn was seated, the hostess placed a menu in front of her and advised that her waitress, Lisa, would be there shortly to take her order.

Robyn picked up the menu and glanced at the prices. Her eyes bulged and her heart sank. She could definitely not afford a meal, not even a cheeseburger, though the thought of one almost made her groan aloud.

She turned the menu's pages and checked over the appetizers and frowned because their prices weren't much better. The side items caught her eye and she was thankful some were cheap enough she could afford one.

When her waitress, Lisa, danced over to her table, something she realized was the norm in this restaurant, Robyn had made up her mind. She tried to wipe the frown from her face before looking at the waitress standing before her.

"What can I get for you?" Lisa asked with a bright smile.

"I'll have a small order of fries," she said then hesitated, "and water, please." She handed the menu back to the waitress and turned her eyes back to the table to hide the shame she felt.

"Sure, coming right up. I'll be right back with your water," Lisa said before she turned and headed off towards the kitchen.

Robyn removed her ball cap and ran a hand through the damp fuzz of blonde hair. She caught herself and was looking around to see if anyone was staring, when she noticed a rather large man, who was definitely looking at her.

He sat in the very back of the restaurant, about four booths from hers and seemed to fill the entire booth and tower over his table. Robyn couldn't quite see his face. It was as if he were sitting in the shadows. She could feel him though, and the feeling she got was *danger, lethal*. But, there was something more. His demeanor was thick with sensuality, which surprised her. How could someone who looked so scary be so very sexy?

Robyn was surprised at her thoughts. Never had a man interested her before, especially not like that. Even before things took a turn for the worse at the ranch, Jake and his vulgar men had never interested her in the slightest. The thought of them now turned her stomach.

Catching herself staring at the rather enticing man, Robyn quickly pulled her cap back on her head and looked down at her table. She knew better than to stare. Jake had

practically beaten that rule into her. She shifted and nearly winced. The bruises she sported from the last beating still smarted.

Robyn sat quietly, looking at her hands, which were clasped on the table while she waited for the waitress to return. A few times she glanced around the restaurant at the other patrons, watching them chat and laugh. Families and friends were enjoying good food and each other's company and she envied them.

At one table, two young boys were blowing the paper off straws, using them as projectiles against each other. Suddenly, one of the waiters ran up to the table and threw a handful of straws at them. Everyone at the table laughed, and the additional straws meant more ammunition for the boys.

As she continued to look around the restaurant, she couldn't keep her gaze from returning to the man at the booth in the corner. He sat alone and seemed to be constantly scanning the room, even while he ate his meal.

*A cheeseburger.* Robyn stared at his plate and her mouth began to water. Her stomach growled loudly and she pressed a hand to it, trying to stifle the noise. It felt as if her insides were slowly shrinking, drying up and wasting away to nothing.

It wasn't long before her waitress, Lisa, came back to her table with her glass of water and small plate of fries. Robyn smiled at her bleakly, trying to be polite, then reached for her napkin.

After grabbing the bottle of ketchup and shaking it a few times, she twisted off the cap and turned it upside down, letting a few lines of the thick red sauce dribble over her fries.

The fries were hot, and Robyn felt she had died and gone to heaven. After popping a particularly long fry in her mouth, she closed her eyes and savored it as she chewed, practically moaning at the taste.

She ate slowly, being sure to chew each fry until she could chew it no more. She wanted to drag this meal out. She didn't know what time the restaurant would close, but hoped it wasn't for a few more hours. The thought of going back out into the cold rain made her shiver. Maybe she could inconspicuously sit there for another hour or so. The

restaurant was warm and she felt safe. The music was entertaining and periodically, the waiters and waitresses got up on chairs, dancing and singing along with the music videos.

Robyn found herself smiling, something she had almost forgotten how to do. This moment, this small piece of time, smoothed away all her troubles.

She could forget everything and just enjoy, but when it ended, she would go outside and find a place to crouch and hide until morning. Hopefully, she would catch a few minutes of sleep.

## Chapter Four

The Watchers' meeting had finally ended and Trigg left the hotel, deciding to walk off his growing agitation. He hated being around people, and having to sit in that cramped meeting room with the other Watchers for the past several hours had been pure hell. What was worse was thinking about the next weeks to come.

Each year the two-week festival was a big pain in the ass and this year would be no different. A hoard of people crowded into the city, many getting stoned beyond reason and no one paying attention to what was going on.

People got stupid when they were partying, especially on the crowded riverfront, and the Rogues were counting on that. It was the best time for the bloodsuckers to strike. The perfect hunting ground and their prey wouldn't even see it coming.

Trigg grumbled at the thought. Although he didn't associate with humans in any way, shape or form, he certainly didn't want to see innocent people fall victim to the Rogues. Their killings were often brutal, vicious. It was something they got off on. Something they craved.

He walked down the steps of the Belvedere and turned, heading towards the heart of the city, ignoring the rain that had turned from a drizzle to a pour.

Sitting in the meeting room all that time was not only boring beyond belief, it made him hungry. He wondered if sitting down to a good meal would settle him down. Besides, he still had time to kill before dawn and he'd never pass up the opportunity for a large, juicy steak or cheeseburger. He laughed at that, thinking that he almost sounded like Vane, one of his Cell-mates. Vane always had something going into that mouth of his, whether it was food, or the tongue of the woman of the week.

Trigg decided to head to his favorite restaurant since it was only a few blocks away. He walked down the street unnoticed, passing people as they wandered in and out of the city's bars and restaurants.

One of the theater's shows had just ended. As its doors opened, Trigg crossed the street to get away from the throngs of people spilling out onto the sidewalk. Many would head out to eat, he thought, so he stepped up his pace before seating problems at the restaurant added to his headache and sour mood.

Just as he arrived at Fourth Street, the block where the restaurant was located, a small figure amidst the crowd caught his eye. A waif of a girl was standing in the pouring rain while huddled over a small stack of bills, counting the cash. Suddenly, her shoulders slumped and she hesitated a few moments before shoving them into her back pocket.

With a slight shrug of her shoulders, she pulled the collar of her jacket closer to her neck and proceeded down the street, heading in his direction.

Trigg didn't know why she had caught his attention. He had walked the streets of this city and cities like it night after night for what seemed like an eternity, hunting rogue vampires in an effort to protect humans and fellow, more civilized, vampires. Not once in all this time had he paid much attention to those around him, those he swore to protect. His focus was always on seeking out and eliminating Rogues.

Only a short while ago he had passed throngs of people on his walk to Fourth Street, but had paid them no mind. It wasn't as if he had a particular dislike for humans, or others of his kind for that matter, he just didn't want to deal with them. He wanted to do his job and be left alone.

What in the devil made him notice her? Unmistakably, he had felt something as he watched her, as if her sadness and despair, so evident in the way she carried herself, washed over him. Trigg scowled at himself for even thinking such a thing. He was just tired and needed to eat and get back to the Cell.

Turning away from the girl as she continued to make her way in his direction, he rounded the corner and walked to the door of the restaurant.

Once inside the hostess greeted him and he sent her a mental compulsion of where he wanted to be seated, the same place he always sat—in the back of the room at the last booth, facing the door. If anyone was seated in that spot, they quickly felt the urge to move or were suddenly finished with their meal and vacated the booth.

Trigg never sat with his back to a door. It was best to be aware of what was going on, including who came and went.

Not long after he had been seated and his order placed, he caught sight of the girl he'd noticed earlier, hovering outside the restaurant and staring in the window. She stayed there for several minutes as if contemplating whether or not to come inside.

Finally, she squared her shoulders, and walked inside. To his surprise, the hostess seated her a few booths down from his. Actually, he was glad she had been seated close to him, but he wasn't about to admit it.

Trigg watched the girl intently as she frowned over the menu. She looked over the items many times, turning the menu over and over before staring down at one section. He knew the menu inside and out, having been here too many times to count, and knew she was looking at the side orders. *As skinny as she is*, he thought, *she should be ordering everything on the menu!*

When his cheeseburger arrived, Trigg situated the plate in front of him and grabbed the ketchup.

After squirting a hefty dollop of ketchup on his plate for his fries, he picked up the very rare, jumbo cheeseburger and launched in with a huge bite.

Looking up over the cheeseburger he held to his mouth, he saw the girl staring, but she wasn't staring at him. Those big, blue eyes were looking almost reverently at his cheeseburger.

Stopping in mid-chew, Trigg felt something peculiar wash over him. The look of longing he saw on her face and the pain in her eyes almost stopped his heart. Before he could blink, she had lowered her eyes back to her table and placed a hand over her mid-section. With his keen hearing he heard the long growl of her stomach.

Trigg had the powerful urge to pick up his plate, walk over and sit at her booth, and share what he had with her. He felt the need to give her anything she asked for, to feed her from his plate by hand.

Where the hell did that come from? What the hell was wrong with him? What did he care about this all too skinny girl who had the air of a kicked one-time-too-many dog?

After giving himself a mental ass-kicking, he took another bite of his cheeseburger and tried to push all thoughts, except for his delicious dinner, out of his mind.

As he finished off his meal, Trigg couldn't stop himself from watching the girl eat her fries. She ate slowly, intently, savoring every bite as if it were her last meal.

Though she wore a jacket, Trigg could see by her hands and wrists that she was bone thin. Her face was long and pale, making her dark blue eyes seem too big for her face. With every quick glance around her, he saw the look of fear on her face, as well as loneliness.

Loneliness was something he knew all too well, but didn't dwell on. In fact, he enjoyed being alone. There was no one to tell him what to do, where to go or even how to act. He relished the freedom, *or did he?*

His focus returning to the girl, he gave her the once over, noticing the small shirt she wore under her jacket, which was soaked from the rain. She had to be chilled, he thought, his forehead creased in a frown. Running around in the rain with her frail body would surely make any human sick. And why did that make him concerned?

Shaking off his thoughts, which were beginning to annoy him, he rose from the booth and plopped down some bills to pay for his food and a decent tip. He turned to leave, but took one more look at the troubled girl, still chewing her fries while glancing around the room.

Trigg breathed a sigh and sat back down in the booth. He sent a compulsion for the waitress to come back to his table. When she did, he pulled a twenty out of his pocket and gave explicit instructions to take a loaded cheeseburger and a big chocolate shake to the girl sitting four booths down. He also instructed the waitress to allow the girl to sit as long as she wanted and not be pressured into leaving once her meal was finished.

The waitress glanced in the direction to which he was referring and nodded. Trigg sent another compulsion to ensure his instructions were carried out and that the waitress didn't just pocket the money instead.

After the waitress left for the kitchen, Trigg stood once again, and this time he left the restaurant without daring to glance back at the girl who had captivated his attention.

He didn't question his reasons for what he had just done. In fact, he didn't want to think about it at all. He had to focus on the events at hand and needed to get back to the place he shared with three other Watchers, his Cell-mates.

A small grin almost touched his face at the thought of that phrase. It was used often enough among his comrades as a joke, although it was, in all honestly, a true endearment. Even to him.

One big family. Brothers and sisters who had taken a vow to uphold the mission to eliminate vampires who preyed on humans and even other vampires.

Rogues thought themselves superior to humans, as well as vampires who didn't follow their lead and blended in with human society. They looked only to satisfy their bloodlust—the lure of warm blood and the thrill of the kill.

Trigg's smile faded as he stepped out into the rain and headed back towards the east side of Main Street where his Cell was located.

Feeling the need to take one last patrol for the night, he decided to take the route closer to the highway where Rogues were known to lurk in the shadows. With the mood he was in, he was itching for a fight.

Walking along the now deserted downtown streets, he took his time. The rain didn't bother him. Besides, it was nature's people-repellant, he mused. Most people would rather stay warm and dry indoors, which meant they were out of his way.

Trigg used his senses as he walked to detect the presence of Rogues, as well as humans in the area. If there was a human around, especially this time of night, they must be stupid, drunk or suicidal. He rolled his eyes at that thought. From his experience humans were rather careless. No civilian vampire would use such bad judgment, unless they were young and foolish.

Surprisingly, he didn't pick up anything and wondered if it had something to do with the rain. To his knowledge, rain hadn't kept the Rogues from hunting before. Or maybe, he thought again, the low number of Rogues in the area meant that they hadn't yet made their way into the city. If that was indeed the case, this was definitely good news where the Watchers were concerned. They had time to implement the plans coming from

Headquarters and have the extra men in place before the bloodsuckers had a chance to gather and find lairs in which to hide.

After roaming downtown awhile, Trigg reached a narrow alleyway that led to a parking garage behind what had been a large old warehouse, but had recently been renovated into office space for a healthcare company. The company owned the garage and employees working the evening shift entered it late at night, many of them alone.

Through the pounding of the rain, Trigg could hear a scuffle on the floor above him. “Yep, another night.” He sighed to himself. He knew a skirmish when he heard one and headed up the stairs of the parking lot to the next level.

When he reached the top of the stairs, he stopped to listen for the location of the noise. Rogues. He could sense them, smell them—the smell of blood and death. The stench permeated the air and turned his stomach and he wondered why humans couldn’t smell them.

Pinpointing their location, he sprinted across the cement floor and up the ramp to the half level. There he spotted two Rogues attempting to pin a man, who looked to be in his thirties, onto the hood of a car.

The man was dressed in a business suit and sported an athletic build. Giving the Rogues a run for their money, he held his own in an attempt to protect himself. He probably would have fared much better if his attackers had been human.

His briefcase lay on the floor beside the car with its contents spread everywhere. The Rogues were slipping on papers as they tried to subdue their late night snack.

“I hate to disrupt your meal, boys, but I believe it’s bad to eat anything after six or seven o’clock. They say it puts on weight. Probably not good for the digestive system, either,” Trigg drawled with a sly grin.

The Rogues backed away from the man, who quickly slumped to his knees in exhaustion. They walked around the car to face Trigg, sneering at him to show their displeasure at the interruption.

“No one invited you to the party, Watcher,” one of them said through gritted, bloodstained teeth.

Trigg walked towards them, eager to get this battle going. He reached out his hand and curled his fingers several times in a “bring it on” gesture.

Robyn was still chewing on her fries and letting her gaze wander to the other patrons sitting in the restaurant. Her attention was caught once again by the man sitting in the corner when he slid out of the booth.

He unfolded his muscular frame from the confines of the small booth and stretched his long legs, and Robyn almost choked.

As he reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded stack of bills, his movements made the muscles in his legs and upper body bunch and ripple. The action made her heart beat a little faster. The man was so amazing she wanted to wag her tongue and follow him anywhere.

He turned and made a move in her direction, then stopped suddenly. Robyn looked away quickly, but out of the corner of her eye, she saw him slide back into the booth. Moments later, the waitress, Lisa, walked over and listened as he spoke to her, his voice too low for Robyn to hear.

After Lisa left, the man stood again and this time he did walk in her direction without stopping. Robyn sucked in a nervous breath just as he passed, catching the scent of musk, leather and man. *Even his scent is sexy and dangerous*, she thought to herself as she dared to turn her head and watch him make his way to the front door of the restaurant. His walk was graceful, but predatory, and she wasn't the least bit surprised to see people step to the side, giving him wide berth as he passed.

After a few moments, he was gone, and she was once again alone. She frowned at the thought. She had been alone when she walked into this restaurant. Just because she had made eye contact...several times...with Mr. Tall, Dark and Broody didn't make them acquaintances or anything. Then why hadn't she felt alone as he sat there in the corner? Why had she felt safe, protected?

Robyn looked up and saw the waitress coming towards her booth carrying a platter, which she placed down in front of her.

"I...I didn't order this," she stammered as she looked wide-eyed at Lisa.

Lisa grinned, then said, "Don't worry, it was ordered and paid for just for you."

Before Robyn could ask what she was talking about, Lisa walked away.

While Robyn stared at the huge, fully dressed cheeseburger with fries sitting in front of her, Lisa returned with a tall chocolate shake.

"There ya go," Lisa said with a wink. "This is for you too."

"I...I don't understand," Robyn said totally flabbergasted. She looked up at Lisa with a bewildered look.

"That guy who was sitting in the back booth told me to get you a cheeseburger platter and a huge chocolate shake. He also told me to make sure that you were allowed to sit here as long as you want and that no one bothered you." With that, Lisa left the table to check on her other customers.

Robyn couldn't believe her good fortune. She hoped that she would run into Mr. Mystery, as she decided to call him, again so that she could thank him. She was still hungry after finishing her small plate of fries.

Without waiting another minute, she cut her cheeseburger in half, since it was too large to fit into her small mouth, and dug in. The warm juices from the burger filled her mouth and she almost moaned aloud. Swallowing, she picked up the shake to wash it down. After one sip, she sighed. *Heaven!* It had been so long since she had had ice cream. *Pure heaven.*

Once she polished off as much as she could, Robyn got a box from the waitress for her leftovers. She would eat them for breakfast tomorrow morning. Sheepishly, she left her booth, feeling guilty she was unable to leave the waitress a tip.

With her head down, Robyn made her exit from the restaurant. She could tell from the way the customers had cleared out and only a few stragglers remained inside it was almost closing time.

Now that she was back outside, she looked around to see if there was any place to huddle unseen until morning. After spotting what looked like the perfect place under the

stairs leading to the upper level of the covered plaza, she cautiously made her way in that direction.

“Hey, you!” came a voice from behind her.

Robyn turned to see a security guard walking her way, eyeballing her bag.

“You can’t camp out here. You’ll have to move on.”

Robyn nodded at the guard, turned and headed out to the street. The last thing she needed was for someone to call the cops on her.

Once again Robyn was in the pouring rain. She stood there, swiveling her head as she took in her surroundings. Sadly, to her left were only buildings and cars parked along the street. To her right, the same. Nothing that looked like shelter.

Straight ahead, however, Robyn could see the highway rising above the smaller buildings. *Well, she thought, homeless people find shelter under highways and overpasses. Guess I can too.*

Robyn headed in that direction, walking as fast as she could in the rain. Her ball cap pulled down low over her head as far as it would go in an attempt to keep the rain out of her face didn’t stop the water from dripping underneath the collar of her jacket and down her back, drenching her shirt.

After turning into a small alley, she found a parking garage in the back of one of the buildings. At least this was shelter from the rain, she thought with a mental sigh. If she hid well, no one would see her.

A small river of rainwater coming in from the street flooded the bottom floor of the parking garage. Robyn decided to go up a couple of levels, hoping for a dry spot to camp out for the night.

Climbing the cement stairs, she caught the sound of a scuffle followed by a thud and she froze, listening intently for more noises. When she heard voices, curiosity kicked in and she continued to climb the stairs to the next level.

To her amazement, Robyn saw Mr. Mystery, the guy from the restaurant, facing two men, while a man in a business suit sat slumped against a car, his chin resting on his chest

Mr. Mystery and the two men looked as though they were ready to go toe-to-toe. Just as she was about to ease her way over the last step to get a closer look, she glanced down at the box in her hand, containing the other half of her cheeseburger and leftover fries. If she brought the food up with her, someone would smell it and know she was there.

Robyn backed down the stairs and placed the box on the window ledge in the stairwell. She would come back for it later. Now she was ready to check out what was happening up there.

Slowly, she crept back up the stairs, crouched and soundlessly skirted across the floor to squat behind a car parked at the end of the ramp, then peered around the car's bumper.

The man from the restaurant was wielding a dagger, while the two men circled him. She held her breath as they taunted him like wild animals hunting prey, smiling and making strange growling noises.

Robyn could not see Mr. Mystery's face as his back was to her. He didn't move. He just stood quietly, following their every move with the dagger held out at his side, ready to do business.

As if on cue, a third man sauntered out of the shadows and stood with the other two men who had stopped circling as soon as he had appeared. Three against one, she thought in a panic. That wasn't very good odds, not to mention totally unfair.

Three against one didn't sit well with her, especially when the man had done something so extraordinarily nice for her at the restaurant. She fumbled in her bag until her hand brushed the handle of the large kitchen knife she had taken from Jake's ranch. "Well," she muttered to herself, "this was supposed to be just for show. Guess it's show time."

Now that she had herself talked into joining the rumble, she shoved her bag into the concrete wall for safekeeping. After this was over, she would know where to find it.

As quietly as she could, she eased herself from the front of the car, crouched low and eased her way to the front of the next one, and then the next, until she reached the car right behind the three men who were about to gang up on the man from the restaurant.

From the way the three were acting, she figured they intended to rob the guy, and the wild look on their faces made her think they were stoned out of their gourds.

Holding her breath, Robyn gathered all her courage. What did she have to lose? She felt she owed this man for his kindness. If someone was in need of help, many people just walked by as if they were blind, which was exactly what the men on Jake's ranch had done. They knew about the beatings that went on in that house, but they looked the other way. Sometimes she had heard them laugh and joke about it.

Robyn steeled her thoughts and let them fuel her resolve to help him. Taking in a deep breath, she slipped out from behind the car.

Trigg froze. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the girl from the restaurant slowly make her way from behind a car, and creep up behind one of the Rogues with a large knife gripped in her hand.

He marveled at how her eyes showed fear, but also determination. Though what she was doing was stupid, she definitely had balls, he'd give her that.

Her actions intrigued him. What in the world could be going through the mind of this skinny girl to jump into a fight between four men? He admired the spunk of this little human female, which almost brought a smile to his lips, but he caught himself before he gave anything away.

Robyn managed to get close enough to the man standing directly in front of her. "Back off!" she said in the harshest voice she could muster, though her hands were trembling, making the knife wobble.

The Rogue directly in front of her slowly turned to regard her as the other two stopped and turned their heads to look her way. The feral look on the face of the man who stood mere feet away from her made her blood run cold. He looked almost mad. The slow, evil grin that crept across his face stunned her.

She had first thought the men to be high on something, but his eyes were not dilated or glassy. They were glowing an eerie red that made her gasp.

“Well, look what we have here,” he said with a sneer as he glanced at the other two men, then returned his savage gaze to her. “Another snack, though not much meat on her bones. But she might prove to be entertaining. What do y’all think?” He glanced again at the other men who were smiling and nodding in agreement.

“Leave her be, Rogue!” Mr. Mystery said in a low, rumbling voice. It sounded almost like a growl and reverberated throughout the parking garage.

His voice captivated her, the sound tingling over her body. She found herself wanting to sit and replay it over and over through her head. That thought was cut short as the man in front of her lunged forward. She jumped back, swinging the knife in self-defense.

Her swing brought the knife slicing across her attacker’s forearm, stopping his assault. In what seemed to be slow motion, he glanced down at the slice on his arm.

Robyn had expected the man to yell or at least say “ouch”, but he just stood there for a moment, watching the blood flow down his arm from his torn shirt.

In the next moment, a slow hiss came from him as he turned back to her. Lips parted, revealing a mouth full of bloodstained teeth and two rather long, sharp fangs.

Robyn couldn’t move. She could only stare in horror. This can’t be real, her mind screamed in denial. These men must have some sort of vampire fetish and had their canines surgically lengthened and filed to sharp points.

The man continued to hiss as he lunged at her again, causing her to dart backwards again. She turned and ran to the nearest car, putting it between her and the mad man as protection.

When the first Rogue advanced on Robyn, the other two had attacked Trigg. He dodged a punch to his face, ducked and came in low with a head to one Rogue’s stomach, driving him hard into the cement wall where he slumped to the floor in a daze.

The second Rogue rushed Trigg from behind and sank his fangs into his shoulder. Trigg let out a grunt of pain as he backed away from the Rogue slumped against the wall but who was now trying to get back onto his feet.

Slamming the hilt of his dagger into the side of the head of the Rogue on his back, he forced the Rogue to release his shoulder. A look of menace and the promise of retribution filled the face of the Rogue as he staggered backwards from the blow.

Trigg took a second to glance at the Rogue against the cement wall and found him unsuccessfully trying to get his footing, only to fall back down to the floor with each attempt.

Robyn's heart raced as she focused on keeping the car between her and what was undoubtedly a crazed killer. Suddenly, he leapt on the roof of the car and jumped down on top of her. She fell backwards onto the cement floor under his weight, hitting the concrete with so much force the breath was knocked out of her lungs.

Stars danced in front of her eyes, and she fought to stay conscious as the man on top of her raked at her jacket and shirt. The sound of tearing fabric from his long, sharp claws filled her ears, followed by the sound of a scream. Her scream.

Pain ripped through her chest and arms, and visions of beatings she had endured at Jake's hands came flooding back to her, filling her with sudden rage. No longer was she a child. This time she had the power to do something about it. She glanced to her side and found she had not lost the knife. It was still clenched by her tight, white knuckles.

Mustering her strength, she raised the knife with a war cry that would make Geronimo proud and stabbed the man in the back where it pierced through flesh and bone, right into his heart.

With a loud shriek, the man jerked up and stared down at her with a look of horror on his face, then slowly rolled to the side. He lay unmoving beside her in a spreading pool of blood.

Robyn was dazed, and she felt frozen in place. She couldn't look at the man. *What had she just done?* In just a few short days she had killed two people. The horror of that realization rushed over her.

Finally Robyn turned her head and saw Mr. Mystery removing his dagger from the second man and straightening when a sudden flash of movement caught her attention. The man who had hit the wall had regained his footing and was streaking towards her.

In the blink of an eye, she was hurled weightlessly through the air until her body found matter. Her head hit the car, sending shards of pain slicing through her skull. The ringing of her ears was the last thing she heard before darkness overtook her.

## Chapter Five

Trigg hurdled the Rogue he had killed and sailed into the one advancing once again on the girl. He grabbed the Rogue by the head and twisted. The sickening crack of his neck breaking echoed throughout the garage.

The girl lay at his feet. She was unconscious after the hard blow her head had suffered from hitting the door of the car.

Bending down, he picked her up and placed her small body on the hood of the much damaged car to check her head and body for any life-threatening injuries. “Stupid human female,” he muttered as he looked her over.

How could this little thing, no bigger than a mouse, get up the gumption to jump into a fight that had nothing to do with her? It was his experience that humans didn’t pay attention to anything except when it directly concerned them. They were self-absorbed, oblivious.

After checking her over and convincing himself that nothing was broken, though she probably had a concussion from the blow to her head, he was suddenly at a loss. He had no idea what to do with her.

Trigg groaned. He couldn’t leave her in the parking garage. She was injured and needed help, just as she had obviously thought he had needed help. He smiled at the thought, brushing a finger down her soft cheek. *Like he needed protection.* Trigg snorted a laugh. If anyone needed protecting, it was most definitely her.

He thought about how she had acted at the restaurant. He had lost count how many times she glanced around like a scared cat.

Trigg wondered what she was afraid of. He had never seen her around town before. Would he have noticed? He knew the answer to that—he would have. Just as he had noticed her tonight. There was something about this girl that drew him. She had a presence about her that his senses had picked up on as soon as she caught his eye. There

were so many conflicting emotions radiating off of her that he felt the need to take her under his wing and shelter her.

But, there was also another part of her that wasn't clear to the naked eye. This girl had spark. Trigg shook his head, then checked her for identification. The only thing she had on her was a few dollars in her back pocket. Now he was back to square one. What was he going to do with her?

Leaving her outside the nearest hospital came to mind. The humans there would take care of the situation. Lord knew he didn't have time to deal with her. Besides, he tried to reason with himself, it was her own fault she got hurt. She should have never gotten involved. Yep, that's what he was going to do. He was going to take her to the hospital and leave her with the other humans.

Carefully, he picked her up and just stood there, looking at her face. Her hat had fallen off her head, revealing an unusually short haircut. Thick, blonde stubble covered her perfectly shaped head.

Trigg bent and retrieved the hat, keeping her close to him so he didn't drop her, and put it back on her head. He remembered how self-conscious she had been in the restaurant about her hair so he dared not leave it behind.

His job of taking care of the Rogues finished, he turned and walked towards the stairs, leaving the parking garage with the strange bundle in his arms. The dead Rogues were already beginning to disintegrate and would turn to ashes—blowing away with the slightest breeze.

Trigg couldn't push aside how it felt holding this girl in his arms. Her body was warm and soft, and her face was that of an angel. He found he couldn't stop staring at her.

The parking garage was dark and quiet, except for the sound of his boots on the concrete. As he began to descend the stairs, a low moan caught his attention and he halted, realizing he had forgotten something.

During the melee with the Rogues and the amazing act of bravery by the mouse in his arms, Trigg had forgotten all about the businessman who the Rogues had attacked.

He walked back up the stairs and placed the girl on the hood of the nearest car, praying she didn't slide off like a wet noodle as he walked over to where the businessman sat in a daze, slumped against his car. From what Trigg could tell, the man hadn't suffered any major injuries from the attack, only a few cuts and bruises.

Trigg roused the man, helped him into his car and sent him on his way with the faint memory of being accosted in the parking garage and fighting off the attacker.

He watched as the man drove away before returning to the girl. Once again she was in his arms and he had the strange feeling she was going to cause him some serious headaches.

The rain had stopped, which was a blessing, because he didn't want the girl to get more soaked than she already was as he carried her to the hospital. When he reached the end of the alley, he stopped.

It seemed his feet were unwilling to turn towards the direction of the hospital, which was what his head decided was the best course of action. But he couldn't bring himself to just leave her at that place all alone. He also suspected that once she came to, she would fly out of there as if the hounds of hell were on her heels. Something was definitely wrong with her situation, but he had no idea what.

The feeling this girl didn't have many options and she was on her own nagged at him. She needed help. But was it his place to provide it?

Cursing himself, Trigg turned in the opposite direction and headed for the building he and his fellow Watchers called their Cell, the standard name for where a unit of Watchers lived.

With each step, he told himself that he'd make sure she was okay and then send her on her way. Maybe he would give her a little money to help her out. Yeah, that would get her out of his hair, and out of his mind.

Taking the back streets and alleys so that no one saw him carrying an unconscious female and either decide to be heroic or call the police, Trigg made his way back to his Cell.

The building was an old warehouse that had been purchased and renovated for the purpose of housing Watchers in the downtown area. Its East Main Street location was the perfect spot.

Shops, bars and restaurants were located several blocks down, leaving this area practically empty. On the outside, the building still looked like an old warehouse. This provided the perfect cover from Rogues and prying humans. It was also fairly easy to secure.

After punching in the code on the keypad by the door, Trigg opened the door and entered the lower level of the unit.

An elevator took him to the next floor. There were stairs, but he didn't even want to think about taking them after carting her all the way from the parking garage. Yes, he knew he was being a wimp, but it had been a long, rainy night, and he was ready to get out of his wet clothes and relax.

The elevator stopped on the second floor. Trigg stepped out with the girl still cradled in his arms. A part of him couldn't wait to put her down, but then again, another part didn't want to let her go. For several minutes he stood in the hallway, warring with himself.

Looking down at her face, he was struck by how young she looked. So small and quiet, like a mouse, but with fire in her heart hot enough for her to go after a Rogue even though she was unaware a Rogue was not a normal man.

Trigg tore his gaze away from the feather light form in his arms. He had to think of what to do next and holding her in his arms all night was not going to get him anywhere, not to mention it made thinking impossible.

He looked at the landing on the next level where the bedrooms were located. Three rooms belonged to his Cell-mates and one was his room. There were two spare rooms for visiting Watchers and guests from Headquarters.

With a mental nod, Trigg decided to put her in one of the spare rooms. Since the house was empty, he didn't have to worry about one of the guys popping in and freaking her out. The last thing he wanted was to deal with a hysterical human female.

Trigg knew that the other guys would be gone for at least another day assisting other Cells per orders from Headquarters. There was still a possibility at least Rayne and Vane would return tomorrow. That, he thought, could be a problem. He needed to do something about this girl and fast.

He climbed the stairs, noticing how silent the place was. Normally he enjoyed the peace and quiet as he didn't associate well with others anyway. But tonight it bothered him and he couldn't fathom why. He almost felt as though he was missing something. There was an emptiness inside he had never experienced before.

Maybe the feeling had something to do with having this girl in his arms. Or maybe it was the feeling of her pressed against his chest and her warmth seeping into him, filling him. Another pleasure not experienced.

Is that what this was—lust? Was he just turned on by her? *No*, his mind whispered.

Shrugging off his thoughts, Trigg held her with one arm and reached down with the other to twist the knob. After opening the door, he stepped inside.

The room had a tall, four-poster bed that sat in the middle, and as far as furniture went, it was sparsely furnished with only the bed, a dresser and a chair.

Trigg pulled back the covers and laid the girl upon the sheet. When he straightened, he cursed. Her clothes were in one hell of a shape. Not only were they soaking wet, her jacket had been shredded and her jeans were ripped down one side.

Aggravation at the whole situation had Trigg raking his hands through his hair. Her wet clothes had to come off before they soaked the entire bed. Deciding the smart thing to do was to dress her in one of his shirts, he left the guestroom and went down the hall to his room and pulled a shirt from his closet.

After returning to the guest room, Trigg stood beside the bed, gazing over the little mouse lying there motionless. *Mouse*. The thought made him smile. She was definitely as tiny as a mouse. All she needed was a set of whiskers to go along with those big eyes.

His smile soon faded as unease washed over him at the thought of removing her clothes. Not having an explanation as to why undressing her bothered him, bothered him even more. Besides, it wasn't as if he hadn't seen a naked woman before. Hell, he'd had

plenty of women, he told himself, ignoring the fact that it had been a while—a *long* while.

But, for some reason this girl was different. She was unconscious and undressing her seemed like an invasion of her privacy even though he knew it had to be done. He couldn't help but feel she deserved so much better. She deserved warmth, care and protection and he found himself wanting to give her all those things.

Releasing a slow breath, Trigg got started. He laid her ball cap on the pillow beside her head so that she would find it quickly when she awoke. Curiosity getting the best of him, he placed his hand gently on her head to feel the stubble of blonde hair.

Closing his eyes, he let his hand brush over what felt like soft carpet. The nerve endings of his fingers came alive and tingled with every soft stroke, every caress. Unable to stop himself, he bent over her head and caught the smell of rain in her hair. Bending down further, he let his lips brush against the skin with the slightest touch stopping at the spot just under her small jaw where he listened to the soft beating of her heart.

The rhythmic tune sang to him and he sucked in a deep breath. When he inhaled, he took in her scent. *Female*.

A groan reverberated through him.

The sound returned his focus. Suddenly realizing what he was doing, he snapped open his eyes, removed his hand from her hair and scowled at himself. What the hell had gotten into him?

Reigning in his primal urges which seemed to rise up every time he looked at this girl, he reached down and lifted her into a sitting position, bracing her back with one arm while he pulled her arms out of the sleeves of her jacket. It hit the floor and lay in a wet heap.

Trigg's eyes narrowed at the sight before him. Down both arms were scars on top of scars as if she had been struck repeatedly with something. Bending one arm at the elbow, he found that the scars were also on the underside.

A mental image of her throwing up her arms, trying in vain to protect herself, surfaced in his mind and his heart began to thud hard in his chest, making it ache deep down to his soul.

The atrocities this half-pint of a girl had hidden beneath her clothing were unthinkable, he thought angrily. Who could have done such a thing to this beautiful woman? “Some worthless coward,” he answered himself aloud.

Still holding the one arm, Trigg looked down at her wrist and saw red marks encircling it. When he lifted the other wrist, he found identical markings. After a closer look, he could swear the marks looked as though she had been bound and not too long ago from their appearance.

Rage boiled inside of him at the abuse the girl in his arms had undergone, and from the scars and bruises that covered her body from the shoulders down, she had suffered quite awhile.

It occurred to him at that moment that no marks were on her neck or face. Years of being around humans had taught him many things. One thing in particular was the behavior of abusers. Many abusers were very cunning, being careful to strike only areas that could be hidden under clothing so others would not know of the abuse. His kind, however, thought the act of abuse deplorable. That is, except for the Rogues. They had no morals.

He lay her back down on the bed and grabbed the hem of her shirt, eased it up over her torso, shoulders and head, then pulled it off her arms.

Although he tried hard not to look down, his gaze found its way there anyway and he froze. It was evident that she was thin. He had seen that from looking at her tiny wrists. But the sight before him was appalling. Bones jutted out of her shoulders, and the outline of each rib showed almost transparently through the skin.

She wore no bra and there were bruises on her chest and ribs. Though they were fading to a light shade of yellow and green, he had no doubt that they, too, were recent injuries.

More scars, such as the ones covering her arms, spread across her torso. His attention caught on the angry red scratches and cuts from where the Rogue had savagely clawed at her in the parking garage.

Trigg hesitated a moment before going any further for fear of what else he may find, but he knew he had to remove the rest of her wet, dirty clothes. Steeling himself, he closed his eyes and took in a few deep breaths before continuing, then bent down and removed her shoes and socks.

A smile tugged at his face when he saw her tiny, yet elegant, feet. They almost looked like those of a child, he mused. But the rest of her body was most definitely not that of a child.

Trigg tossed her socks on the floor next to her shoes and returned to her feet. Red marks circled both ankles, similar to the ones around her wrists. Where in the world did this girl come from? Why would someone do such a thing?

He had no doubt the girl was running from someone. When he first saw her on the street and then again in the restaurant, he hadn't thought her situation was serious. He assumed she was just another girl running the streets, most likely a runaway. His "not my problem" attitude had voiced loudly to leave it be and that she would find some place to stay or whatever she needed.

Sighing at his own stupidity, he went back to the task of removing her clothes.

Next to go were her torn, wet jeans. Trigg lifted her back up to put his long shirt on her before removing her pants.

After pulling one arm through the sleeves of the long shirt, he leaned back a little to pull the shirt around to her other arm. He stopped when he noticed black marks dotting her back. Leaning closer, his breath caught. Several burn marks darkened her milky white skin—cigarette burns.

Trigg's jaws tightened and he held on to his control. He finished getting the shirt on her and buttoned it down the front. He would leave the panties, figuring she would most likely freak if she came to wearing a shirt and nothing else.

As he slowly pulled down the jeans, he was not surprised when he saw more scars.

Trigg heard a low rumble echo throughout the room and it took a moment to realize the noise was coming from him. The tight reign of his control was slipping. Seething rage clawed at him because of what had been done to this girl.

Seeing the marks on her beautiful, soft skin threatened to undo him, releasing his inner beast. He touched one mark gently before his fists clenched, ready to punch the daylights out of someone.

Before he snapped, Trigg took several deep, calming breaths. *In through the nose, out through the mouth. In through the nose, out through the mouth.*

A frown creased his brow when confusion set in. Why was he getting so bent out of shape? He didn't know this girl. For all he knew she was a thief or hell on wheels or something. She could even be wanted by the law.

Reason set in, cutting off those thoughts. Though the little mouse had spark, which he had seen first-hand tonight, he couldn't bring himself to believe that any of what she had endured had been her fault. She had been the victim of abuse, plain and simple.

Trigg gathered her clothes and tossed them into the hall before heading into the bathroom for a warm, wet washcloth. He rifled through the medicine cabinet and found a tube of antibiotic ointment to apply to her cuts and scrapes.

After returning to her side, he gently cleaned the wounds on her arms and chest, as well as the one on her thigh where the Rogue had torn her jeans. Antibiotic was spread where it was needed before he situated the shirt so it hung down over her panties. Taking a step back, he pulled the covers up to her shoulders.

She was still out.

Trigg stood, but didn't move. He felt hollow but had no reason for it. The feeling hadn't been there moments before, but only surfaced when he started to leave her to sleep. Was he a babysitter now? Trigg almost snorted at that thought. *More like a mouse sitter.*

He took the washcloth and ointment back to the bathroom and dropped them in the sink. Without casting another look her way, he made a beeline for the door and closed it softly behind him.

Grabbing up the mess that used to be her clothes, Trigg took them downstairs and tossed them in the trash. They were definitely beyond repair.

The “not my problem” monster was throwing a tantrum inside Trigg’s head and he felt mentally drained, his body close behind. Since none of his or any of the other Watchers’ clothes would come close to fitting her, he would have to get her something to wear tomorrow so she could be on her way as soon as possible.

His feet dragging, Trigg made his way back to his room and took a long shower before dropping into bed. He hoped tomorrow would straighten out this mess and he could get back to his normal life—hunting down Rogues in the evening then returning to the Cell before crashing and losing himself in the oblivion of the daytime sleep.

## Chapter Six

Robyn awoke slowly, feeling a soft mattress under her and thick covers blanketing her body. She was warm and comfortable. Something she hadn't felt in a long while.

Her eyelids fluttered open, and she tried to determine where she was. The first things she saw were the towering posts of the bed. *Where the hell am I?*

Robyn ran her hand across the soft quilt warming her body. Turning her head she realized she was in a bedroom, lying on a huge, luxurious bed. For some reason she wasn't afraid. No alarms went off in her head. She wondered if someone had found her at the parking garage, lying on the concrete, *next to a dead man*.

That thought made her heart almost jump out of her throat. What if someone had seen the dead man with the knife stuck in his back? It certainly would not have been hard to figure out that the person lying next to the dead body was a pretty good suspect. She had to get out of here.

Attempting to sit up, Robyn winced. Her head felt as though someone had clobbered her with a Louisville Slugger. She put her hand to the side of her head and gently touched a rather large goose egg.

She lay her head back down on the pillow, trying to piece together what had happened. Then, as the fog in her mind lifted, she remembered.

She could see the crazed eyes and evil grin of the man she had fought in the parking garage. "His teeth," she muttered to herself. "No, they were fangs." She raised a hand to touch her own teeth in comparison.

Maybe she had imagined it, she thought. She must have hit her head pretty hard when the man had jumped on her and she had landed on the concrete. Maybe her eyes had been out of focus. Maybe...

Suddenly, her thoughts jumped to the man from the restaurant—Mr. Mystery. "Is he okay?" she wondered aloud.

Robyn knew she had to stop thinking about all this and get the hell out of there. If the person who found her hadn't called the cops already, they probably were going to. And if they weren't?

She hated to think of what their reasons would be. After spending all that time with Jake, she trusted no one.

Taking a deep breath, Robyn rolled on to her side and swung her legs over the side of the bed. She let out a groan when she moved, feeling every cut, scrape and sore muscle. Her limbs were so stiff she thought they would snap if she moved.

The cool air on her legs made her pause. She looked down and realized she was no longer dressed in her blue jeans, but was wearing someone's shirt and nothing else except her panties.

Robyn gasped. Someone had undressed her. Someone had seen the ugly marks and scars on her body. Her body was hideous, repulsive.

A wave of shame and embarrassment washed over her. How could she look this person in the face after he or she had seen the monstrosities she kept hidden?

Robyn glanced at the clock on the side of the bed. The red numbers glowed 6:00 and a red dot lit beside the word *PM*. Six p.m. This shocked her. She must have been exhausted. That and the fact it felt as if her skull had been cracked wide open.

Where were her clothes?

Robyn got on her hands and knees and checked under the bed. Bending over brought more pressure to her head and she had to grit her teeth to hold back the pain. The only thing she found were her socks and shoes. Straightening, she scanned the room for another place to check.

A dresser sat in the corner of the room. She got to her feet and slowly made her way across the room. When she reached the dresser she had to grab it tightly, close her eyes and wait for the room to stop spinning.

After a few minutes, the feeling of being on a merry-go-round subsided and she tried breathing slowly to stop the nausea stemming from the sudden dizzy spell.

Robyn pulled open the top drawer of the dresser, but it was empty. The other three drawers were the same.

She took another deep breath, the panic beginning to build a little more in her chest.

The bathroom wasn't too far away, so she made a go of it. Although she staggered her way to the bathroom door, she managed not to fall or run into anything, which she felt was a plus.

The bathroom wasn't anything out of the ordinary. A sink, medicine cabinet, shelf with towels and toiletries and a tub with a shower curtain hanging over it.

Frowning, Robyn picked up a damp washrag and tube of ointment. Someone had attended to her cuts. *But who?*

Still no clothes and Robyn was at her wits end at what to do about it. Rubbing her arms, not because she was cold, but because she was growing afraid of her situation.

She should just walk out that door and find a way out of this place, wherever she was. It didn't matter that she only had a shirt to wear.

Having talked herself into it, Robyn was ready. She didn't know what lay on the other side of that door, but she would mow it down if she had to as she made her escape.

Robyn staggered back to the bed. Noticing her ball cap on the pillow of the bed, she picked it up and pulled it down over her buzzed head. The cap didn't feel good pressing against the latest knot on her head, but she tried to ignore it. There was no way she was going to walk around without it.

Walking around the bed while holding on to the bed posts, she tested her legs one more time to make sure they would hold, especially if she was going to have to run.

After reaching the bedroom door, Robyn slowly turned the knob and peered out into the hallway. Not seeing or hearing anyone, she slipped out.

Keeping her back pressed to the wall, she tiptoed down the hall until she was facing a banister overlooking the wide expanse of space below.

The harder she tried to listen for signs of someone in the house, the more she heard the sound of her own ragged breathing. Finally, she pushed away from the wall and

inched towards the banister but stopped about a foot in front of it, not wanting to be seen in case someone was down there.

To get a better look below, she stood on her tiptoes.

The lower level was heavily furnished. A living room with a couch and several comfortable looking chairs sat in the right half of the room. A large television hung on the wall, flanked on both sides by bookcases filled with CDs and DVDs.

She stepped a little closer to look down to the left of the living room area. There was a small elevator behind a short wall. On the other side of the wall was a large kitchen with a small table in the middle.

Robyn hung over the side of the railing as much as she dared to look under the balcony. Directly below her was a pool table and off to the side sat a dining table with enough seating for ten people.

A sudden clang from the kitchen made her jump backwards so fast that she smacked into the wall with a loud thud. She pressed a hand to her racing heart and stayed as still as possible.

Trigg heard a bang and a muffled curse. He walked around the wall separating the kitchen from the rest of the house and looked up towards the balcony. There he saw the girl plastered against the wall, inching her way back towards her room.

“Well, looks like you’re gonna live!” he said, loud enough for her to hear. He didn’t care if he sounded rude, besides, she shouldn’t be here anyway.

The girl didn’t move as if she thought he couldn’t see her. He smiled and shook his head in amusement. He might even have a little fun with this mouse.

“Hey, are you going to hide there against the wall all day or are you going to come down?” Trigg waited a moment to see what she would do next. “I don’t bite,” he said with a little humor in his voice. “Much,” he added after a slight pause.

After a few moments of hesitation, as if she was weighing her options in her head, the girl slowly edged forward, away from the wall and back to the banister. She stood there looking at him and his heart felt like it skipped a beat. It was the strangest sensation.

Right before him was this beautiful little creature, standing there, wearing only a ball cap and his shirt which was so long it fell to her knees. She was staring at him with the biggest blue eyes he had ever seen.

Funny, he thought, he had never paid attention to, or ever thought about, anyone's eyes, or hair, or body for that matter. When he had needs, they were just that—*needs*. He got what he needed from a female and moved on. No big deal.

"I guess you probably want to eat something. Lord knows you could use it!" Trigg turned and walked back into the kitchen, giving her a chance to make up her mind.

"Whatever," he muttered, trying to convince himself he wasn't bothered by how malnourished she was and how her bones protruded. He busied himself by making a pot of coffee, strong, the way he liked it.

Robyn took a deep breath to steady herself. She *was* hungry, then remembered the box of leftovers from the restaurant. She must have left it at the parking garage. *Parking Garage*.

"Shit!" she muttered, smacking herself on the forehead with her palm. She had left her bag stuffed in a hole there too!

Her stomach lurched and she felt the blood drain from her face. *Her journal*. What if someone found it? What if they contacted Jake? He would know where she was! She had to get out of here and retrieve her bag.

She looked down at herself and what little she had on. Where the hell were her clothes?

Returning her gaze to the kitchen, she could no longer see him. *Maybe Mr. Mystery put them in the wash or something. Or maybe he took them to keep her here just like Jake had done to her and her mother*. That thought sent a wave of panic through her. She had to get herself together. There was no sense in freaking out until she talked to him and found out what his game was.

Squaring her shoulders, she stepped back from the banister and made her way to the stairs. Knees stiff and refusing to bend, she held on tight to the railing as she descended

the stairs, afraid her legs would lock and she'd end up sailing down them with all the grace of a train wreck. She had enough bruises and certainly didn't need a matching goose egg on the other side of her head.

Trembling slightly, she walked into the kitchen, stopping just inside the door.

Robyn's jaw dropped.

The kitchen was the biggest she had ever seen. Oak cabinets filled each wall and the appearance of so many stainless steel, ultra-modern appliances forced a "Wow" from her lips. She couldn't help but gape at the sight, taking in every detail before turning to him. He was leaning against the counter, holding a coffee cup. His eyes were so amazing they captured her gaze. They were hazel with an odd tint of red and seemed to glitter, or maybe they were flickering.

The word *lethal* came to Robyn's mind by the way he held himself at that moment—motionless, watching, waiting.

Robyn shifted uneasily on her feet, and she had no doubt he was taking it all in, watching every subtle move she made. If she moved suddenly or turned her back to him, he would pounce.

Wavy, long brown hair with little streaks of gold mixed in, flowed to his shoulders and framed his strong-jawed face, which was clean-shaven and without a hint of stubble. His hair was beautiful. Its healthy shine seemed wasted on a man and she felt a little envious.

As he leaned against the counter with his legs crossed at the ankles, her gaze followed the long lines of his flowing, muscular body. He was dressed in a pair of cotton lounge pants and a T-shirt that stretched over his bulging pecs and biceps. Since the T-shirt was red, she reasoned that was the cause of the red tint in his eyes.

Trigg stared at her as she framed the entrance to the kitchen. She looked so delicate, like a porcelain doll. Her eyes were wary and she looked as if she was ready to bolt at any minute.

He couldn't pull his gaze away from her. He was doing his best to assert control, tamping down the beast inside that was roaring to pounce and claim her. Just looking at her made his body hum.

His mind recalled the image of her lying naked upstairs and it stirred his juices. He wanted to snatch her up and cart her upstairs to his room. He wanted to run his hands over her soft, buzzed hair. He didn't care about the scars. He would run his tongue over each and every one. Hell, he had plenty scars of his own, which made him feel as though they shared a bond.

Blood threatened to rush to his groin and he shifted his stance to get his mind away from where it was heading before a tent in his lounge pants made it obvious where his thoughts were going.

For several long minutes, she stood in the doorway, nervously tugging on the long shirt, as if she showed too much skin. He had known the ball cap would be back on her head to cover her hair. For some reason, she was ashamed of her short, buzzed hair, but he found it fascinating.

She was barefoot, and he took in the sight of her slender legs visible below the hem of his shirt as well as her tiny feet. Those feet fidgeted nervously as she shifted back and forth.

"Want some coffee?" Trigg asked, pulling himself from thoughts that only led to trouble, and breaking the spell. She nodded and took a step forward.

He took a coffee mug from the cabinet and laid it down on the table and told her to sit. She hesitated briefly before giving in and sat in the closest chair. Trigg smiled to himself. The little mouse had some backbone and he liked it.

She continued to glance nervously around as he set the coffee pot on the table, making no move to pour her a cup. As he turned to walk away from the table, he caught the look on her face. If she expected him to serve her, she had better think again, he told himself.

When she reached over and picked up the coffee pot, he noticed her hand tremble slightly, then steady as she poured her coffee.

“May I have some cream and sugar?” she asked, not looking at him.

“Creamer’s in the fridge and sugar’s on the counter,” he answered dryly.

Robyn retrieved the creamer and sugar and fixed her coffee to her liking. She was going to play this calm and cool, find out where her clothes were and get the hell out of here. She took a few moments to settle herself before she asked about her clothes.

“They were trashed so I threw them away,” he said with a shrug.

Her eyes widened as she looked at him. “What am I going to do about clothes? I left my bag at the garage so I have nothing to wear. Everything I own is in that bag. I’ve got to get back there to get it!”

Trigg studied her for a moment, noticing the fear on her face and in her eyes. He wasn’t sure if her reaction was the result of realizing she currently had nothing to wear but that shirt, or if there was something more to that bag than just retrieving her clothes. He sighed loudly and ran a hand through his hair.

Pouring himself another cup of coffee, he said, “I’ll get it when I go out tonight. Just tell me where you left it.”

Robyn described the hole in the wall where she had stuffed her bag and he nodded in understanding. She took a sip of her coffee, then looked at him again. “Um...when I get my clothes, I will get out of your hair. Thanks for taking care of me. I must have blacked out.”

Trigg leaned back against the counter, resuming his earlier pose. His response was only a grunt as he continued to drink his coffee and stare at her over the rim of his cup.

Finally he said with a smirk, “Must have been after your head destroyed that car door.”

Robyn grimaced. She lifted her hand and felt the lump on her head. It was so big, she could feel its entire outline through the ball cap and expected it to grow eyes and a mouth any minute now and become a second head. “Yeah, I guess someone’s going to be pissed when they see their car,” she said, trying to put a little humor in her voice.

“What the hell were you doing there anyway?” Trigg growled, putting his coffee cup down on the counter rather hard, making Robyn jump. His eyes flared as he looked at her.

“Well,” she began slowly, absently running her hands up and down her coffee cup, then cleared her throat to tamp down how nervous she was feeling around him. His sudden anger had both startled and confused her. There was also the fact that she didn’t know how to explain to him why she had jumped into the fight at the garage. She had felt compelled to come to his aid.

She started again with her explanation. “I was looking for a dry place to crash, and I heard the fight. I saw you and the two guys, but when the third guy came into view—” she shrugged, “—I just didn’t like the odds.”

After a long sigh, she continued. “I thought about what you did for me at the restaurant and I wanted to return the favor. I figured I could take one of them out, or at least slow him down a little while you took care of the other two.”

Trigg raised an eyebrow. “So, you didn’t think I could handle it?”

He didn’t look very amused and Robyn squirmed in her chair a little at his tone. “No, it wasn’t that. You looked pretty competent and all...” She glanced up at him. “I didn’t have anything to lose, so I just...followed my heart.” She was surprised at her admission. Why had she said that?

Out of the corner of her eye, she could see him stare at her for a long moment before he shifted slightly. Robyn worked to keep her face passive. She still felt a little keyed up from escaping Jake, arriving at this strange new city with very little money and not a clue as to what she was going to do next, then the incident at the parking garage and now, waking up here with this strange, but extremely sexy guy. She smiled inwardly at that last part, as it seemed to be the highlight of the past couple of days.

It grew uncomfortably silent in the kitchen for a few minutes.

To break the silence, Robyn spoke again. “Um...do you know of any local shelters around here? One that would take me in?”

The man frowned deeply, staring into his coffee cup that he had picked back up from the counter. His expression showed that he was pondering the question for a few moments before answering.

“You don’t really want to go there,” he said in a low tone, which almost sounded like a growl. “It’s not a place for a young woman who’s by herself.” He continued to stare into his coffee mug.

“Well,” she said slowly. “Can I borrow some money to get a place to stay until I find a job? I promise I’ll pay you back. I’ll send the money here, I swear.”

Trigg uncrossed his legs and pushed himself up from the counter. He walked to the sink, emptied and rinsed his cup, and left it there.

“You’re staying here until something can be arranged. I’ll find your bag tonight,” he said flatly as he walked out of the kitchen.

Robyn blinked. Was that an order he just gave her? *Who the hell did he think he was?*

Angry at his *presumed* authority over her, Robyn got to her feet and stomped out of the kitchen to tell him what she thought about his arrogance, but he had already gone up the stairs and into his room. “Humph!” she said as she walked back to the kitchen. “That man needs work on his social skills!” She glanced over her shoulder to his closed door and narrowed her eyes. “Either that or a good kick in the pants!”

Robyn rinsed out her cup and placed both of theirs in the dishwasher. Her stomach growled, reminding her that she was hungry. He had told her to come down and eat, but hadn’t bothered fixing her anything. “Men,” she quipped.

She peered into the refrigerator. Her choices seemed to be eggs and bacon, or bacon and eggs. Robyn pulled out the carton of eggs and the package of bacon from the refrigerator, grabbed the loaf of bread sitting on the counter and popped two slices of bread in the toaster.

Although she was still miffed by the man’s extreme lack of manners, she fixed enough bacon and eggs for them both. He must have smelled the food, because he

emerged from his room a few minutes later, fully dressed in faded blue jeans and a black T-shirt, and popped his head into the kitchen.

“I’ve made enough for both of us,” Robyn said coolly as she loaded up his plate and set it on the table. He walked over and picked it up, muttered what sounded like “thanks” and walked out of the kitchen. She gave an exasperated sigh and fixed her own plate.

After she finished eating at the kitchen table, Robyn loaded her dirty dish, utensils and the frying pan she had used in the dishwasher. Seeing it was almost full, her Suzy Homemaker persona took over, she rooted through the cabinets until she found the dishwasher detergent and started the wash.

Robyn dried her hands and left the kitchen to find Mr. Mystery. She had to stop calling him that and find out his name. She hadn’t really thought about it until now. Her biggest worry had been who brought her here and why, and the location of her clothes so that she could leave.

He was sitting on the couch in the living room with his boots propped on the coffee table. On the large screen television were two beefy men in Speedos and tights pummeling each other in a wrestling ring while a scantily clad, large-breasted woman stood outside the ring and yelled at the men grappling on the mat.

Robyn glanced at the carnage on the screen then walked over and sat in one of the overstuffed chairs.

“So,” she began. “What’s your name?”

Trigg looked at her for a moment before turning his attention back to the television, grunting his approval as one of the men held the other in mid-air and did a pile driver on him. The other man rolled around on the mat grimacing in pain.

“Trigg,” he said curtly.

Robyn nodded and waited, but he didn’t say anything else. After realizing that was all the information she was going to get out of him, she spoke again. “I’m Robyn.”

She sat up and extended her hand, but he just glanced at her and made no move to shake it. He seemed too interested in the wrestling action on the television to conduct a conversation.

Robyn dropped her hand, then gathered up his dirty plate and fork. She took them back to the kitchen, pressed PAUSE on the dishwasher and added them to its contents to be cleaned.

Trigg watched her walk away from the living room to the kitchen. Her small, round butt, faintly outlined under the shirt that she wore, swayed slightly as she walked. He continued to follow her with his gaze until she stopped at the dishwasher.

When she bent over to place the items inside, Trigg felt himself harden again at the sight, picturing himself standing behind her, taking her in the most primal way.

His control snapped. Before he could stop himself, he was off the couch and in the kitchen, standing directly behind her.

Robyn felt the hair on the back of her neck stand on end. She straightened slowly and pushed the RESUME button on the dishwasher to continue the cleaning cycle.

Taking a deep breath, she turned around and was eye level with Trigg's massive chest. She could see the quick rise and fall of his bulging muscles and heard his ragged breathing. Slowly, she lifted her gaze until she met his.

He was staring down at her. His eyes glowing, this time more red than hazel—as they had looked earlier.

Robyn stood very still, like a rabbit caught in the stare of a coyote. From somewhere in the back of her mind, memories began to come forward. Memories of seeing that hungry, smoldering look in a man's eyes and the fear it had caused her. *Not this time*, she thought to herself. Now, she had the power to stop it. She was no longer under someone's control and she would never let anyone abuse her again, even if her life was at stake.

*Show no fear*, she told herself. It quickly became her mantra. Wasn't that what you were supposed to do when facing a wild animal?

Robyn clenched her fists. She would *not* be a victim again. Raising her chin, she glared at him. "Back off!" she said through clenched teeth.

Trigg stared at her for several minutes then blinked as his hot blood began to cool. He slowly regained control of his primal urges. Urges that had him on the verge of pouncing on this little creature who was enticing to him—a definite game of cat and mouse.

The glow of his eyes faded and the original hazel color returned, red haze slipping away and his normal vision returned. A slow, one sided grin spread across his face as he took in her attempt to thwart his advances—spine fully erect to make herself seem taller, chin set and raised and those big blue eyes narrowed at him.

He put his hands in his pockets and backed up a step, and then stepped aside to let her brush past him as she left the kitchen.

Trigg watched as she tried to hold on to her cool composure while she made her way back to her room. He was amused at how she climbed the stairs with a little more speed than normal while trying to hide her hasty retreat.

Shaking his head, he walked back to the living room, sat on the couch and pondered over what to do next about his little guest.

## Chapter Seven

The heavens opened wide and a cold, spring rain streamed down over the city. It was Friday night and Chris was taking a shortcut through the parking garage in an effort to stay dry.

Chris Farmer was a local street corner drug dealer and thief. To him anything and everything was fair game. As he sauntered through the garage, he prowled around the parked cars, checking to see if any were unlocked or had something of value inside.

He made his way to the second level of the garage, continuing his perusal of the uninhabited cars. Just as he was getting ready to walk away from a car with a huge dent in the door, he spotted a bag tucked into a hole in the cement wall. Curious, and hoping something of worth was inside the bag, he picked it up and unzipped it.

A pile of clothes and a ratty blanket were stuffed inside. Disgusted with his lack of luck, Chris cursed. He yanked out pants and shirts, letting them fall to the ground in a heap, not ready to give up just yet on his find. Reaching inside again, he felt the hard, wire spiral of a notebook.

Once the notebook was in his hands, Chris let the empty bag fall to the floor alongside the clothes and blanket.

Since it seemed to be the only interesting thing in the bag, he leaned against the car and opened the pocket-sized notebook. Flipping through the pages, he was amazed at what was written on them. Tales of kidnapping, control, brutality and drug deals were described in vivid detail.

Chris smiled. “Damn, this shit’s pretty good!” Scanning more of the pages, he noticed one name on almost every one of them—Jake Carter. Surprisingly, the name sounded familiar.

A piece of paper slipped out from between the pages and floated to the floor. Chris frowned and picked it up. He unfolded the piece of paper to discover it was a birth

certificate for Robyn Andrews. Tucked inside the folded paper was a social security card in the same name.

A sly grin spread across his face. He could do some hefty identity theft with the social security number.

Deciding the notebook was worth keeping, he kicked the clothes and bag that lay sprawled on the ground at his feet underneath the car.

He checked his watch, then took off at a run for the bus stop. Having to rely on the bus for all of his transportation he knew the routes and schedules by heart. He didn't need to cart around a bus schedule to know he only had a few minutes to get there before he would miss his ride and have to wait another thirty minutes or so before the next bus arrived.

Chris stepped off the bus, the notebook tucked under his jacket to keep it dry, and headed towards his apartment. Once inside, he grabbed himself a beer and sat on the couch. The notebook contained a lot of writing and he intended to read every word.

When Chris finished reading the pages he had to laugh aloud. "Is this shit for real?" he asked himself. After thinking on it awhile, he decided to give his buddy Aaron a call.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Aaron. It's Chris."

"Hey, Chris, my man, what's happening? You need more stuff?"

"Nah, man, I'm cool. Hey, what's the name of that guy down in Texas who sends the shit up to Tennessee where your cousin makes his pickup?"

Aaron was quiet for a moment, obviously searching his memory. "Uh...I think his name is Jake Carter. Why you wanna know?"

"Well, I found this bag, see, over in the parking garage by the river. It didn't have nothing in it but clothes and shit. But then I found this notebook."

"A notebook?"

"Yeah. It's got all kinds of stuff written in there about Jake and some girl named Robyn and her mama, Rachel. That shit's deep in there, man. Talkin' about beatings and

drugs and shit. I don't think Jake would be all too happy to know about this thing sitting around. If the cops got this and had the girl, some bad shit could go down, ya dig?"

Aaron was quiet again for a minute. "Yeah, I dig. Hey, let me contact my cousin and have him get a hold of Jake or his people...let them know what you found."

"Yeah, maybe it could be worth somethin' to him," Chris said with a laugh.

"Man, I wouldn't go fuckin' around with that man. He ain't no small time shit like what we got here."

With that warning to Chris, Aaron hung up the phone.

Chris sat back on his couch, cocked an arm behind his head, tapping the notebook against his thigh as he smiled. Yep, he was going to get something for this notebook, *a lot* of something!

It didn't take long for word to reach Jake about Robyn's notebook. Now he had a general idea of where she was. Ironically enough, he had a shipment about to head in that direction.

Louisville was one of his favorite stops. This time of year he had a list of buyers lined up, ready to party during the two week festival and he was all too happy to oblige. He was going to make out big.

"Get the shit ready," Jake told his men. "We're heading out to Louisville a few days ahead of schedule. Gives me some extra time to...take a look around."

He grinned at his lead man, Rico, who understood just what he meant since he had been the one to inform Jake of Robyn's notebook. Jake wanted to take some time to hunt her down. He also was going to get a hold of that notebook and make sure it no longer existed. He didn't need anything pointing towards him or what he did in his free time.

Jake tossed his cigarette on the ground and headed back towards the house. He had some planning to do.

Robyn looked around the bathroom and found some soap and shampoo in the cabinet under the sink. A hot shower to relieve the muscle aches all over her body was just what

she needed. She unbuttoned the shirt and put it, along with her panties, on the toilet seat and stepped into the shower.

A sigh of relief escaped Robyn's lips as the hot water sprayed over her body. It felt good to be clean again. It had been days since she had bathed and was able to wash her hair.

Even with the shower on, the place was too quiet. The quiet allowed the thoughts in her head to speak louder. She didn't want to think about her predicament right now. She just wanted to relax and enjoy. To feel a little at peace.

Robyn pulled back the shower curtain slightly and looked around the bathroom. "Yes!" she squealed when she saw a small boom box sitting on the top of a shelving unit that held clean towels, washcloths and extra rolls of toilet paper.

Leaving the shower running, she grabbed a towel and quickly wiped some of the dripping water from her legs and torso.

Robyn wasn't tall enough to reach the radio so she climbed up on the toilet seat to get higher.

Trying to make sure she didn't slip from the water she was dripping all over the place, she scooted the radio closer to the edge of the shelf and pressed the power button.

Rock music blared, giving her a start as she quickly grabbed the volume knob and turned down the sound. Her heart still racing, she closed her eyes to steady herself.

Keeping the volume at a reasonable level, she flipped through the stations until she found a country station. She liked country music. Funny and saucy, slow and sad, just about any mood could be found in a country song.

The song flowing from the speakers was one she recognized which made her smile. A woman sang about her cheating boyfriend and how she got even by trashing his truck.

Robyn stepped down from the toilet seat, being careful not to slide on the pool of water she had made and stepped back in the shower.

Under the hot spray of water, she started dancing, shaking what little butt she had as she sang along. Singing was something she loved to do, that was until they moved in with Jake and she didn't dare. Now she was feeling the power from the words of the song and

singing with gusto, letting the idea of a woman standing up for herself and taking action against someone who had done her wrong wash over her. Reclaiming her life, exactly the thing Robyn planned to do herself.

Trigg was no longer interested in the wrestling match that was on the television. He knew it was all staged. A violent nighttime soap opera. Somebody was going to beat up somebody to gain the title and then someone else would get stabbed in the back when their so-called partner turned on them. *Yep, nothing new there.*

Rubbing his face with his hands, he blew out a long breath. What was he going to do with Robyn? Nope, best not to name her...too personal. What to do with *the mouse*, he corrected himself.

He had told her that she was staying here until something could be worked out. What the hell did he mean by that? What was he going to *work out*? “Damn!” he said, exasperated.

Everything had been going along as usual. It was just another night until he spotted her in the rain and then saw her again in the restaurant. That’s where he screwed up, he thought. He should have ignored her just like everyone else around him and gone on about his business. Then he would not be in this mess of trying to figure out what to do next. Hell, what was it that made him look at her anyway?

There had been dozens of people on the street last night when he saw her standing in the rain. His mind pulled up the image of her standing alone, her tiny body shivering in the pouring rain, looking so lost. He remembered feeling the need to pull her into his arms, shield her from the cold rain and warm her with his body and his lips. He wanted to erase the scared and desolate look he had seen on her face.

Trigg got up from the couch and went towards the stairs. It was time for him to head out and hunt for Rogues. He was going to tell her to stay put. Then, he remembered she didn’t have any clothes. Unless she wanted to put on something of his or one of the other guy’s which could be wrapped around her a dozen times. That image made him laugh.

When he reached her door, he knocked but received no answer. It was then that he heard the shower.

Listening to the water, Trigg pictured her standing naked in the shower, water flowing down her neck, in between her breasts, running down her flat stomach and streaming down her legs.

He could see himself in the shower with her, using his tongue to lap up the beads of water from her shoulders, then make his way down her body...

Trigg groaned and laid his forehead against the door, fighting the urge to bang it against the hard wood several times. He was beyond hard and his jeans felt two sizes too small. He really needed to stop going there and get the little mouse out of his head. Gritting his teeth, he shifted the bulge in his pants to relieve some of the pressure.

As soon as he started to walk away from the door, the radio clicked on with the blare of Ozzy's "Bark at the Moon" followed by a small *squeak*. A corner of his mouth turned up. Whoever had used the radio last had left it on jam mode when they turned it off.

Bits and pieces of songs sounded as she surfed the channels before settling on a country song he vaguely recalled hearing a time or two. He started to step back again to leave since she was obviously busy, when he heard her sing along to the country tune.

He listened intently to her voice. It was soft, but powerful and beautiful, he thought. Closing his eyes and blocking out all other senses, he focused on her voice.

There was a hint of sass and even laughter as she sang. He hadn't seen her smile and longed to see those wide, blue eyes shine with a sparkle of joy instead of the haunted sorrow that they'd held since he had first seen her.

The shower shut off, followed a few moments later by the radio. Now was the time to leave before she discovered him listening at her door. He was sure the little spitfire wouldn't appreciate it.

He hesitated a moment, remembering the reason he was there. He needed to tell her he was going out and wouldn't be back until dawn. Another thought hit him at that moment and he imagined her answering the door in nothing but a towel, her short hair beading with water while droplets streamed down her skin to her shoulders...

No, he told himself. That would definitely be a bad idea. He would just leave a note where she would see it and get the hell out of there. He needed the fresh air to clear his head.

Robyn turned off the shower, stepped out and dried herself briskly with the large, soft bath towel. Before she hopped on the toilet seat to turn off the radio, she used the towel to clean up the water she had dripped onto the floor.

She redressed in the shirt and panties, picked up the wet towel and headed out of the bathroom. Hiding in the room all day wasn't going to cut it, Robyn told herself. It was stupid and childish. She would get her clothes back soon and then she would leave. *And go where?* Surely, she thought, Trigg would have some idea...but he had told her she was staying here. "Stay here with Mr. Charming?" she mused. "Oh joy!"

Robyn shook her head at her thoughts as she left her room and headed down the stairs. The place was noticeably quiet. She didn't hear the television and saw no sign of Trigg.

A piece of paper taped to the banister at the foot of the stairs caught her attention. She stopped on the last step, picked it up, and read.

*Will look for your bag. Won't be back until morning. Don't go bothering anything!*  
*Trigg*

"Don't go *bothering* anything?" Robyn shrieked. "What an ass! I don't care about his stuff!"

Growling through her teeth, she crumbled up the note. "Stupid man acts like I'm a thief or something," she gritted out, stomping her way into the kitchen where she threw the note in the trash.

Robyn stood there for a minute, her arms crossed, foot tapping and smoke practically coming out of her ears. "Trigg may be cute...well...maybe even *more* than cute, but his personality stinks!" she muttered.

Realizing she still had the wet towel that she had carried from the bathroom in her hand, Robyn headed towards a small alcove that looked like the proper place for a laundry room, and found the basket for dirty linens. She stared at it for a moment and couldn't help herself.

After four years of having laundry duty drilled into her, she pulled the detergent and fabric softener from the cabinet above the washer and dryer, loaded the washer with dirty towels and washrags that were already in the basket and set the wash cycle. Besides, she thought to herself, she had nothing better to do. Trigg would be gone all night so she may as well make herself useful.

Robyn picked up the empty basket and headed upstairs to check the bedrooms for more items to wash. She had counted six doors, included the one to the room she was occupying.

At first, she had thought that Trigg lived in the building alone as he hadn't mentioned anyone else living there. But, then again, he hadn't told her much of anything except his name and she was surprised he had even told her that. He most definitely could use some help in the conversation department, she mused.

Robyn's arms grew tired from carrying the laundry basket, which was close to overflowing with dirty towels and washrags. There was even a shirt or two that she had found during her perusal of the bedrooms. She had already checked out four rooms and found three belonged to men and the fourth was empty and must be a spare room.

Finally, she reached the last bedroom and knocked, just to make sure she didn't walk in on someone. When she heard no answer, she turned the knob slowly and found it unlocked.

Robyn eased open the door. A familiar scent engulfed her and she knew immediately that she had stepped into Trigg's room. Closing her eyes, she let his essence roll over her—powerful and erotic.

She flicked on the light and stepped inside.

His room was rather simple, practical, with an ordinary, albeit large, bed and a single dresser.

Robyn walked over to the bed and set the laundry basket on the comforter as she continued to gaze around the room. After what she had seen in the other rooms, she was disappointed to find practically *nothing* in his room that gave a single hint or clue of who Trigg was.

It wasn't only curiosity that made her walk to his closet and open the doors. It was a serious desire to find something that indicated the man had somewhat of a personality and wasn't totally hopeless.

The closet doors folded backwards, revealing clothes neatly stored inside. Several pairs of jeans and button-down, collared shirts hung from a metal rod. A pair of boots sat in the corner, and a stack T-shirts were folded neatly on a shelf.

Robyn immediately noticed a theme among the items in the closet and her heart sank. Every piece of clothing was in dark colors and the sight was downright depressing.

Glancing down at the shirt she had on, Robyn frowned. She knew that the shirt she was wearing was one of Trigg's shirts, as it was the same style as the ones hanging in the closet. But the shirt she wore wasn't black, or even dark blue or red as were all of his other clothes. It was white. Either he had dressed her in a shirt he no longer wanted, or he had not wanted to dress her in something dark and dismal. She wanted to believe it was the latter.

*His shirt.* The heat of a blush crept up her neck and spilled onto her cheeks. She could feel her heart beat a little faster and couldn't help the happy grin that played across her face. *He had dressed her in one of his shirts.*

She pulled the collar up to her nose and inhaled. Yes. It was definitely his. Still smiling like a teenage schoolgirl with her first crush, Robyn wrapped her arms around herself, wanting to feel his warmth touch her body.

Robyn's logical side gave her emotional side a swift kick and she rolled her eyes. She was just being stupid. Trigg had no interest in her whatsoever, and she certainly had no interest in a man with the manners of a Neanderthal.

She closed the closet doors, then turned back towards the room and let her gaze sweep from wall to wall, not able to push aside the heaviness creeping into her chest.

His room revealed nothing—nothing about what sort of man he was. She thought it rather sad not to find a part of him here. The other rooms, however, practically screamed the personality and interests of their owners.

One was adorned in an African motif, another held Native American items, and the third room had a James Bond meets Austin Powers theme. Those rooms were obviously a part of their owners. But, here there was nothing. It felt cold and empty.

Sighing, she walked into the bathroom, changed out his towels and washrag for clean ones, restocked the toilet paper and toothpaste since they were running low and left the room.

As Robyn was pulling the door to his bedroom shut, she paused and looked at the shirt she had on. She had worn it for at least twenty-four hours and the thought of wearing it until she saw Trigg again didn't sit well.

Since she was getting ready to do some cleaning, she decided to grab a clean shirt to put on after she finished. She went back to the closet and took one of the button-down shirts off its hanger, closed the closet doors and left the room.

Downstairs, Robyn carried the heavy basket to the laundry room, tossed in the additional towels and washcloths and shut the lid.

As the washer jerked back into action, she made her way into the living room to check out the huge television she had seen hanging on the wall.

## Chapter Eight

Trigg stepped out of the old warehouse and onto the city street. The evening had just started. Pink and purple lines crossed the sky as the sun dipped below the horizon.

Closing his eyes, he inhaled. He had to clear his head. He had a job to do and the first item of business that would get him back to that job was to find her bag. He had to get some clothes on her because having her run around in nothing but his shirt was too much of a temptation.

He smiled as he licked his lips, then stopped himself from letting the picture of Robyn invade his head again. That bag should be the only thought in his head right now, he told himself as he made his way back down to the parking garage. When he reached the second level of the garage, at the spot Robyn indicated she had hidden her bag, he saw nothing in the hole of the cement wall.

Looking around the car, the one the Rogue threw Robyn into, he saw the tip of something sticking out from underneath. Trigg went down on one knee and looked under the car.

Several items of clothing had been shoved underneath the car. Trigg's chest rumbled as he growled in anger. Each item he pulled from under the car was caked with filth and grime from the dirty floor and engine fluids that had leaked from this car and every other car that had parked in that spot.

The bag had also been tossed under the car. He grabbed it by the strap and pulled it out, then bent down once more to make sure nothing else remained.

Along with the anger, Trigg felt sympathy...no...something stronger than that. It was almost like grief. Grief would most likely be what she would feel when he handed her these ruined clothes. He knew they were all she had. No, he wouldn't stand for it. He would buy her some new clothes. He would...

An all too familiar smell came on the night breeze. Trigg shoved everything in the bag and zipped it up before he took to the stairs and sprinted out of the garage.

At the end of the alley, three rogue vampires stepped from the shadows. They, too, were on the hunt tonight. Once they saw Trigg standing alone, they smiled at each other.

“Looks like we’re going to have some fun tonight,” said one Rogue walking slightly ahead of the other two. The other two laughed with him as they continued walking towards Trigg.

Their reaction to seeing him in the alley was a surprise. Rogues didn’t normally seek out Watchers to fight. Actually, it was the other way around. Whatever the case, when they did meet up, Rogues didn’t back down from a fight. Trigg knew they hated Watchers as much as the Watchers despised them.

He studied the three as they ventured closer. To him, one of the most deadly things about Rogues such as these was that they appeared to be a group of college kids, hanging out on the town on a Saturday night. Nothing out of the ordinary, until you got a closer look at them, he thought.

Vampires were normally beautiful, sensual creatures. But, when vampires surrendered to their natural beast inside and embraced the bloodlust, they became a Rogue—a mindless killer who craved blood and death. It was well known that Rogues hid behind their beauty to blend in and get closer to their prey. However, one look into their wild, crazed eyes revealed the monsters they truly were. If the eyes are the windows to the soul, their eyes spoke volumes.

The Rogues stopped a few feet from Trigg. He regarded them for several moments, then turned and set Robyn’s bag down and nudged it out of his way with the tip of his boot.

“Well, well, well,” Trigg drawled, giving the Rogues the once over. “If it isn’t Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys!”

The lead Rogue’s toothy smile faltered, but he recovered quickly. “More like the four horsemen of the apocalypse, Watcher,” he sneered.

Out of the corner of his eye, Trigg saw another Rogue turn into the alley behind him. The newcomer sauntered down the alley until reaching him, then gave him a wide berth, stepping around him to join the others. He must have been disposing of the evidence of their last meal, Trigg thought with distaste.

Trigg let out a short bark of laughter at the Rogue's words. "Yeah, I can see your end is near, Rogue."

At that comment, Trigg pulled his daggers from their sheaths and settled back on the balls of his feet ready to meet them head-on. He couldn't resist another jab.

"What, only four of you? I was hoping to get a *real* workout tonight."

Trigg gave a sardonic smile. His fingers itched to get this party started. He needed to release the beast he had kept on a tight leash today while around Robyn. His aggravation at the confusing emotions and thoughts that swirled inside him needed to be focused and released, using his inner chaos to his advantage tonight.

The Rogues began to spread out, attempting to surround him and box him in. Trigg grimaced inwardly at the fact that one of them was a female. He hated the thought of having to strike or kill a female, but he quickly reminded himself that female Rogues were no different than the males. They, too, were crazed killers who had no soul.

Trigg was acutely aware of every move the Rogues made, every twitch of their fingers and every blink of their eyes. This was his life. It was ingrained in him. He didn't have to plan or to strategize. He followed his instincts and moved with the grace and speed of a natural predator.

The Rogues moved forward, closing in. They teased and taunted, flashing their bloodstained fangs. The lead Rogue sprang forward, stretching out his claws to claim flesh. Trigg jumped to the side, averting the claws, leaving the Rogue grasping nothing but air.

Another Rogue grabbed Trigg from behind, trying to sink his teeth into his neck to rip out his throat. Trigg knew to keep his neck protected at all times. He bent forward, and jammed his elbow into the Rogue's ribs, making him fall back with a howl while grabbing at his side.

The four Rogues tried to use their numbers to keep the Watcher off balance and wear him down. Three managed to pin him up against the wall, leaving the lead Rogue the honor of finishing him off.

“So, Watcher,” he snarled, wiping blood from his mouth with the back of his hand. “Hope you enjoyed our little *play time*. We’ve been looking forward to the hospitality of your fair city. The next couple of weeks are going to be a real party!”

The Rogue’s laugh was shrill and harsh.

Trigg rolled his eyes at the dramatics. Before the Rogue took another step forward a whistled tune filled the alley. It was melodic, soothing.

Trigg smiled as the Rogues looked around, trying to discern the source of the sound.

“Hello, boys. Oh, and girl, although I use that term loosely.”

The Rogues froze and looked up at the roof of the building.

“Trigg, my brother, looks like you could use a hand,” a figure above them said in a sarcastic tone.

Trigg glanced up and saw Rayne, a fellow Watcher and one of his Cell-mates, standing on the roof of the building, looking down at them. His long, straight black hair blew around him in the wind and his hands rested on his narrow, blue jeans clad hips.

“Rayne,” Trigg said with a feigned sigh. “You’re interrupting my fun. Cramping my style, man!”

Rayne knew that Trigg was just being flippant. He barked a laugh, then reached behind him and tied back his hair with a leather strap. With ease, he sprang into the air like a professional diver on a high-dive and landed in a slight crouch in the alley, directly behind the lead Rogue.

Smiling at them, Rayne spoke again.

“Now, Trigg, I know you hate to share, but I insist.”

With that, Rayne raised the walking stick he carried, placed his hands at both ends and pulled the stick apart, revealing razor sharp blades at both ends.

He stepped forward so quickly the Rogues didn't realize that he had moved. With a sweep of his hands, the blades crisscrossed, slicing through skin and bone, severing the lead Rogue's head from his body.

"Show off," mumbled Trigg as he used the distraction to shove two of the Rogues into the wall, while landing a kick to the side of the female Rogue, sending her staggering backward and slamming into a foul-smelling dumpster.

Both Watchers descended upon the three remaining Rogues, dodging claws and landing blows. Two Rogues remained focused on Trigg, trying to combine their strength to overpower him.

Trigg lengthened his fangs and latched on to the throat of one of the Rogues, sinking them in deep. He locked his jaws tight and jerked his head back, tearing the Rogue's flesh, arteries and muscle as blood sprayed in all directions.

The Rogue staggered backwards, clutching his throat with his hands. The only sound coming from him was the gurgling of blood entering his airway.

Swinging back around, Trigg grabbed the other Rogue by the shoulder and rammed his dagger into his heart. The Rogue dropped to the ground like a stone.

Out of the corner of Trigg's eye, he saw Rayne pierce the heart of the female Rogue he had been dancing with. He turned to Rayne, but stopped when he saw the look on his Cell-mate's face.

"What?"

Rayne stared at Trigg for a moment. Trigg's mouth and the front of his jacket were covered in blood from ripping the throat out of the rogue vampire.

"Trigg, my brother, it is good to see you again. Are you well?" Rayne asked with a smile.

Trigg looked at Rayne and considered the reason for the concern he heard in his comrade's voice. The stunt he had just pulled was dangerous as it fed the desires of the beast, something that could unleash the bloodlust. All warriors were aware that there had been Watchers who had lost sight of the mission. They had gotten caught up in the act of

the kill and lost focus on who their targets were. Before long, no delineation was made between rogue vampire, civilian vampire or human.

He pulled his shirt out of his pants, mentally telling himself that he was far from becoming a Rogue. He took a moment to use the clean parts of his shirt to wipe his face, mouth and the front of his jacket before answering Rayne.

“No need to lecture, brother. I got tired of playing around and decided to take him out. No biggie,” he said with a sly grin.

Not looking at him again, Trigg ran the blades of his daggers over the pants of one of the Rogues to clean off the blood, then slid them back in their sheaths. Letting out a slow breath, he looked up and met Rayne’s glowing, golden eyes.

Robyn absently clicked through the television channels. “Man, who would have guessed? Hundreds of channels and not a thing on,” she muttered.

Letting out an exasperated sigh, she turned off the television and tossed the remote onto the coffee table. She slipped her cap off her head and ran her hands through her buzzed head of hair and turned in circles, taking in her surroundings.

The building had no windows. She hadn’t noticed that before, but the feeling of being locked in her little room in the basement of Jake’s house started to seep into her thoughts.

A strong sense of panic began to well up inside of her and she decided she needed some fresh air. When Robyn had been checking out the bedrooms earlier, she had noticed a door on the side wall. It had one of those push-bar mechanisms to open it, but she hadn’t seen a lock. Hopefully the door led to the outside.

Robyn pulled her cap back on her head, took the stairs and approached the door. She pressed the push-bar hard and shoved the door open.

A fire escape was on the other side of the door. Eyeing the stairs leading to the roof, Robyn let out a happy squeal. “Perfect!”

Stepping back inside, she looked around for something to wedge in the door to keep it from shutting completely and locking her out. A small wooden block sat by the floor that must be there for just that reason.

She made her way up the metal steps of the fire escape to the roof, breathless when she reached the top.

The view was spectacular. She could not only see the beautiful lights of the downtown buildings stretching towards the sky, but turning around, she saw the lights of two bridges reflecting off the dark water of the Ohio River. Across the river, more restaurants and buildings illuminated the night.

“Wow,” Robyn whispered as she walked towards the table and chairs placed in the center of the roof. There was a comfortable breeze, which felt good as it caressed her skin, whispering against her bare legs and feet.

She settled on a chaise lounge, then lay back to stare at the sky.

The night was clear, and even with all the lights of the city, she could see thousands of stars in the sky. Robyn smiled. She felt at peace. A feeling she hadn’t known for such a long time.

## Chapter Nine

Vane sped down Main Street in his luxurious black Mercedes, drumming on the steering wheel to the beat of the music playing on the Latino radio station.

He had just left one of his favorite gentlemen clubs and was a little edgy. But since it was the night he and his Cell-mates had determined would be their night off, he could wait until they hit the town to find some lovely ladies satisfy him.

The performance by one of the women at the club had totally rocked him. She had long black hair and sported tattoos of roses all over her body. She even had long stemmed roses on the back of her thighs.

Vane had been as mesmerized as the rest of the men in the club as she climbed the pole, then swirled down like a snake before slinking across the floor on all fours to men sitting at the stage, waiting for her attention.

When the dancer's set was over, Vane had finished his drink in one gulp, then headed out for his car, wondering what he and his comrades would do tonight.

When they got together, sometimes they headed out to one of the clubs, but they also didn't mind staying at the warehouse and playing a couple games of pool or cards.

There would only be the three of them tonight as Tank, their Cell leader, was out of town on assignment.

Much of the time Vane and his comrades were scattered in order to cover the expansive city. A local college campus had been his assignment for the past month but he had recently received orders to return to downtown.

Watchers were being pulled into the city and set in place to gear up for the upcoming annual two-week festival. A deluge of rogue vampires were expected to invade the city, trying to claim it as their happy hunting ground. Hell, they were probably already licking their chops at the thought of hundreds of thousands of people lining the city's waterfront,

partying through the night under the thunder of fireworks. Luckily, an event of this magnitude was held in Louisville only once a year.

Slowing down as he reached the converted warehouse, Vane turned into the small driveway, keyed in his code to open the garage door and pulled inside.

Of course, Tank's parking spot was vacant and so was Rayne's at the moment. The Watcher was expected to return tonight as well. Trigg's motorcycle was parked in the back. He didn't drive when he patrolled the downtown streets. He said that walking kept him from getting soft. Vane chuckled at that thought. Lord knew no one would ever accuse Trigg of being *soft*. He was such a hard-ass! Never did the man say anything good about anything, or anyone for that matter.

Vane got out of his car and took the stairs. Stepping out into the kitchen, he noticed how quiet the place was. That was until his stomach rumbled, causing him to rub his rock-hard belly. "Food. Must have food!" he said, making his way to the refrigerator.

He found some lunchmeat and some fixin's hidden in the back of the fridge and decided to make himself a couple of sandwiches. Well, maybe more than just a couple—four would probably hit the spot he mused as he grabbed a plate from the cabinet and laid everything out on the table.

Lifting his nose, Vane froze.

Robyn enjoyed looking at the stars and trying to find the constellations, at least the ones she knew. She got up from the chaise and began walking over to the side of the roof that faced the city streets.

A small shed caught her attention before she reached the half wall surrounding the rooftop. Curious as to what was inside, Robyn walked over and turned the small knob on the door and found it unlocked. Slowly, she opened the doors, praying there wasn't a bunch of spiders running around in there or worse, something that would come flying out at her.

Luckily, neither of those things happened and she was glad not to have the crap scared out of her. There had been enough drama and chaos lately to last her a lifetime.

The shed contained a couple packs of playing cards, a Frisbee, a set of binoculars and a few odds and ends. She picked up the binoculars and thought how great it would be to check out a little more of the city.

After closing the doors, Robyn walked back over to the side of the roof that faced the river and used the binoculars to check out a dinner boat cruising down the river.

The binoculars were powerful. She could see the people on the dance floor. She could even see all the way across the river to the restaurants on the other side. After taking in her fill, she lowered the binoculars and went back to the side of the roof that faced the street.

Scanning the buildings and side streets with the binoculars pressed to her eyes, Robyn checked out the people laughing and walking around the downtown streets. How nice it must be, she thought, to have friends and family, and to head out and have fun at a restaurant or bar. She had never had that chance. Now she was on the run and probably never would.

Refusing to let those thoughts get her down, she continued to take in the sights through the lenses.

Robyn scanned back over to the parking garage, remembering that Trigg had promised to look for her bag. She felt a pang of panic at the thought, praying he had found it and her journal would be safe, back in her hands where no one knew it existed but her.

As she continued to people watch, she saw a small group head down the alley beside the parking garage then suddenly stop. Raising her head a little to see what they were staring at, she saw Trigg. He was standing there, feet spread apart, with daggers in each hand.

“Trigg!” she gasped. Before she could blink, the fighting ensued. Three of them managed to pin him up against the wall and her heart stopped. She wanted to scream. She wanted to cry out for someone to help him. Just as she was beginning to do just that, they stopped and looked up from where they stood, still holding a struggling Trigg against the wall.

Robyn zoomed in with the binoculars to see a tall, slender man standing on the roof above them. He looked like a hawk, ready to swoop down and catch its prey. Suddenly, that is exactly what he did.

The man leapt off the building, pulled out what looked like a long stick, yanked it apart, and then severed the head of one of the men who had been fighting Trigg.

“Oh God!” she cried, putting her hand over her mouth.

Robyn’s heart seized. *He had just killed that man!* What bothered her even more was that the others were not fighting with weapons, but with their hands.

Watching the scene play out in the street below, Robyn remembered the man who had tried to rip her to shreds in the parking garage. Looking closer at the two men and the woman who had pinned Trigg to the wall, she saw they had the same wild look on their faces, flashing sharp teeth, and using claws to fight.

As if she was seeing some bloody horror flick, Robyn stood transfixed with a hand held tightly over her mouth as she watched Trigg bite one of the crazy men on the neck and rip out the side of his throat.

Robyn let out a startled cry. Terror flooded through her and she let the binoculars slip from her fingers and fall to the ground. Her hands began to shake and she fought down the urge to vomit.

She took two steps back, shaking her head in disbelief. This man who had taken her into his home had fangs just like the crazy guys, and he had just ripped the throat out of one of them! What the hell was going on here? Who were these people? When did she enter the *Twilight Zone*?

Another thought hit her, sending up another wave of panic. *Is everyone in Louisville like this? I think I should have taken the bus to Arizona.*

Her heart pounded in her chest and she tried to catch her breath. Slowly she bent down and with shaky hands, picked up the binoculars and looked at the alley once more.

She saw Trigg and the other man standing there talking while something unbelievable happened to the bodies of the three men and one woman they had killed.

Robyn zoomed in as close as the binoculars would allow and saw the bodies begin to shrink. She sucked in a breath.

“This is so not happening. They’re disintegrating!”

A movement caught her attention. Trigg and the other man turned and began walking back towards the building where they lived—where she was. Robyn jumped. All kinds of thoughts raced through her head. She didn’t know what to do, and for the first time in two days, she was truly terrified.

Vane sniffed the air and caught a strange scent. It was human, delicate, *feminine*. A sly smile came across his lips.

Being a lover of two things—food and women—Vane laid the sandwich he had just started to make on the table and walked out of the kitchen. Keeping his sense of smell focused on the scent he had picked up, he walked into the living room and paced around, noticing the scent on the chair and couch, and then followed it up the stairs.

When he reached one of the guest rooms he opened the door slowly. As soon as it opened the scent engulfed him. He stood there taking it in and feeling his fangs elongate and his mouth water. Yes, she had been here. He noticed the rumpled sheets on the bed and smiled again.

Quickly Vane closed the door and followed the scent back down the hall. He heard a *thump* and a muffled cry from the roof and stopped to listen intently. After a few minutes he heard footsteps race across the roof and clamber down the fire escape. Grinning in anticipation he waited.

Robyn turned and without hesitating, ran towards the fire escape, her heart beating so hard and fast that her chest hurt.

She sailed down the stairs, gripping the railing hard so as not to fall if she missed a step in her rush to get back to her room and hide.

She shoved open the door, letting it hit the wall hard with a *bang* and ran down the hallway. She turned towards the direction of her room, but came up short, colliding into a

wall of hard muscle that didn't move. She bounced off, falling backwards toward the banister when large hands gripped her tightly and yanked her forward.

Robyn's breath caught in her throat. She was too scared to even let out a scream. When her vision began to clear, she saw broad shoulders, covered by a silk shirt, with several buttons undone at the top revealing tanned flesh and a small patch of dark, curly hair.

Ignoring the hard grip on her forearms, Robyn slowly lifted her eyes. She caught herself staring into the face of a gorgeous Latino man, with dark hair that had been slicked back, but still had a little wave at the ends, and piercing emerald green eyes.

"Mmm..." the man said, a side-ways grin spreading slowly across his face. "Looks like we have company."

He bent forward, stopping an inch from her neck and inhaled deeply before he leaned back and stared down at her face.

"Ah, *chiquita*, you smell good enough to eat!" Robyn heard him say before a slight frown covered his face. He leaned down again, but this time he smelled her shirt.

"Well, well. How did you come about wearing one of Trigg's shirts? Are you here solely for his enjoyment, or is he planning to share?"

When his grin became a full smile, showing tips of white fangs, Robyn stiffened and her eyes grew wide.

"You're one of *them*!" she cried and he only smiled wider. She had to react. She had to do something before *her* throat was ripped out!

Robyn lifted her leg and stepped down hard with the heel of her foot onto one of his black dress-shoes. The act must have startled him because he loosened his hold giving her the chance to get free from his hands. She shoved him as hard as she could and bolted towards the stairs, taking them as fast as her legs would carry her. She didn't see him hurdle over the rail and land on the living room floor without making a sound.

As she turned at the foot of the stairs to head towards the door leading to the lower level, she was brought up short once again. Her shirt was grabbed from behind, almost yanking her off her feet.

With all her strength, Robyn continued her momentum forward, then heard the sound of fabric ripping, followed by cool air brushing the skin on her back.

Vane reached out and grabbed the girl by the nape of the neck after his attempts to stop her by holding on to her shirt didn't work.

When the girl froze, Vane turned her around and pushed her slowly towards the kitchen before releasing her. He was captivated by those big, brilliant eyes as she stood facing him.

Vane continued to walk towards her slowly until she was cornered, pressed against the kitchen wall. Exhilaration vibrated through him from the chase the little female had given him.

He reached forward, halting for a second when he saw her flinch, then slowly removed the baseball cap from her head. For a long moment, he stared at the short, carpet-like blonde hair that covered her small head. Unable to stop himself, he reached out to touch it. He had never seen a woman with such short hair.

Sweeping his hand gently over the girl's hair, he discovered it was soft. When he glanced down, he could see that her breathing was fast and he watched the rise and fall of her chest.

"Please, leave me alone," she begged and he heard the tremble in her voice. "I'm just here until my clothes are returned, and then I'll leave."

Vance couldn't help but smile at the little woman. He moved in closer and braced both hands on the wall beside her face, purposefully caging her in.

"Leave? Oh no, *chiquita*, I think not. You see, I just got here."

## Chapter Ten

Trigg looked over at Rayne after he finished wiping the blood from his face.

“Look, don’t give me any lectures, *capisce*?”

Rayne let out an annoyed sigh, reassembled his swords back into a single walking stick and turned to head out of the alley.

Trigg picked up Robyn’s bag and stepped in beside him.

“You get orders to come back into town too?” Trigg asked, not looking over at Rayne.

“Yeah, that time of year again”.

Trigg nodded. They walked towards the street in silence before Rayne spoke.

“So, is Vane going to make it tonight?” Rayne asked.

“What?” Trigg asked, hoping that he had heard incorrectly.

“Is Vane coming to play cards or shoot some pool tonight? Knowing him, he’ll probably want to hit the bars and pick up some women,” Rayne said dryly.

Trigg stopped abruptly and stared at Rayne. He had totally forgotten about Vane returning to the Cell and suddenly he had a bad feeling.

“Where’s your Jeep?” Trigg asked in a growl.

Rayne stared at him for a moment before answering. “It’s around the corner. Why?”

“Come on. Get me back to the warehouse, pronto!”

Trigg took off at a full run towards the direction Rayne said he had parked his Jeep, and Rayne quickly caught up with him. They jumped inside and Trigg yelled at Rayne to “step on it”.

The Jeep sped through the downtown streets and when they turned into the small driveway, Trigg leapt out of the Jeep, ducking under the opening garage door before Rayne could pull inside.

He shoved open the lower level door and took the stairs two at a time, his heart racing. His only thought was getting to Robyn. After Rayne mentioned the arrival of Vane at the warehouse, his thoughts flashed to Robyn being alone in the building with the playboy wannabe.

Anger began to boil inside of him and the beast was roaring to be released. Clenching his fists so hard his knuckles turned white, he made a solemn vow. *If Vane hurts her, or even touches her...*

The door burst open, making both Robyn and Vane jump. Trigg came barreling through the doorway and then stopped, his feet almost skidding on the floor. His eyes were blazing with a tint of red fire, and his chest heaved with his heavy breathing, fists at his sides.

A low rumble emanated from him, filling the room.

“Get. Your. Hands. Off. Her.”

Each word was clipped and enunciated clearly with a low growl.

Vane dropped his hands and took a few steps back from Robyn. He turned to face Trigg, his smile faltering only slightly.

“Trigg, *mi amigo*, what’s cooking?”

“That’s not far enough. Get the hell away from her.”

Trigg’s snarling continued. His fists were clenching and unclenching as he stared at Vane through narrowed eyes, making the red glow all the more intense.

Rayne came running through the doorway and stopped abruptly.

“What the hell is going on?” he yelled.

Trigg didn’t move. He continued eyeing Vane as if he was coiled for an attack.

Vane lifted his hands up, palms out, in a gesture of surrender and had a confused, but apologetic look on his face, although Trigg was not fooled.

“Calm down, Trigg, I was just talking to the little female here. I wasn’t going to hurt her.”

Vane grinned at Trigg and Rayne as he stepped sideways, towards the kitchen table.

“I think she got a little spooked. The little *chiquita* came flying down from the roof like a bat out of hell and ran into me, that’s all.”

Robyn stood there, plastered against the wall wishing she could melt into it like wallpaper. She was afraid to move, afraid to speak. She wanted to run into Trigg’s arms for comfort, but then remembered what she had seen him do in the alley—rip out the throat of the mad man.

Looking at him, with eyes blazing and the fierce look on his face, she was afraid of him too. She didn’t know where to turn for help.

Robyn’s eyes flashed to the third man who had come into the room. She remembered him from the rooftop where he had jumped down in the midst of the fight to help Trigg. But, he was one of them. She was surrounded by monsters. She had gone from one killing beast into a house of several. It was too much.

With an anguished cry she flung herself from the kitchen wall and bolted up the stairs to her room, slamming the door behind her.

Trigg watched Robyn flee the kitchen, sheer terror on her face. His heart ached as he remembered her looking so frightened against the wall.

As she ran up the stairs, he saw that the back of the shirt she wore was ripped halfway down and his anger raged even higher. He turned abruptly to Vane and launched himself at him.

“You son of a bitch! You couldn’t keep your hands off her, could you?” Trigg bellowed.

Rayne moved in a blaze of speed and grabbed Trigg before he could get to Vane.

“Trigg, my man, get a grip! Stop it now!” Rayne yelled as he continued to wrestle Trigg away from Vane.

“Alright! I said that’s enough!” Rayne gritted out before Trigg settled and tried to get control of his anger.

“As I said before, what the hell is going on?” Rayne asked in a calm voice.

Rayne looked from Trigg to Vane and back to Trigg.

“Who the hell is that girl and what is she doing here?”

Trigg gave Vane another hard look before he turned slightly and looked upstairs at Robyn's door. He blew out a long breath and ran a hand through his hair.

"Hell," he muttered. "She just got into town. I noticed her at a restaurant where I helped her out a little by buying her some food. No big deal."

Trigg looked over at Rayne who was eyeing him intently.

"I didn't talk to her, just left the restaurant and headed out to check for Rogues."

He paused a moment, catching his breath and gathered his thoughts, recalling the events of that night.

"I ran into a couple of Rogues, actually three of them, at the parking garage you and I just left. The girl came out from behind one of the cars wielding a knife like some hell-bent Amazon warrior, and went after one of the Rogues."

When Trigg glanced at his two Cell-mates, he saw they were as shocked as he was by what the human female had done.

"She ended up taking down one Rogue while I took down another. The third Rogue picked her up and sailed her into a car door."

The other two Watchers grimaced, obviously getting a visual of her flying through the air and crashing into the car.

"Yeah," Trigg agreed. "Well, she was out cold and I couldn't just leave her there. I wasn't sure how badly she had gotten hurt." He shrugged. "I brought her here."

Rayne cleared his throat and walked over to the table, pulled out a chair and sat. Vane slid into the chair closest to him. His sandwich and all the fixings were still on the table where he had left them.

Trigg made his way to the table, pulled a chair back so that he sat a little farther way, then dropped into it heavily.

Rayne was quiet a few moments before turning to Trigg.

"Okay, I agree that you couldn't leave her there...but why didn't you take her to the ER?"

Trigg hesitated, then answered Rayne's question.

“Look, the girl had no identification and no money. She’s obviously running from someone.” He didn’t know how much more information to divulge, but decided to proceed anyway. “When I got her here, I needed to check her injuries. Her clothes were soaking wet from walking the streets in the rain, not to mention ripped to shreds by one of the Rogues. I needed to clean up the cuts and scrapes, so I dressed her with one of my shirts.”

Vane smiled, but Trigg flashed him a daring look before he continued to relay the events of the other night.

“The girl’s got marks and scars all over her body and cigarette burns on her back.”

Trigg saw Vane and Rayne shift in their chairs, obviously as displeased as he was. Abuse of a female or child, whether vampire or human, was not acceptable.

“I returned to the parking garage tonight to find her bag. I didn’t know it was there when we had left the garage until she told me about it earlier this evening. It has her clothes in it.”

Rayne nodded and got up from his chair.

“It’s still in the Jeep where you tossed it. I’ll go get it.”

As Rayne left the room and headed to the garage on the lower level, Vane got up from his chair and began to gather the sandwich fixings he had left on the table. After a few moments he spoke.

“Look, Trigg, my brother. I was totally out of line with the little lady, and for that I am truly sorry. You have my word that I won’t lay a hand on her or step out of line again. I will be the perfect gentlemen...to your *guest*.” The last part he said with a hint of humor and accusation, which Trigg certainly didn’t miss.

Trigg looked at Vane, cold and hard, studying his face and eyes, then nodded his acceptance of the apology and declaration. Leaning forward, he placed his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. He had brought her here and she was under his protection.

“Damn! She’s probably seriously freaked out right now.”

He sat up again, blowing out a long breath, then turned and looked towards Robyn's room.

"I don't know what to do with her," Trigg muttered.

Rayne came into the kitchen and put the bag on the table and Trigg continued with his story.

"She asked me to point her to a shelter and lend her some money until she could land a job," he said then glanced at Rayne. "Shelters are too dangerous for a young female who's alone."

Rayne nodded.

"Yeah, I agree with you there." Rayne said with a sigh, scraping the toe of his shoe against some imaginary spot on the floor. "But you need to work something out. She can't stay here for long. In a couple of weeks Rogues are going to be crawling all over this place."

Suddenly Rayne's head jerked up and he stared at Trigg. "Does she know about us? About the Rogues?"

Trigg thought about that for a moment. "Well, she did fight one of the Rogues at the garage and got an up close and personal look at him, fangs, claws and all. I don't know what she thinks about it, though. I haven't talked to her about it. Actually, I haven't talked to her much at all. Although it's only been a day, she's stayed out of my way since she's been here."

"Must be your impeccable social skills," Vane smirked, sitting at the table and taking a huge bite of his sandwich.

Trigg flashed Vane the finger while muttering a few choice words at him.

Vane took a bite of his sandwich, then got up and headed up the stairs, ignoring the low rumble beginning to emanate from Trigg.

"Trigg!" Rayne snapped in warning.

Vane reached the corner of the hallway where he and Robyn had collided. He bent down and picked up the binoculars she had dropped, then headed back to the kitchen and laid them on the table.

“So, what were you and Rayne up to before you came here?” Vane asked, looking at Trigg.

Trigg stared at the binoculars and thought a moment. Realization came. The fight in the alley came to mind and what he had done. A sick feeling filled his gut and his mouth went dry.

“Shit!” he spat, running both hands through his hair, leaving it tousled. “Rayne and I had a dance with some Rogues in the alley and I got a little carried away.”

“Humph,” Rayne scoffed at Trigg’s declaration. “A *little* carried away?” he asked Trigg incredulously. “You ripped the throat out of one of them. I’d say that was more than getting a little carried away, wouldn’t you?”

Vane chuckled. “Well, if that’s what she saw, that would make a hell of an impression on someone.” He grinned at Trigg, and then his smile faded. “Uh, I guess I can say that I didn’t help much.”

“You can say that again!” Trigg snarled.

“No, I mean, I was a little...” Vane shrugged a shoulder. “...well, she is a pretty little *chiquita*.”

Rayne looked at him, scowling. “Did you flash your fangs at her?”

Vane didn’t answer. He just took another bite of his sandwich, looking sheepish.

Trigg rubbed his face with both hands, then groaned and stood. “Guess I better go talk to her.” He picked up her bag from the table, turned and walked up the stairs and towards Robyn’s room.

Robyn fled up the stairs, feeling cool air on her back from her torn shirt. Pure terror gripped her. She silently cursed herself for getting too comfortable here and for letting her guard down. She knew that males couldn’t be trusted. And now, there were several males in her proximity, not to mention that these males were *not human*.

Finally reaching her room, she slammed the door shut and locked it. Looking around frantically for something to bar the door, she spotted the dresser. She pushed it as hard as she could, and managed to scoot it across the floor and shove it against the door.

Robyn backed away from the door until the back of her legs hit the bed, and she sat abruptly.

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” She was almost hysterical. “What am I going to do?” She felt trapped, and there were no windows to provide escape. She didn’t care that all she had on was a ripped shirt. If there was a way to sneak out of this room and out of the building she would do it even if she were naked.

What had she seen from the roof? *No, it couldn’t be true*, she thought. People fighting to the death in the alley. Trigg savagely tearing the throat out of one them. Not to mention the dead people disintegrating, leaving nothing behind to show that they were even there. This sounded like something out of a Stephen King novel.

The crazy ones had fought with fangs and claws. Trigg and the other two men downstairs had fangs too. And what did the one guy mean when he asked if she was there for Trigg’s enjoyment? Am I here to snack on? *Not another imprisonment*. No wonder all I have to wear is a shirt. It’s part of the plan to keep me from getting out of here!

Robyn’s mind reeled from all of her thoughts and fears. She pulled her knees up to her chest, hugged them close to her with her arms and rocked herself back and forth. She felt sick and her ears began to ring. She willed herself not to faint from fear and tried to slow her breathing.

Trigg knocked on Robyn’s door softly. “Robyn? Robyn, it’s Trigg. I need to talk to you for a sec.” He tried to keep the gruffness, his natural tone, from his voice. He wasn’t used to *talking nice*.

When Robyn didn’t answer, he tried the door and found it locked, he knocked again. “Robyn, you need to open the door and let me talk with you. There are some things I need to explain before you go freaking out on me.” Nothing.

All of the bedroom doorknobs locked from the inside, but they weren’t very substantial. They were designed for privacy and not security. Trigg extended the nail on his forefinger, put the tip in the hole in the doorknob and heard the click. He pushed the

door open slowly, but met the resistance of the dresser Robyn had shoved against the door. He smiled to himself at her ingenuity, useless as it was against a vampire's strength.

Slowly, using not much effort on his part, he applied pressure on the door while opening it, moving the dresser enough for him to enter the room.

Robyn was sitting on the bed with her head hidden in her arms, which were hugging her knees. She was rocking back and forth to comfort herself. Seeing her like that, in so much pain and anxiety made his stomach clench. He felt guilt and anger over Vane's stupidity, as well as his own.

Trigg wanted to go to her, scoop her up and cradle her in his arms and tell her she was safe. He slowly walked towards the bed and laid his hand on Robyn's shoulder.

Robyn rolled off the side of the bed in a flash and stood, putting the bed between them.

"Don't touch me!" she yelled, her eyes wide. She held up her hands, palms out, to ward him off.

Trigg made no move. He didn't want to frighten her further.

"Robyn, I'm not going to hurt you. No one is. I'm sorry that Vane scared you. He's an arrogant ass who just can't leave the females alone."

Trigg smiled to ease her, keeping his arms at his sides to show he meant no harm.

"Look, I'll go and sit across the room and we'll talk. I know you are very confused and scared at the moment, but again, there is no reason to be."

He backed away, not taking his eyes off her, picked up a chair, and placed it closer to the bathroom, leaving a clear exit to the bedroom door. He didn't want her to feel trapped. Oddly enough, it seemed he harbored some sort of compassion and that surprised him.

He watched the expression change on her face—her wide eyes narrowed in distrust, her fear and her confusion ebbing only slightly.

Robyn eased herself to a sitting position on the side of the bed. She stared at Trigg for a long time. Speaking slowly, almost a whisper, she addressed him. "What are you and what do you want with me?"

Trigg blew out a long breath, not knowing what to say. She was already pretty freaked out and he didn't want to add to her fear. He looked at her and replied, "I am a Watcher and I am a vampire."

He waited to let that sink in, watching her expression. She flinched a little, but made no other reaction, so he continued. "I, along with my comrades downstairs, am employed to hunt rogue vampires."

After seeing the confused look on her face he explained. "Rogue vampires follow their bloodlust. They kill humans and other vampires for blood, of course, but also for sport. They get off on the act of killing."

Robyn's expression turned to worry. Trigg put his hands up to put a halt to her thoughts. "They can't hurt you here. You're perfectly safe."

Robyn waited another moment before asking another question. "So, how many of you are there? Watchers, I mean."

"There are several thousand of us spread across the world, but unfortunately, there are more Rogues than Watchers."

"Do you drink blood?" she asked, looking uneasy as if she was afraid to hear his answer.

"Yes and no," he answered. When she gave him a questioning look, he continued. "We swore an oath to protect humans and vampires, which means we do not feed off them. We don't have to feed unless we are seriously injured." *Or in times of extreme passion*, he thought, but he wasn't going there.

"We get blood from rare meat. There may be times when we may take blood from willing civilian vampires, but that's another story."

"If I get bitten, will I turn into a vampire?" Robyn whispered, wide-eyed.

"Old wives' tale. I believe there is a process that a human must go through to be turned. I'm not sure exactly what happens as I have never turned anyone." Trigg shrugged then smiled as he saw an opportunity to ease her fear and put a little humor into the situation.

“And to answer some of the other common questions...no we don’t burst into flames with sunlight, but we can get seriously burned. We don’t fly, turn into animals or dematerialize. We don’t sleep in the ground, crypts or coffins, and we don’t read minds. We can, however, put thoughts in the heads of humans or bend their will if need be.” He noticed by the look on Robyn’s face that she didn’t like that last bit of information, but she didn’t say anything.

The silence seemed to stretch out uncomfortably. Robyn had lowered her gaze and kept her eyes on her hands, which she held firmly in her lap. She seemed to ponder everything he had said.

“I brought your bag,” he said, breaking the silence. Your clothes are inside but they look pretty bad. Someone had emptied the bag and shoved everything under a car, so they’re covered in dirt and grease. They need to be washed and maybe the grime will come out. I put everything I found back inside the bag. I’ll get you another shirt to wear while your clothes are being washed and dried.”

Trigg got up, leaned out the door and pulled in her bag. He walked slowly to the bed, his arm stretched out before him, and gently laid it on the bed.

Robyn made no effort to move away while he had advanced, which he took as a good sign. Trigg walked to the chair and sat.

“Is there anything else you want to know?”

When Robyn didn’t answer or even look at him, Trigg sighed. There wasn’t anything else he knew to say to make her feel better.

“I’ll go get another shirt so you can put it on. Get dressed and come meet the guys. You have my word no one will hurt you, and I’ll make sure Vane doesn’t bother you again.”

After Trigg looked at her for a few moments, he got up and walked out the door, making no effort to put the dresser back, or show any interest in it.

Robyn stared at the empty doorway, trying to take in all she had heard.

After a few moments, she pulled her bag closer and unzipped it. Her clothes were inside just as he had told her. Turning the bag upside down, she dumped everything out

on the bed and grimaced at the filthy clothes. Trigg had been right, they looked almost ruined.

Suddenly she noticed that the journal wasn't there. Spreading the clothes around didn't help.

Panic filled her chest. She felt around the inside of the bag, even turned it upside down again and shook it as if it was stuck inside somewhere and shaking it would make it come tumbling out. Nothing.

"Oh, please, no. It can't be gone," she whispered.

Robyn thought about the possibilities of why someone would take her journal but leave the bag and her clothes behind. *Had one of the guys downstairs taken it? Would they contact Jake? Maybe seek a reward or something?* She didn't know, and the worry made her sick. She had to find out if they had it. Until then, there was nothing else she could do.

A soft knock sounded at the door moments before Trigg poked his head into the room. He held out one of his shirts and set it on the dresser.

After he left Robyn walked to the dresser, changed her shirt, then walked back to the bed and pulled on her socks, which were on top of her tennis shoes. Her legs may be bare, she thought, but at least she could cover her feet.

Leaving the room, she glanced at the dresser and made a mental note to push it back to where it belonged. She headed towards the stairs, not really wanting to meet the guys, but knew it had to be done sooner or later. This was their home and there was no way to avoid them.

## Chapter Eleven

Trigg sat in the kitchen, where he had returned after leaving Robyn's room. He was surprised she wasn't hysterical after learning about him and the Rogues.

Slouching in his chair, he told Rayne and Vane that he had given Robyn her bag and another one of his shirts to wear because her clothes were a mess and the shirt she had on was ripped down the back. He sent a narrowed eye glance Vane's way, then said that he had asked her to come downstairs to talk. Giving Vane another glaring look, he silently warned the Watcher to back off and not act like some animal in rut.

"I talked to her and she seems pretty calm about all this. I figure she is trying to take it all in," Trigg said, trying to reassure Rayne that Robyn was not a liability, at least not yet.

"At least she isn't running out into the street screaming like a banshee—*I see dead people!*" Vane said with a laugh.

Trigg didn't acknowledge Vane's rather lame attempt at humor. "Like I said, she is definitely running from someone so I don't think she's going to bring any attention to herself by claiming there are vampires in the city."

As Robyn made her way down the stairs, Rayne got up and grabbed a beer from the refrigerator. She stopped in the entryway to the kitchen and stood with her hands tightly linked together in front of her.

Rayne, leaning against the counter with his legs crossed at the ankles, smiled at her, being careful not to show fangs, and spoke.

"Hello, Robyn, it's nice to meet you. I apologize for the..." He sought the words, "...extreme way you were greeted earlier. I'm Rayne."

Robyn tried a smile, but wasn't very successful. There was still fear getting in the way. Now that she was calm, she had a chance to get a better look at him.

He was tall and muscular, with long, straight black hair tied at the nape with a leather strap. His beautiful features and tanned skin all but screamed Native American. She wondered what tribe he was descended from.

Robyn recalled her exploration of the bedrooms in the building and knew exactly which one was his. It had such an *earthy* feel, and she could see why. He, too, had that same air about him. The strange energy she had felt in the room also seemed to be a part of him as well.

Rayne's smile was warm and Robyn noticed how it reflected in his golden eyes. They were beautiful eyes, she thought. He was long and lean, casually propped against the counter in his blue jeans and royal blue, button-down shirt.

When Rayne shifted, Robyn noticed a beautiful choker on his neck that had some shells on it. She wanted to take a closer look, but didn't dare move from her spot.

"Nice to meet you, Rayne," she answered, unsure about these men staring at her. It made her feel very self-conscious as she stood there with her buzzed hair, a shirt that reached inches above her knees, bare legs and socked feet.

The shirt Trigg had given her was a short-sleeved T-shirt, a little shorter than the other two she had worn. She knew they could see the scars on her arms and probably had seen the marks on her back through the ripped shirt as she had run to her room. Embarrassment and shame made her cheeks feel hot, but she forced herself to get over it, thinking it was best not to show them any emotion to use against her.

"Robyn, I'm Vane." Vane started to get up and go to her with the intention of kissing her knuckles, his suave way of greeting ladies, but a low growl of warning from Trigg made him stop. Instead he smirked, then bent over and picked up her ball cap, which had fallen on the floor earlier during their rather abrupt meeting. He handed it to Rayne who was still leaning against the counter beside him.

Rayne handed the ball cap to Trigg, who passed it to Robyn with an apologetic smile. She gave him a thankful smile and put the cap on her head to hide her hair.

"Guess a handshake is out of the question," Vane said to Robyn as he shrugged a shoulder, then his smile fell.

“I want to apologize for my behavior earlier. If I frightened you, I am truly sorry and I didn’t mean to rip your shirt. I’m really not a violent guy, actually quite the opposite.”

He winked at Robyn and gave her a heart-warming smile so charming, that it could be considered dangerous—dangerous because it could lure you in hook, line and sinker.

Robyn knew she needed to be cautious around this vampire, but his smile seemed to evaporate her anger and anxiety. He probably used that smile to captivate women, she thought. She made a hesitant smile at him and nodded in acceptance of his apology.

“Now that the introductions are done, Robyn, why don’t you have a seat,” Rayne said, gesturing to the chair next to Trigg where she would probably feel more comfortable.

Robyn hesitated a moment, looking around at them, then slowly made her way to the table and sat down. She continued to clench her hands together and kept them in her lap for composure.

“Trigg said he explained some things about us.”

Robyn nodded.

“And he told you about the Rogues?”

She nodded again.

Rayne shifted his legs once again and re-crossed his ankles, continuing to sip his beer before meeting Robyn’s gaze as he talked. “I’m sure you understand the importance of secrecy about Watchers, Rogues and civilian vampires?”

Robyn nodded in agreement.

“Besides,” he said with a slight grin, “if you told anyone about our existence, I’m not sure they would believe you.”

Robyn let slip a very unladylike snort at that remark. “You’ve got that right,” she said, almost under her breath. “I’m not sure *I* believe it.”

The guys smiled at her remark. She looked around at them, her face warming as she blushed, realizing they had heard her comment, not to mention the embarrassing animal noise she had just made.

“I...I won’t say a thing to anyone. I don’t know anyone here anyway.”

Rayne smiled, then took another pull from his beer. “So, I take it you are new here to Louisville? Just arrived?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Where are you from, originally?”

She hesitated before answering, wondering how much of the truth she should give. But maybe they could help protect her? She thought about that for a moment. Or then again, they may know Jake and would contact him. Maybe they would want money from him for turning her over.

Robyn glanced at her surroundings, remembering the elaborately decorated bedrooms and expensive equipment around the house. They certainly didn’t look like they needed any money.

She decided to proceed cautiously, following her gut. “I’m from Texas.”

“Texas? Wow,” Rayne mused, “That’s a long way from here. Why did you come to Louisville? Do you have family here? Friends?”

Robyn shook her head. “No, it was just my mom and me, but she passed away.” She felt tears burn the back of her eyes, but pushed them away.

Trigg shifted in his chair and glanced at her after her statement, but she didn’t look at him. She was already on edge tonight and didn’t want to read into things that weren’t there. He had shown concern for her tonight but she had no idea why.

“I didn’t have any place to go, so I took the first bus out of Texas, which happened to be going to Louisville. I figured I could make a new start. Get a job and a place to stay. I hadn’t counted on the bus ticket being so expensive, so I didn’t have much money left.” She shrugged.

“I’m sorry to hear about your mother. I’m sure it must be difficult for you. Well, welcome to our fair city.” Rayne grinned at her, trying to lighten the conversation a little after she had spoken about the death of her mother.

“Do you have any plans on what you are going to do?” he continued.

Robyn lowered her eyes. She didn’t want to show her desperation. She had no idea what she was going to do. She felt at peace here, well, until a little while ago.

She answered quietly, “No, not really. I was hoping that you would have some ideas or know of a shelter I could stay at until I got things in order.”

Robyn could feel heat begin to radiate off of Trigg and noticed him glance at Rayne then shift his gaze to the floor.

Rayne pondered the question for a moment, then caught the disapproving look on Trigg’s face. He remembered how emphatic Trigg had been when he stated earlier that she wasn’t going to be put in a shelter as it wasn’t safe for a girl alone. He hated to admit it, but he agreed. Until he could discuss the situation with Tank, she would have to stay.

“Well, for now, you should stay until we can work something out. You’ll be safe here. I don’t mean to embarrass or criticize you, but you are overly thin and need to watch your nutrition. We’ll make sure there’s plenty to eat around here. Although...there’s probably not much here at the moment,” he said with a smile while looking at Vane who laughed and nodded in agreement.

Robyn let out a breath, relieved at the invitation because she knew if they booted her out, she would be back on the streets and that’s not what she wanted. She had been prepared to do so that first night she arrived in Louisville and realized her money situation was dire, but she had been scared to death.

She looked at Trigg and Vane, and then at Rayne. “Thank you. I really appreciate it, and no offense taken.” She smiled a little at his comment about her figure, knowing all too well that he had only been stating the obvious.

“Uh, I can do some things around here to earn my keep. I can cook and clean,” she said. “Actually, I was quite bored earlier after Trigg left, I did some cleaning and some laundry.”

They all sniffed at the cleaning product scents in the air and nodded. She had to bite back a chuckle at seeing them all raise their noses and sniff, their nostrils flaring as they inhaled. They looked like a pack of wolves. The humor quickly faded at that thought as a mental image of her being trapped by a pack of wolves came to mind. She shuddered.

Robyn decided to take a risk, and she looked around the room at them. “Uh, has anyone seen a little notebook? I had it in my bag, but it wasn’t there when I pulled out my

clothes.” She tried to keep her look passive as if it really wasn’t all that important and she was just curious.

Trigg answered. “No. I didn’t see a notebook when I pulled your clothes from under the car in the garage. I even double-checked the area to make sure I didn’t miss anything. Was it something important? Do you want me to go back to the garage and check again?”

Robyn didn’t know how to answer. She wanted to scream, “Yes!”, but didn’t want to seem too anxious.

“Only if you are going by that way anyway. Don’t make a special trip or anything. It’s really not that big a deal.”

Trigg nodded and silence fell for a few minutes. Robyn glanced at the clock. It was now almost four in the morning.

“Well, I am really tired. If you’ll excuse me, I’m going to bed. Goodnight, although it’s technically morning, I guess.”

She got up from the table and headed to her room. Her feet felt like they were dragging in mud. The night’s events had both physically and emotionally drained her.

Trigg looked over his shoulder as Robyn climbed the stairs, thinking to himself how well the *interrogation* had gone. A scraping noise coming from upstairs brought him out of his thoughts and he realized she was pushing the dresser back into place. One side of his mouth tipped up, then he heard Vane let out a long sigh, so he turned to regard him. “That is one frightened *chiquita*,” Vane said as he shook his head.

Rayne nodded in agreement and pushed himself off the counter, then tossed his empty beer bottle in the trash.

Trigg lowered his eyes to stare at the floor in contemplation. She had tried to hide her expression when he asked if she wanted him to check the garage again for the notebook. He had a feeling that it was rather important to her for some reason.

He knew she was running from someone, and he felt he had to protect her. He wanted to protect her. He wanted her to trust him, not fear him. Finally, he stood and stretched.

"I'm calling it a day myself. This has been one hell of a night!" He turned and walked out of the kitchen.

As Trigg climbed the stairs, he could hear Rayne and Vane continue the discussion in the kitchen.

"So, what do you make of that?" Trigg heard Vane ask.

"Her story or Trigg's actions tonight?" Rayne responded.

"Well, both...but I was mainly talking about Trigg. He's usually an ass anyway, but I've never seen him act like this. He was so possessive...and with a human of all things."

He heard Rayne let out a groan. "Yeah, I agree with you there. He sure is acting strange. We're going to have to keep an eye on him and I need to talk to Tank about this. See what he wants me to do about it. Well, I'm hittin' it."

Since the conversation was obviously over, Trigg stepped into his room and closed the door.

He undressed and jumped in the shower, letting the water run over him as he thought about Robyn and what had transpired tonight. He hated the fact that she had seen what he had done to the Rogue in the alley. What must she think of him? Did she see him as a monster? Why should he care? He cursed himself for his conflicting emotions and the fact that they were even there. Still, the feeling of shame wouldn't leave him.

After stepping out of the shower, he dried himself and walked towards the bed. He was almost to the edge of the bed when he remembered the blood on his shirt where he had wiped his face and jacket.

Trigg scowled as he rinsed the blood out of his shirt as best as he could in the sink, then hung it on the shower rod to dry. Since Robyn had offered to do the laundry, he didn't want her to come across bloody clothes. It would just make things worse for her by coming face to face with the evidence of what he was and what he did each night.

After finishing with his shirt, he crawled into bed to sleep.

As the sun began to make its way to the horizon after what seemed like hours of tossing and turning, Trigg fell into a deep but fitful sleep. In his sleep, his subconscious mind replayed the events of the night. He had savagely bitten the Rogue's throat, sending

blood spurting everywhere. His face and jacket had been stained with blood. Then there had been the roaring of his beast when Vane had Robyn pinned against the kitchen wall, terrifying her. He will never forget the way she had looked at him after that, her eyes full of fear and apprehension.

Robyn awoke the next day feeling somewhat refreshed. She lay there for a moment, wondering. They hadn't tried to hurt her, she analyzed, not really. Vane had only seemed to want to scare her for some reason. Maybe that sort of thing rocked his boat. Rayne had seemed very calm and level-headed. He had never raised his voice or presented a threatening manner towards her. And Trigg, he had been flippant towards her in the beginning, but seemed to really be concerned for her last night. *And the growls that were coming out of him. They were somewhat sexy.*

Robyn chuckled. It was kind of nice having someone look after her for a change. She had never felt protected—much less had a man in her life who did anything other than abuse her. Besides, she had nowhere else to go and she felt safe here. She had everything she needed, except clothes at the moment. There was food, a shower and a nice bed to sleep in. With a sigh, she flipped back the covers and got out of bed.

Since she had nothing else to wear, she slid Trigg's T-shirt back on. The clothes she had brought from Texas were a mess. She just hoped she would be able to get them clean.

"Well," she said to herself, "the clothes aren't going to wash themselves." She made the bed, picked up her clothes and left the bedroom.

Robyn stopped at the banister, listening to see if anyone else was up. "Duh," she told herself. "Vampires, daytime, sleep." She shook her head at her silliness and headed to the laundry room. Setting the wash cycle, she set the clothes on the floor and held up a shirt and grimaced. It was definitely going to be a miracle if her clothes got clean. They would most likely sport some ugly stains no matter how hard she tried to get them out.

After pouring in the laundry detergent and closing the lid, she went into the kitchen. All her stomach could think about was food. She had been blessed with getting three

meals yesterday instead of her usual one meal a day. Now her stomach was beginning to expect, no demand, the meals.

Eyeing the loaf of bread on the counter, she pulled out two pieces and popped them into the toaster. While the bread toasted, she rooted around the freezer for something to fix for dinner before the guys headed out for the night.

Spotting a beef roast in the freezer, she took it out and set it on the counter to thaw. She figured she would let the roast cook slowly during the day, but make sure it didn't get too done since Trigg had said they got blood from meat, so she needed to keep it on the raw side.

After she finished eating, she rooted through the vegetable bin and found some potatoes and an onion, which she chopped and set the slow cooker to the lowest setting.

On the way out of the kitchen, she saw a note on the counter that she had overlooked earlier.

*Robyn,*

*You need to get some clothes since yours looked to be in pretty bad shape when I found them. Although it would be nice to see you run around in only my shirt, I don't think you would appreciate that as much as I would. There is some money in a drawer in the office. It's the door off the living room. Help yourself. There is a shop with female clothes on Fourth Street, by the restaurant where we met. Be back by 6 and use code #3341 to get back in.*

*Trigg*

Robyn smiled at Trigg's thoughtfulness, until she saw the last sentence, then she scowled. "There he goes again with the orders." She shrugged it off, realizing he was just looking after her, egotistical male mannerisms notwithstanding.

The door to the office was right where he'd said, and when she stepped inside, she was amazed. Several monitors showed video from cameras mounted outside the building and on the roof, and a door sensor panel was mounted on the wall.

Remembering what Trigg said they did for a living, she understood the need for security. Surely if the Rogues knew where to find them, they'd come in with guns blazing. That thought made her heart skip a beat, although Trigg had reassured her that she would be safe here.

Finding the money, she pulled out a hundred dollar bill, shut the drawer and left the office, closing the door behind her. The washer had stopped so she opened the lid and pulled out her clothes and winced.

The jeans managed to come out okay with most of the grease gone, but the shirt was another story. It was a light blue, short-sleeved top that now sported a big grey stain on one shoulder.

Robyn groaned. She would have to wear the shirt despite the embarrassing stain. There wasn't any choice in the matter. Trigg's shirt was so long that if she tried tucking it in she would be walking around with weird looking bulges in her pants. People would think she either stole something and shoved it down her pants or worse—she was wearing a lumpy diaper. Sighing heavily, she tossed the clothes into the dryer, then went to her bedroom for a quick shower. The clothes should be dry by the time she was finished.

Clothes dry, she got dressed. Although she was thankful to Trigg for lending her his shirt, having her own clothes on had never felt so good. With ball cap donned, she took the stairs to the lower level and headed outside for the trek downtown.

## Chapter Twelve

Warm sunshine filled the sky. Though she did have to shade her eyes, Robyn was glad to see such a nice day. She hadn't seen daylight since arriving in the city.

She stood there a moment, just soaking it all in. Cars rushed by and people milled about. It suddenly occurred to her that she had no idea where she was or how to get to Fourth Street. She remembered what the place had looked like, but that was about it. When Trigg had brought her here, she had been out of it.

A man walked in her direction, wearing a business suit and carrying a briefcase. Robyn assumed he worked in the area. She hated to talk to anyone that she did not know, but if she didn't ask someone she wouldn't know how to get to where she needed to go to buy some clothes.

Glancing at the large stain on her shirt, she sighed, and after taking a deep breath, she spoke up when the man was within hearing range.

"Excuse me, sir."

The man stopped in front of her and smiled. "Yes? Can I help you?"

"Uh, I hope so. Could you tell me which direction is Fourth Street? Is it very far?"

The man smiled. "Actually, it's not far at all. What you do is take this street in that direction," he said while pointing in the direction in which he had been walking before she stopped him. "It goes all the way to Fourth Street. Actually, Main Street goes down quite a ways."

Robyn nodded and thanked him, then stood for several more minutes as he walked away. Her self-preservation instincts had her rooted at the spot until she was sure he was not going to follow her. She knew it was stupid, but she couldn't help herself. These things seemed to be ingrained in her now. It was something she was going to have to work on.

As his form disappeared out of sight and her mind told her she was safe, she began to walk the several blocks to Fourth Street.

Along the way, Robyn passed shops, restaurants and businesses, amazed at how much there was to see. Reaching Fourth Street, she turned the corner and walked several more blocks before she began to hear the sound of music.

Knowing she was close, she smiled. Robyn remembered the blare of music coming from the restaurant that had played music videos and had walls adorned with music memorabilia, much of it signed by famous singers and musicians.

She made it, but was slightly out of breath from the long walk. As she passed the open doors of the restaurant, recalling the day that she first saw Trigg and how he had purchased her food without saying a word, she had to grin. The memory would be with her always, she thought.

On the other side of the street was the clothing store he had mentioned. It was on the second level, so she climbed the stairs and walked through the glass doors.

Clothes of all styles packed the floor of the shop. Although the skirts and fancy tops were pretty, she wouldn't be going anywhere nice to wear them. She would stick with jeans, shirts and shorts, she sternly told herself. She definitely needed some bras, panties and socks too.

In front of her was a rack of swimsuits. Robyn thought about buying one for sunbathing, another luxury she hadn't had in many years. Since the guys would be asleep during the day, she wouldn't have to worry about anyone seeing her while she sunbathed on the roof.

Robyn found what she needed and even grabbed a jacket. She was pleasantly surprised to find that there were caps for women. Hers had begun to look pretty shabby from the rain.

Stepping inside the small fitting room at the back of the store, she shimmied into a pretty little black bikini swimsuit with blue trim, then stepped in front of the mirror.

The swimsuit fit perfectly, but standing in front of the mirror made her heart sink. She stared at the ugly scars marring her arms, torso and legs and her bones jutting from their sockets.

Why had she done that? She knew to stay away from mirrors. She must have gotten caught up in the day, she thought, her heart heavy in her chest as she pulled her gaze away from the sight before her.

Robyn sank to the floor and tried hard not to cry, but she wasn't very successful. Someone entered one of the other fitting room stalls, so she quickly got herself under control, wiped away the tears and redressed.

While picking out her items, she had been amazed at the prices. Everything was so expensive. Even the socks and underwear! She mentally calculated her items and discovered she had gone over the hundred dollars, not including tax. Disheartened, she went through her items to see what she could do without.

Robyn had to put the swimsuit and ball cap back on the rack as she hadn't brought enough money and they were items, although nice to have, she really didn't need.

After leaving the store, she walked back down the stairs and stood on the sidewalk, checking out the other shops and restaurants on that street. Taking everything in, her mood quickly perked up and she let go of the disappointment of not being able to purchase some of the items she had picked out.

Robyn looked towards the end of the street and noticed a huge bookstore located on the corner. Bookstores had always been her favorite place because she loved to read. It didn't take long to convince herself to check it out. Besides, she deserved a little indulgence, she told herself.

Stepping inside the bookstore, she immediately caught the delicious aroma of the coffee shop. Deciding to treat herself with the few dollars she had leftover from the clothing store, she scanned the menu board.

Robyn settled on a small snickerdoodle latté, and after a cautious sip of the hot drink, she felt like she was in heaven. The latté was simply delicious. Like nothing she had ever tasted.

Sipping away on her new favorite drink in the world, she walked down the aisles of books, taking note of ones available in her favorite genres.

Robyn loved fictional romance. She chuckled to herself at that thought, because she felt as though she was living a paranormal fictional story, though she couldn't exactly call it *romantic*. Sure, she thought Trigg was major eye candy, but he didn't see her as anything more than a nuisance.

After spending a couple hours looking at the books and sitting for awhile to read a few short stories, Robyn reached into her pocket to count the amount of money she had left and found there was only a dollar and some change. Rooting through a bin of clearance items, she spotted a blank journal with a price tag of one dollar and twenty-five cents—a price she could afford.

Robyn was living a new adventure and wanted to record it all. She hesitated at that thought for a moment, remembering Rayne's warning of secrecy and decided she could be vague about things that only she would know the meaning behind.

It was time to head back and she walked at a leisurely pace carrying her bags and memorizing places she wanted to check out on her next visit. She didn't feel right in accepting the Watchers' money. Maybe she could get a job and earn money of her own. She would make sure she took care of her obligations for the guys as she promised in payment for her stay.

*Watchers*. It all felt so unreal. She was having a hard time believing it herself. Glancing at all of the people making their way through the downtown streets, she wondered how many of them, if any, knew of the danger that lurked around here in the dark. The thought was unsettling.

The walk back was exhilarating. Her entire day had been exhilarating, she thought with a smile as she entered in the code Trigg had given her and stepped inside the building.

Robyn made her way to the kitchen and laid her bags on the table. The roast smelled delicious, its aroma spreading through the kitchen as it simmered in the slow cooker. She lifted the lid, poked the vegetables, then cut a slice of the roast.

The meat inside was very pink and bloody juice ran out into the bottom of the slow cooker as she sliced. Seeing that the roast hadn't overcooked, she was relieved. She didn't want the first meal she made for them to be ruined.

It was four-thirty and she knew the guys would be up and about soon. She popped some biscuits into the oven to add to the meal, picked her bags up off the kitchen table and carried them into the living room.

Before putting her purchases away, she wanted to make sure the amount of money she had spent was okay. If not, she would take some items back, though she sincerely hoped it wouldn't be a problem. She desperately needed everything she bought, except maybe the jacket. Trigg had tossed hers in the trash after the Rogue had decided to play Mr. Shredder with it. She could possibly do without one, especially this time of year.

Sighing, she went to the kitchen to clean and set the table. Noises from upstairs told her that someone was awake.

Trigg woke up with a start. His dreams had plagued him while he slept and left him feeling heavy, both inside and out. His mind suddenly jumped to Robyn and he wondered if she had found the note he had left.

When he had first gone to bed he lay there awhile, trying to drift off to sleep. Robyn's clothing situation had popped into his head. He'd slid out of bed, gone downstairs, and left her a note about the cash they kept in the office for emergencies, as well as the closest place for her to buy clothes. He hoped she'd found the clothing store on Fourth Street easily and enjoyed herself.

Something inside made him want to cheer Robyn up and see her smile. Her eyes held much sorrow and pain. There was no light, no spark in them and it made his heart ache.

Trigg took a deep breath, let it out and prepared to meet those eyes once again, dreading to see condemnation in them for the monster she most likely believed he was. She had probably spent the day thinking about what she had seen last night, what he had done to the Rogue, not to mention how he had lost control with Vane.

Robyn removed the biscuits from the oven and set them on the table. The aroma of roast and biscuits wafted up towards the bedrooms. She smiled when she glanced upstairs and saw both Rayne and Vane open their doors at the same time and poke their heads out to check out the smell. It wasn't long before they came bounding down the stairs.

"Man, oh man, *chiquita*. Dinner smells *muy bueno!*" Vane crooned as he walked into the kitchen rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

"Yeah," agreed Rayne coming in behind him. "It smells delicious!"

Robyn smiled at their enthusiasm. It was nice to have her cooking appreciated. "Well, you haven't tasted it, yet. I just hope I didn't cook the roast too much for you guys. Trigg had said that you...uh..." Robyn felt a little weird about mentioning the ingesting blood issue, but she continued, "...got the blood you needed from meat."

She walked over to the counter and lifted the lid from the slow cooker, sliced off pieces of roast and began plating them with vegetables, then poured the bloody juice from the bottom of the slow cooker over the meat and veggies.

Trigg came in and took a seat as she began placing the plates in front of them on the table.

"Wow, service too! I could get used to this!" Vane said while smiling brightly at Robyn, who blushed at his attention.

Trigg was watching her as she went around the table. He wanted to catch her eye, to discern some sort of thought from her face. When she came around to his chair to set his plate down in front of him, his hand brushed hers as he reached for it.

They both hesitated, but only for a moment, then Robyn stepped away and Trigg muttered, "Thank you."

When Robyn's eyes met his as she stepped back, Trigg couldn't find any hint of fear, anger or repulsion. He saw...peace. And was that happiness in her eyes? He felt his muscles relax and his previously knotted stomach ease.

Trigg smiled inwardly while he watched her move about the kitchen as if she had been doing it all her life.

When Robyn reached up to get glasses down from a shelf much too high for her, Trigg jumped out of the chair, almost knocking it backwards and was quickly by her side to get them down.

Robyn jumped, not because of his nearness, but because he had been so quick he startled her. Seeing the slight frown crease his face, she quickly thought to explain her reaction.

“Oh, you scared me. I didn’t see you coming,” she said then laughed softly.

“Sorry,” Trigg said quietly. “Sit and eat. I’ll get this.”

His voice had turned a little gruff, but she didn’t give it much thought. She just turned around, placed some roast and vegetables on her plate and popped it in the microwave.

When Robyn turned from the microwave, the guys were all looking at her, smiling.

“What?” She asked, feeling a little uncomfortable at their sudden attention.

Rayne laughed.

“Guess you don’t go much for rare meat, huh?”

Robyn bit the inside of her mouth so as not to laugh. “No, I’d rather my meat not squeal, say “ouch” or howl when I cut into it!”

They laughed and she retrieved her plate from the microwave, then yelped and dropped it on the counter, making everyone jump.

“Ow!” she cried, putting her fingers in her mouth. “I forgot to use the stupid pot holder!”

Hissing in pain, she ran to the sink and shoved her fingers under the cold water.

Trigg stopped in the midst of putting the drinks on the table and walked over to her quickly.

“Here, let me see,” he said as he reached for her hands.

“No, it’s okay. I just burned them. I’ll put some ice on them in a minute. You go ahead and eat before your food gets cold.”

Robyn tried to smile up at him, but the pain on her face was evident.

Trigg didn't wait for her permission. He turned off the water and looked at the blisters forming on the pads of her fingers where she had touched the hot plate. He stared into her eyes for a moment, then slowly raised her hand to his lips.

Robyn had no idea what was going to happen. *Was he going to kiss it and make it better?*

When Trigg opened his mouth and began to run his tongue over the burns, she thought her knees were going to buckle. The moist heat from his rough tongue invoked tingling sensations that coursed through her body and pooled in her lower belly.

Robyn realized this was turning her on, and from the look in Trigg's eyes, he was there with her, or maybe even more so. They were glowing and showing a tint of red, but not fully red as they were last night when Vane had her against the wall in the kitchen.

Her breath caught at the look in his eyes—hunger and want. When he finished, he kissed her palm gently and slowly released her hand.

Trigg smiled at the astonished look on Robyn's face. He could see in her eyes that there was something more, she wanted him. When she blinked, breaking the spell, he spoke.

"Your burns needed healing."

Robyn blinked again. "Wha-what?" She stammered as if she hadn't realized he had spoken.

Trigg's smile deepened. "Your burns needed healing. Our saliva has a healing agent, so I healed them." He watched as Robyn's eyes seemed to refocus and he could see that the information finally sank in. Her face flushed as she thanked him before sidestepping him on the way to retrieve her plate from the counter.

Trigg handed her a potholder with a chuckle before she could repeat the incident.

When he turned and headed to his chair, he noticed Rayne and Vane staring at him with arched eyebrows and he scowled. He didn't need either one of them reminding him that he was playing with fire. He was a vampire and she was a human. Nothing good would come out of a relationship between them.

## Chapter Thirteen

The meal was pleasant and Robyn's heart was soaring. She laughed and smiled at the guys' banter and jokes. Vane shared some funny stories, some of them involving stupid things Trigg had done in the past, which had the Watcher shifting in his seat with embarrassment. She could feel tense energy emanating from him, but he seemed to hide it well and take it all in stride. But she had no doubt Vane would pay dearly later.

Trigg didn't speak much, he just sat and observed while he ate. She noticed the glances he stole her way. Their gazes met many times, causing her to blush.

Robyn wished she could stop the burning of her cheeks when she caught him staring. She was acting like a teenager, although it could definitely not be compared to her teenage years.

Rayne let out a laugh, startling Robyn out of her thoughts.

"Robyn, this is delicious. I can't remember when I've had a really good, home-cooked meal. If it wasn't for restaurants or take-out, we wouldn't eat. Thanks."

Robyn beamed at Rayne's statement. She had wanted to show them she had worth and would keep the place clean and their stomachs filled in return for letting her stay.

After the guys took their fill of second and third helpings, they got up and put their dirty plates, silverware and glasses in the sink as Robyn had sheepishly asked them to do.

"You cooked a wonderful meal. One of us can handle the kitchen," Trigg told her.

But Robyn wasn't having any of it and shooed them out of the kitchen, apologizing that she didn't have any dessert fixed. She hadn't thought to check out the pantry and refrigerator for possibilities. They assured her it was no big deal, but she was disappointed in herself nonetheless for not thinking about it.

After some disagreement, they finally relented at her insistence of taking care of cleaning up the kitchen herself and left the room to get out of her way.

Vane racked up the balls on the billiard table while Rayne rosined a pool cue to play a couple games. Trigg noticed the shopping bags on the living room floor and walked over to see what she had bought.

“I see you found the clothing store okay.”

“Yes, thank you for the note,” Robyn answered from the kitchen. “I, uh, I took a hundred dollars, but really didn’t intend on spending it all. It’s just...I hadn’t realized clothes were so expensive. If that was too much, I can take some of it back. I don’t mind.”

Trigg peered through the bags to check out her purchases, his curiosity getting the best of him. After looking through them, he frowned. “Is this all you got?” his voice a little sharper.

Robyn stopped what she was doing and peered out of the kitchen to where Trigg stood in the living room, holding one of the bags. She felt a slight bit of anger that he was being nosey and going through her things. She had never had an ounce of privacy at the ranch.

Robyn corrected herself quickly, telling herself she was being unreasonable. She had used his money hadn’t she? It made sense that he had a right to know how she had spent it.

“Yeah. Things are really high, but I only got what was absolutely necessary,” Robyn answered. She had thrown in that last statement to assure him she hadn’t blown the money needlessly.

Trigg didn’t notice the anxiety in her tone as she tried to explain her purchases. “There’s only one pair of jeans, one T-shirt and one pair of shorts!” His voice was showing an edge of temper, his brows knitting together as his frown deepened.

Robyn didn’t move as he peered into the second bag. She stared at him from the kitchen, contemplating what to say to placate him. He was obviously getting angry with her, but she didn’t know the exact reason or how to deflate it.

Trigg heard Rayne clear his throat but ignored it until he heard him say his name in a low, stern voice. When he looked at his Cell-mate, he saw the warning look on his face.

Realizing how he was acting, he stopped and composed himself. He wasn't angry with Robyn. He was angry because she deserved so much more than she had gotten for herself. He wanted her to be happy and have the things she needed.

He looked back at Robyn, who was standing in the kitchen, fidgeting with the dishtowel she held in her hands. *Damn*, he thought. *Here I go screwing things up again with my temper. She thinks I am bellowing at her.*

He smiled slightly at her, trying to ease her tension. "Yeah, I know. Things can cost an arm and a leg these days. You could have taken more money, but I'm sure you felt uncomfortable in taking what you did."

He picked the bags up from the floor. "I'll just drop these on your bed. You should head back and pick up some more outfits. Three outfits..." he was including the one she was currently wearing "...just aren't enough. You'll be washing them too damn much. Besides, that shirt you're wearing should probably be tossed into the trash, unless big dark stains are in style these days."

With that he took her bags upstairs and put them on her bed. He checked the sizes before leaving the room, vowing to himself that if she didn't get what she needed, he would.

Robyn glanced over at Rayne and Vane who were playing pool. She didn't know what to make of Trigg's concern. She couldn't understand why he was so angry with her. She was trying to be frugal while getting the necessities, but he seemed to think she needed more. She just didn't feel right spending someone else's money on herself.

Another beautiful day beckoned Robyn to the roof where she settled into a chaise lounge to soak up the sun's rays. As the sun warmed her body, her mind drifted to Trigg.

He had been making an effort to have conversations with her and his social skills had improved somewhat. She had found that she was getting used to catching him staring at her out of the corner of her eye, and even when they locked gazes, the hunger there no longer frightened or embarrassed her. It made her feel kind of...good.

Robyn smiled to herself as she lay there with her eyes closed. Being looked at by a man like Trigg—handsome, muscular, *dangerous*—made her feel like a woman. She could never see herself as beautiful, not even pretty, but something was stirring Trigg's interest. She just couldn't figure out what.

After he had the odd outburst regarding the clothes, or lack of, she had bought, he had returned to the living room with a totally different demeanor. He had sat down beside her on the couch and they had talked.

Although he had shared many things about himself, she had only divulged less guarded things about her own life. She had not told any of them about Jake or the ranch.

Robyn had been surprised when Trigg told her he and Rayne were from Texas.

"I was born and raised in Texas," he had said. "I'm what they call a *Trueborn*. Both my parents are vampires. I wasn't born a human and converted into a vampire like Rayne and several of the other Watchers."

Robyn had wondered about the conversion of humans to vampires, but hadn't asked him any questions about it.

When Trigg had told her he was sixty-three years old, she had been amazed. She had thought he was somewhere between twenty-five and thirty years old.

"My parents still live in Texas and are healthy and happy in their *old age*," he continued and she had laughed. He had so much love in his eyes every time he had spoken about his parents.

"So, why did you become a Watcher?" Robyn had asked curiously. Anyone who wasn't blind could see that he certainly had the body of a warrior, but she had wondered what his deep down reasons were for spending his life hunting down and killing Rogues.

"Well, it's not like I am following in my father's footsteps or anything. I'm an only child. I was bored with my life." Trigg had shrugged nonchalantly.

Robyn had looked at him a moment, then rolled her eyes. "You just like to kick some butt and get away with it."

A shadow crossed over her and Robyn noticed the growing darkness through her eyelids. She blinked them opened and watched a large airplane fly overhead, but its

presence didn't stop her thoughts of Trigg. She had had a nice conversation with Trigg last evening, and he had definitely shown a different side of himself.

Trigg had told her so much about vampires, the Watchers, and even his own life. Though there were questions she wanted to ask, she hadn't dared.

One of the questions that had been on her mind was about vampires bearing children. She knew that Trueborns could get together and have children. That was obvious because Trigg was the child of two vampires. But she didn't know if one or both were converted humans if they would be able to have children. *If a vampire and a human got together, could they have children?*

When she had gone to bed last night, her mind had continued to ponder these questions. How many children could vampires have? How long did a pregnant vampire carry a child? Was the pregnancy just like a human pregnancy?

*Why the hell am I focused on this topic?*

With a sigh, Robyn sat up on the chaise and swung her legs over the side. She had only been at their home a short while, but she couldn't help feeling she and Trigg were beginning to develop a relationship of some sort. What kind of a relationship, however, she had no idea.

Before he had headed out to patrol the streets last night to hunt Rogues, they had watched a couple of the professional wrestling matches on television and had laughed at the fake moves and horrible acting and storylines. Trigg had told her that one of the wrestlers, Vampyre Jake was just that—a vampire. He was also one of the Watchers.

After that match had ended, Trigg had agreed to teach her how to play pool. She hadn't learned very much because she hadn't been able to concentrate.

Trigg had stood so close behind her his breath had tickled her ear, and each time he had leaned in to demonstrate how to make the shot, his erection had pressed into her, making his desire evident.

Robyn shielded her eyes while she watched another plane fly overhead. Anxiety squeezed her chest. She was falling for him and that scared her more than anything.

A honk sounded below, bringing her out of her thoughts. Robyn went to the side of the roof and looked down at the street. She had forgotten she had called for a delivery of paper products and cleaning supplies. "I'll be right there!" she yelled.

After the delivery guys finished stacking her order inside the garage, Robyn signed the paperwork and closed the door. She pressed the button to bring down the elevator, then placed the items inside. This was so much better than carrying everything up stairs, she thought. Turning, she caught sight of a door she hadn't paid attention to before. Curious, she walked over and opened it.

The door opened to a mini-gym. There were weights, a treadmill, a rowing machine, an elliptical machine, two exercise bikes and several other pieces of equipment.

What really caught Robyn's attention was what sat behind a glass wall in another room. It was a Jacuzzi.

She couldn't help but go into the little room to get a closer look. After studying the control panel for a moment, she figured out how to turn it on.

Robyn thought she had died and gone to heaven. She didn't have time right then, but she was going to use it, and soon. Smiling, she turned off the Jacuzzi and took the supplies to the kitchen and laundry room.

After everything was put away, it was just about the time the guys normally got up. She figured she had just enough time for a quick shower before dinner. With several hours of sunbathing, she probably smelled a little ripe.

Robyn bounded up the stairs and almost ran into Trigg as he was coming out of his room. He grabbed her arms to steady her. The contact sent heat rushing through her until Robyn remembered where she was headed and why. Suddenly she was a little embarrassed.

"Sorry, I need to shower before dinner. I don't want to ruin anyone's appetite with the smell of burnt human flesh," she said, trying to hide how his touch made her feel.

Trigg smiled at her ruefully. "I don't mind the smell of human flesh." He leaned in close to her neck, his warm breath kissing her skin before he inhaled. After a moment, he leaned back, staring into her eyes. "You don't smell burnt to me. You smell *just right*."

Robyn couldn't breathe. Her heart was beating so fast and hard she was sure he could hear it. In fact, by the look on his face she was certain of it.

Realizing his game, Robyn smiled back at him, then pulled herself out of his hold. He didn't try to stop her or tighten his grip as she moved. Instead, he took a step back to let her pass so that she could go.

After Robyn had closed the door to her room, Trigg stood with his eyes closed, savoring her scent. He liked her sweaty—sweaty underneath him as he made love to her in his bed. *Oh, the torture*, he thought. His erection plastered against his pants, screaming for release. He took a couple of deep breaths, trying to bring his lust under control so he could make it down the stairs.

The guys made their usual exit not too long after the sun had set. Robyn cleaned the kitchen and settled to watch a little television.

She watched episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and got a good laugh out of them. Then she changed the channel a few times and settled on a late-night horror flick.

Robyn awoke to white noise from the television. She had fallen asleep sometime during the movie and the station was off the air. She picked up the remote and turned off the television.

After tossing and turning in bed until she thought she would scream, she finally gave up on getting back to sleep. She glanced at the clock and saw there were still a couple more hours before the guys would be back. This, she thought, was a good time to unwind in the Jacuzzi.

Robyn lay back, the warm water almost making her purr. Since she hadn't had the money to purchase the swim-suit at the store the other day, she had just pulled off her shorts and shirt and let the warm water bubble over her naked flesh.

The water felt good as it massaged her back and legs. Bubbles danced along the surface and tickled her arms as she let them float freely. It was so peaceful she was soon oblivious to the world around her.

Trigg headed back to the warehouse a little early. He had been thinking about Robyn all night, which was probably why the Rogue got in a blow to his shoulder. He almost lost his head a time or two, literally. “Getting sloppy, man. A good way to get yourself killed,” he chastised himself.

Still muttering, he entered in his code and stepped inside the building. His body ached and his shoulder throbbed. What he needed now, he thought, was a beer and to relax.

Trigg headed to the kitchen, grabbed a beer and took the stairs back to the first level. He needed to unwind and had just the thing in mind to help.

As he stepped into the gym, he pulled his shirt out of his pants and unbuttoned it, took it off and tossed it on the nearest piece of equipment, then stopped a few feet inside the room.

Robyn was in the Jacuzzi, head tilted back and eyes closed. She looked beautiful, he thought. He knew he should turn around and leave, but his feet wouldn’t obey his mind. Instead of walking away, he found himself walking towards her.

Standing beside the Jacuzzi, Trigg watched Robyn soak in the warm water. She was so relaxed she wasn’t even aware he was standing there staring at her. His eyes tracked the bubbles as they played over her elegantly long neck and her creamy bare shoulders.

Trigg’s mouth went dry. He took a pull off of his beer and swallowed, wetting his mouth and throat so he could speak.

“Robyn?” When she didn’t stir, he spoke a little louder.

“Robyn?”

Robyn heard a faint voice calling her name, but she thought she was dreaming. When she heard her name again, she shifted and opened her eyes. Before they could focus, all she saw was the figure of a large man looming over her. *Jake?*

Robyn jumped and let out a short scream before her legs slipped out from under her, sending her under the water too fast to have a chance to take a breath of air. The floor of the Jacuzzi was slippery and she was very tired, making surfacing difficult.

Trigg quickly set down his beer and pulled Robyn from under the water. She choked and coughed as he lifted her out of the Jacuzzi and cradled her in his arms, lightly patting her on the back to help expel the water she had swallowed, too caught up in the urgency of the situation to notice that she was totally naked.

“Are you okay?” he asked, grabbing a towel and draping it over her.

*Cough. Cough.* “You startled me, that’s all.”

She wheezed, trying to laugh a little, but water was caught in her throat.

Trigg sat her on the edge of the Jacuzzi and quickly wrapped the towel tightly around her. She felt like a swaddled newborn.

After she quit shaking and coughing, Robyn looked at Trigg and started to laugh. He was looking at her pitifully and full of concern as if she was a fragile doll and he had broken her.

Trigg was startled by her reaction. He thought she would be angry he had inadvertently scared her, but she was looking at him and laughing. She was *laughing*. *What a wonderful sound*, he thought. It was soft and melodious, like music to his ears. It washed over him. He closed his eyes and listened.

Robyn was still laughing at the silly thing that just happened, thinking if anyone had seen it, they would have thought it hysterical. But then Trigg closed his eyes and just stood there. Her laugh quieted. She thought maybe he was pissed for some reason and was trying to control his temper, but then she saw his expression.

Instead of frowning or pursing his lips, she saw the corners of his mouth tilt upwards slightly, and she realized he was listening to her laugh and taking it inside of him. His gesture touched her heart. The hungry stares, the protective actions, smelling her and now this. What did it mean?

When Trigg noticed Robyn was no longer laughing, he opened his eyes and looked at her. She was staring at him. Her big, blue eyes held wonder and fascination.

Unable to stop himself, he leaned down slowly, giving her time to move away, but when she didn’t, he placed his mouth over hers.

He kissed her tenderly, gently rubbing his lips over hers. "Open for me," he whispered onto her lips. When she parted them, he swept his tongue inside to taste her.

Trigg felt her tongue touch his fangs, which had begun to lengthen, and pulled back, looking at her face for signs of fear. She only stared into his eyes and leaned forward, wanting to continue the kiss. After a while, they parted slightly, both breathing rapidly.

"I don't know much about this stuff. I mean...I never..." Robyn stammered. She was embarrassed to tell him she was a virgin, and her shame at the appearance of her body kept her from looking at Trigg as she continued. With marks scarring her body, she didn't think she ever stood a chance with a man, especially when they got an eyeful of the packaging.

"Trigg, you don't want anything to do with me, trust me. I'm damaged goods." She shook her head as the words came pouring out of her. "I..."

Trigg kissed her tenderly once again, stopping her words. He knew she had been abused and that she was afraid. He wanted to make her forget about the marks on her body and how they got there, and replace those memories with ones of passion.

"Robyn," he said after ending the kiss and putting a finger under her chin to hold her eyes to his. "I know someone hurt you, and I hope someday you will trust me enough to talk about it and what you are afraid of. Give me this chance to show you joy and ecstasy. Let me show you how good the touch of a man can be."

He watched the conflicting emotions cross her face, holding his breath. He wanted to comfort her the best way he knew how. He wanted to ease her pain and fears, to give her pleasure.

Robyn's answer was to pull him to her mouth for another kiss, though she trembled slightly.

Trigg, lifted her into his strong arms, then carried her out of the gym and all the way to his room. The guys were still out, but he didn't care if they saw. She was *his* and he was claiming her.

Once in his room, he pulled back the covers with one hand and gently placed her on his bed, then unwrapped her from the towel.

She lay naked before him.

Robyn quickly reached for the sheet to cover herself, but Trigg grabbed her hand.

“No, let me see you.”

Tears began to fill her eyes and she tried to blink them away, shaking her head.

“No, I’m hideous. The scars, the marks, they’re repulsive. I...I should go.” She made an attempt to sit, but Trigg grabbed her shoulders lightly and looked into her eyes.

“You are so beautiful, Robyn. Even your voice is beautiful. I look at you and I see radiance. But when I look at your big, blue eyes, I see sorrow.”

He ran a finger lightly down her cheek, down her neck and across her collarbone. “Let me bring you some happiness, Robyn. Let me do this for you.”

Trigg began to kiss her once again, then trailed kisses down her neck, pausing over the pulsing of warm blood under her soft skin. He ran kisses over her collarbone and slid his palm over her breast before taking the nipple lightly in his hand.

Robyn gasped and arched to his tender touch. This was gentle and felt so good she wanted more.

Trigg rubbed the nipple between his thumb and forefinger, before leaning down and covering it with his mouth.

Warm heat coursed through her as Trigg’s tongue flitted over her nipple. He suckled, nipped and caressed, then moved over and did the same to the other breast. Wet heat pooled at the apex of her legs and she wanted him. She had never wanted a man before, but now the feeling was almost unbearable.

Trigg trailed kisses down the middle of her chest, slowly making his way to her stomach where he laved her navel with his tongue before his head and mouth dipped even lower.

When he stroked his tongue over the inside curve above her thigh, Robyn’s breath caught. It was so unexpected and erotic. His thumbs caressed the curve of both hips before she felt his breath on her mound.

Robyn was startled. “Wha...what are you doing?”

“Shhh...just relax and feel.” Trigg separated her folds tenderly and circled the outside of her opening with his finger. Robyn almost jumped off the bed, but Trigg held her steady with an arm across her lower belly.

Trigg’s fingers on her sensitive flesh made her whole body tingle and shudder. He circled her clit several times in a lazy rhythm before slowly entering her with one finger, stroking her inside while his thumb stroked her clit on the outside.

Robyn let out a moan and she moved her head from side to side, trying to keep herself from shattering into a million pieces.

Trigg added another finger and slid them in and out of her while his tongue caressed her swollen clit.

A cry of pure pleasure escaped her as his hot wet tongue sent waves of ecstasy through her body. She felt every nerve ending come to life. The feeling was so unbelievably delicious that she let her legs fall open wide so he could touch more of her, taste more of her, take more of her.

Trigg increased the pace by which he stroked inside her creamy, hot channel, while alternating between swirling his tongue around her clit and the outside sensitive flesh. The taste of her was like candy on his tongue. He could spend all day just like this.

A surge of heat swam through her as pleasure rose up from her toes and began to soar through her body like a smoldering volcano, ready to erupt. Her breath was coming hard and fast, making her feel almost dizzy.

The feeling built from somewhere deep inside of her until it exploded all the way through the top of head as if her very soul had found its release from the confines of her body. A wave of ecstasy washed over her, sending her spiraling upwards to heaven and she let out a long, hoarse cry. Her body shook and as her climax pulsed through her, so good, so strong, she wanted it to last forever.

Trigg watched the rapture on her face, fighting the urge to plunge himself inside her like a surfer, riding that perfect wave. The beast inside him roared, *Take her! Take her!* but he clenched his teeth and maintained his control.

As Robyn's shudders subsided and she came back to Earth, her breathing slowed and she opened her eyes. Trigg was beside her, leaning over, watching her face with a sly grin.

"What did you do to me?" she whispered, a little breathy.

"Did you like it?" He was grinning.

She was confused and a frown creased her face. Trigg had not taken her. He had only touched her—everywhere—but had not sought his own release. "But, you didn't..."

Trigg shook his head. "No, I wanted to give you pleasure. I loved watching you when I made you come."

Robyn felt the heat rise up her face as she blushed. Trigg chuckled and wrapped her in the sheet.

"What are you doing?" Robyn asked, her eyes wary as she watched him bundle her in the sheet.

"Time to sleep."

Trigg carried her to her bed. He stood there for a moment, staring at her before he bent and kissed her on the forehead, then walked from the room, closing the door behind him.

So many emotions went through her as she watched Trigg leave her room. She felt relaxed, and smiled, but she was confused at why he didn't take pleasure for himself. Why hadn't he taken her? She wondered what he truly thought of her. Did he have feelings for her or was she just a new toy to play with for a while? Drowsy, she turned on her side and fell asleep.

Trigg left Robyn's room and headed back to the Jacuzzi. He had left his beer, his shirt and Robyn's clothes. He replayed what had happened in his head, wondering what had come over him to make him want her. His beast had wanted him to settle between her thighs and seat himself to the hilt inside her. He was so hard at that moment he ached. What he needed right now was a cold shower, if it would help.

When Trigg stepped out of the gym and into the garage, Rayne and Vane were walking in. They stopped for a moment and regarded him.

“Hey, Trigg. Guess you cut out early,” Vane said and Trigg didn’t miss the sarcastic tone.

Trigg closed the door to the gym, but didn’t respond. What he decided to do with his time was his own business, he told himself.

He noticed Rayne staring at what he had in his hands, but he didn’t care. He had enough on his mind without having to worry about what his Cell-mates thought.

When he turned towards the stairs, he could feel their eyes on him. He knew he was acting totally out of character, but even he couldn’t explain it. There was something about his little mouse that threw all reason out the window every time he laid eyes on her. *His*.

That thought almost made him stop in his tracks.

No one spoke another word as the three went upstairs. As usual, Vane headed straight for the refrigerator.

“Man! The *chiquita*’s cooking is *delicioso*!” He pulled out a casserole dish containing lasagna, slapped a huge helping on a plate and popped it in the microwave.

“Don’t hog it all, Vane,” Rayne warned as he stalked over and snatched the dish out of his hands.

“Hey, you want some?” Rayne asked Trigg who was sitting on the couch in the living room, flipping channels on the television. He just nodded.

Rayne shook his head at Trigg’s behavior and waited until Vane’s plate of food was finished before placing the entire casserole dish in the microwave so they could finish it off.

Robyn awoke the next morning and stretched languidly like a contented kitten. She remembered last night and smiled as she left the bed and headed for the bathroom. Even while she showered, she was unable to stop thinking about Trigg and how he had made her feel. His touch had been so tender that she had felt beautiful and feminine.

The way he had looked at her, scars and all, had made her heart skip a beat. She hadn't seen any revulsion in his eyes. It was if the markings weren't there, or that the sight of them hadn't bothered him in the least.

Stepping out of the shower, she almost slipped and fell. "Get your head out of the clouds, Robyn, before you fall on your ass!" she admonished. She dressed, grabbed her dirty laundry and headed downstairs.

Robyn thought about what she would do today and decided a nice walk by the river would be great. She made her cleaning rounds, except for the guys' rooms as they were probably sleeping.

Once her clothes were in the washer and all the preparations for dinner had been made, she laced her shoes, pulled on her ball cap and headed outside.

As Robyn strolled along the riverfront she struggled to catch everything that was going on around her. Children laughed and played on the large playground, bicyclists and skaters passed her on the walkway and kites soared and dipped in the sky from the warm breeze.

She saw families enjoying the warm, sunny day and her heart sank in her chest. She had lost her mother, the only family she had. Would she ever have a family of her own? She could only hope, she told herself as she continued to walk.

Robyn made her way along the walk until the sun sank lower in the sky. She turned and headed back, walking a little more briskly this time. The guys would be up soon and she wanted to have dinner on the table.

Jake Carter drove his truck from Texas to Louisville. Two of his contacts in the city had been sent over to a warehouse he owned just east of downtown, which also doubled as a legitimate storage facility.

The delivery truck carrying his product would be in Louisville in time for them to distribute the stash to the local dealer before the city's fireworks festival.

Jake smiled to himself as he sped down the highway. A lot of partying would be going on that night and it was just the beginning. Throngs of people were expected to pack the city and he would be supplying the party favors.

As he exited the highway and turned down the street where his warehouse was located, he quickly glanced at his watch. In a few hours he had a meeting with some local punk by the name of Chris. Chris wants to play with the big boys. *We'll see about that*, he thought with a smirk.

Trigg awoke with a groan. He hadn't gotten out of bed and his head already ached. When he had lain down to sleep, he had thought about what had happened between him and Robyn and the questionable looks on the guys' faces. He knew Rayne didn't approve and wondered if he had talked with Tank yet.

His emotions were running too high and it was affecting his duty. Last night he had blown off the rest of his patrol because he couldn't stop thinking about her. Much more of that could land him in hot water with Headquarters, not that he hadn't been on their shit list before, but not thinking clearly could get him seriously injured, if not killed.

Trigg knew he had to back off and get his act together. He had to regain control before something happened. It wasn't going to be easy, but it was something he had to do. He needed to stay away from Robyn for a while.

When he got downstairs, Rayne, Vane and Robyn were already eating dinner.

Robyn saw him come down the stairs and waited for him to enter the kitchen. When he didn't, she got up to see where he had gone, but she didn't see him anywhere. Frowning, she walked towards the back door, opened it and listened. The unmistakable slam of the outside door reverberated through the garage.

Robyn stood there a moment, stunned and feeling a little hurt, wondering why Trigg was behaving strangely. Had she done something wrong? Had she said something? Maybe one of the guys had said something. Had they seen him carrying her to her room, or worse yet, to his room? Her mind was reeling with all the possibilities. Finally, she went into the kitchen and sat.

“Did Trigg leave already?” Rayne asked, looking at Robyn.

Robyn nodded, twirling the food around on her plate. She had suddenly lost her appetite.

Vane raised a brow. “Without dinner?”

Robyn glanced at Vane. Only Vane would find it unthinkable to go without a meal, she thought to herself, then busied herself with the food on her plate.

“Maybe he decided to eat out or eat later when he gets back. He must have had something really important to do,” Robyn said, not looking up. She was more or less trying to convince herself rather than offer an explanation to the guys.

No one said anything further. Robyn was the last to leave the table. She cleaned and straightened the kitchen until Rayne and Vane headed out. When she heard the outside door shut, she let herself go.

First the tears of hurt came and then anger at Trigg’s childish behavior. She had done nothing wrong. Why had he high-tailed it out of there without even a “Goodbye”, or “See you later”?

“Men! They only care about themselves.”

Slapping her dishtowel on the counter, Robyn walked upstairs and headed towards the roof. She watched the sun make its final dive and watched the stars slowly come out to dance in the sky.

Trigg made this way through the streets of downtown Louisville, trying to stay focused on hunting Rogues. He felt guilty for practically running out of the building without speaking to Robyn, but he had to do it. He had to avoid her for a while.

He kept his senses alert, not only for Rogues, but for Rayne and Vane. He didn’t want to talk to them either. No, it was best to stay away from everyone until he figured things out, until he was himself again.

While he attempted to censor his thoughts, he caught the scent of a Rogue, so he sprinted to the end of the block. He found the Rogue walking nonchalantly up the street as a couple walked, hand-in-hand, in the other direction.

Trigg watched the Rogue stop when the couple reached him and plaster on a brilliant smile. His excellent hearing made it easy to pick up what the Rogue was saying to the couple.

“Hey, could you tell me where the Mexican restaurant is? A friend of mine told me it was in this area, but I must have turned down the wrong street.”

Trigg knew the drill all too well. One Rogue would capture their attention with his charm and get them to stop and talk to him, while the others would come out of the shadows and herd them out of sight where no one would see.

Rogues never traveled alone, at least he had never come across one where there wasn't at least another Rogue close.

Trigg walked in their direction. When the Rogue saw him, his smile quickly faded, breaking the spell. The couple, who must have wondered why they were standing there talking to the stranger, walked away quickly in the direction they were originally headed.

“Sad. Sad. Sad.” Trigg blew out an exaggerated sigh. “Can't you bloodsuckers come up with any other pickup lines than that?”

The Rogue snarled at him, flashing his fangs and showing his displeasure at the Watcher's intrusion on his folly.

“Watcher,” the Rogue spat. “What the hell do you want? I was just chatting with the good folks. Is that a crime?” He smiled, but his smile was sadistic.

“You may as well tell your friends to come out and get this over with. I am not in the mood to chase anyone tonight,” Trigg warned, still advancing on the Rogue.

Another Rogue came out of the shadows, pulled out a dagger and flashed a toothy smile as he joined the first. “Well, well,” Trigg mused. “Finally moving up in the world, huh? Rogues with weapons. How sporting. So, who'd you steal that from?”

Both Rogues advanced on him. Trigg sidestepped a sweeping claw headed towards his face, then ducked and blocked the knife wielded by the other Rogue.

One Rogue spun around and took another lunge towards him as the other rushed him from behind. Trigg threw a punch to the Rogue's ribs, before ducking to flip the other one over his shoulder.

As the fight continued, three more Rogues came around the corner to join the melee.

Trigg stumbled his way upstairs to his room. It had been a rough night. Although he finally had managed to take down all five Rogues, he had incurred cuts and scrapes while getting the job done. A large slice on his side was going to need stitching to stop the bleeding so it could heal while he slept.

He made his way to his room and headed to the bathroom for the med kit. He had been off his game a little and should have called Rayne or Vane for backup instead of dodging them all night and making sure they didn't pick up his location.

Trigg cleaned the wound, stitched it and collapsed into bed.

## Chapter Fourteen

Robyn left her room the next morning wondering if she would get a chance to talk to Trigg today. She didn't want to bang on the door to his room and wake him. She'd wait until he came down this evening.

She descended the stairs and turned towards the kitchen for breakfast, but paused when she caught sight of something on the floor. Moving closer and bending, she discovered it was blood.

Robyn straightened and stepped back. There were several drops of blood on the floor. She turned and made her way to the stairs, looking for more spots and found there were drops leading up the stairs.

There didn't seem to be a huge amount of blood, which was a relief, though that relief soon faded.

Glancing upstairs, she wondered if it was Trigg who was injured. Even if it was, she knew there was nothing she could do about it now. The guys were sleeping off the long night, and the doors were kept locked from the inside so they wouldn't be disturbed. Trigg had told her that vampires needed the daytime sleep to rejuvenate their bodies.

Robyn began cleaning all the spots of blood she could find, even the ones on the stairs and lower level leading to the outside door.

Jake instructed the guy, who had called him in Texas about finding the notebook, to arrange for Chris to meet with him at the storage company.

The meeting would be away from prying eyes and ears, and he could take care of the situation swiftly and quietly. Anyone with knowledge of their meeting, or even their acquaintance, would keep silent if he valued his life. Jake didn't play around, and he didn't give second chances either.

The delivery truck had made its scheduled stop in Nashville, Tennessee, for a small drop, and everything was going as planned. The holding area in the back of the building for the stash was cleared out and ready for the delivery.

Jake poured himself a shot of whiskey as he looked out of the window of his office and gazed over the city's skyline. Robyn was in the city somewhere, and he would get her back. He would keep her alive just long enough to assert his authority and save face with his men, then he would get rid of her. She wouldn't be going back to Texas with him, he was certain of that.

Taking a sip of whiskey, he remembered the embarrassment of her escape. He prayed no one higher up on the food chain had heard about it. They would think him incapable of handling his area if he couldn't keep a young girl in line.

Jake turned and flung his shot glass at the wall, shattering it and leaving whiskey splattered over the wall and counter, then he stormed out of his office.

Trigg left the warehouse the same way he did the night before, without speaking to anyone. This time he rode his motorcycle in case Rayne or Vane tried to catch him before he left. He had seen someone opening the door to the lower level, but didn't stop. Instead, he gunned his motorcycle and hit the street without looking back.

His side was still sore, but it was healing as expected. He wouldn't let the Rogues get a knife on him again. He should have let Rayne know about the knife, but shrugged it off as a possible one-time incident. The Rogue may have taken it from someone unlucky enough to be the main course at dinner that evening.

Trigg sped towards the outer downtown streets. He would spread out a little farther tonight so he didn't cross paths with Rayne or Vane. He wasn't feeling up to talking to anyone.

For hours Trigg rode, not finding much action on the outskirts of downtown until he gave up and slowly made his way inward.

At a red light, he glanced at a storefront window. Mannequins dressed in women's summer wear were on display. Trigg immediately thought of Robyn and her need of

clothes, and no matter how hard he tried, the thought wouldn't leave his mind. She needed more clothes and he was going to get them for her. This time of night, though, only bars and restaurants were open downtown.

When the light changed, he wound through the streets, making his way to Second Street and crossing the bridge. He was going to head for one of those twenty-four hour megastores in Southern Indiana and pick out some more items for Robyn.

Robyn cleared the table. She had put on a happy face and tried to carry on a conversation with Rayne and Vane during dinner. It took all she had to mask her disappointment that Trigg had left tonight without a word to anyone, not even a backwards glance at her.

Rayne had tried to catch him, but Trigg had already left on his motorcycle. Usually Trigg preferred to patrol the streets on foot. Guess he wasn't up to walking tonight, she thought.

When the guys left, Robyn headed to the bedrooms to gather the dirty clothes and towels. She set her basket down in Trigg's room and went to the bathroom to get his towels and change them for clean ones.

She froze when she saw a bloodstained washcloth on the sink. It was still wet from where Trigg obviously had tried to rinse out the blood, but it must have set in too long. *So it was Trigg's blood on the floor and the stairs. How badly had he been hurt?*

Robyn worried her lower lip, staring at the bloodstained washcloth. She would wait for him this time and give him a piece of her mind. With a huff of agitation, she picked up what needed to be taken to the laundry room, stomped from Trigg's room and slammed the door.

After the laundry was finished, Robyn settled on the couch. The place was quiet. She enjoyed the peace and quiet and freedom to do whatever she wanted. If she wanted to blast the stereo and slide across the floor in nothing but a long shirt and panties, she could. If she wanted to dance naked on the roof under the stars, she could.

Instead of those silly things, Robyn opted to watch television. Flipping through the channels, she didn't find anything that interested her. Actually, all she could think about was Trigg. She desperately needed to talk to him and find out what was wrong. Finally, she got up and retrieved her journal from her room. Organizing her thoughts would help her when she talked to Trigg.

Robyn spent the rest of the evening writing in her journal as she sat on the couch. She wrote about her trip to the park by the river, about watching the children play and hearing their laughter, watching families spending time together and about her sorrow that her mother—her only family—was gone.

Writing about Trigg and how he made her feel wanted and special made her smile. He had treated her gently the other night, but she was confused with the way he was acting towards her now.

Since her original journal was missing, and she prayed it hadn't fallen into the wrong hands, she took a deep breath, then wrote about the years at Jake's ranch, summarizing a lot of events that had happened over the four years she was there.

Robyn revisited the memory of the loss of her mother after Jake had gotten her addicted to his drugs from which she had died of an overdose.

She wrote about the night of her escape, of coming to Louisville, of the thoughtful thing Trigg had done for her at the restaurant and of the fight at the parking garage, though she made no mention of vampires, just noting the men were a couple of crazed goons.

Robyn smiled when she described how she met the other guys. Though it had been quite scary at the time, she could laugh about it now. She wrote about staying in a renovated warehouse and her wonderful trip to the shops on Fourth Street. All of that writing made her eyes droop, and before she knew it, they closed for good, and she fell asleep.

Trigg came back early. He had picked up a couple more outfits for Robyn, hoping he was correct in guessing her taste and using the sizes he remembered from the clothes she had purchased at the store on Fourth Street.

The light was on in the living room when Trigg walked through the door. The television's volume was turned down and only white fuzz filled the screen because the station had gone off the air for the night.

Trigg picked up the remote and turned off the television, then turned and looked at Robyn, who was stretched out on the couch.

She lay on her side, her left hand curled under her head and the right arm resting on the couch. A notebook and pen were on the floor beside the couch where they must have dropped from her hands when she fell asleep. He smiled. She looked peaceful, and very beautiful.

He stood there watching her for several minutes before deciding to take her to her bed. It was more comfortable than the couch, he thought. But before he could pick her up, she stirred.

Robyn was slightly aware of someone close to her as she slept. She opened her eyes, blinked a few times to get them to focus and saw Trigg standing there. Seeing his face washed away the hurt and anger she had been holding inside for the past two days. And when he smiled at her, it melted her heart.

"Hi," he said quietly.

"Hi." Robyn smiled and pushed herself up on the couch, then scooted back a little, leaving Trigg room to sit. She waited for him to say something, anything, but he only stared at her.

Trigg finally spoke as he took a seat next to her. "I'm sorry I have been acting like an ass the last couple of days. I just..." he paused, then looked down at the floor. "I needed some time to think about a few things."

Robyn spoke before he could say anything else. "I've missed you, Trigg." She laid her hand over his and gave it a slight squeeze.

Staring at her hand covering his, Trigg felt guilty for hurting her.

“Did you work things out? The things you had to think about?” she asked.

Her face showed concern when he looked at her. He thought about his answer and frowned

“No. Not all of them.” The one thing he did work out was that he didn’t care what the other guys thought, not even Tank. He knew he felt something for Robyn, but he was afraid to analyze that too closely right now.

He had decided to step back and take it slow and easy. Provide her with comfort and silently vowing to do anything that would keep her happy. That was the most important thing. He wanted her to be happy because he was sure she had not felt happiness in a long time. Her eyes had said it all the first time they met.

Robyn glanced over and saw shopping bags sitting in the floor. “What’s that?”

Trigg got off the couch and brought the bags to her. “I picked up some clothes for you since you obviously didn’t do what I asked and go back to the store to get what you needed.”

Robyn didn’t catch Trigg’s sarcasm as she was too surprised and elated that he thought about her and cared enough to shop for her. She looked at him with wide, excited eyes before she peered into the first bag.

As she pulled out socks, shirts and jeans, Trigg emptied the other two bags, which contained two sundresses and two nightshirts. He had even bought her a little white cap. It looked more feminine than a ball cap.

Robyn looked at the clothes that filled her lap and spilled over onto the floor. Her mouth was open like a Venus Flytrap. Trigg reached over and pushed it closed with one finger, chuckling at the expression on her face.

She turned to him with a sheen of tears in her eyes. It moved him that something he considered not a big deal evidentially meant so much to her.

Robyn was at a loss for words and didn’t know how to thank him. Without hesitating, she leaned in to him, reached behind his head and pulled him to her mouth, remembering how he had kissed her the other night.

The kiss started out gently, then deepened. Their tongues danced and tasted, exploring each other's mouths. Robyn moaned and he felt it on his lips, heating him even more.

Trigg could not tamp down the beast. He wanted her. He was no longer listening to his head, but following his need to be deep inside her. Ignoring her squeak of surprise, he picked her up, cradled her in his arms and carried her upstairs to his room, barely breaking the kiss along the way.

They fell into bed, a tangle of limbs and moving bodies.

Robyn ran her fingers down Trigg's back and grabbed the sides of his shirt, needing the material gone so she could run her hands along his chest and feel his skin next to hers. He had worn a T-shirt that night, so it was easy for him to stop and pull it over his head. Robyn sighed as their mouths met again.

She let her hands roam over his shoulders and down his arms, feeling the hard muscles flex and bunch as he moved. Slipping her hands between them, she ran her palms over his chest and along his flat abs before making her way down and unbuttoning his jeans.

Robyn's heart was beating fast and heat was coursing through her veins. She wanted to *feel* him, all of him. Although he would be her first, there was no fear or hesitation—only want.

Trigg moved slightly and helped Robyn remove his jeans. Her fingers felt like satin ribbons flowing across his skin. She was so delicate, he thought. He pulled her shirt over her head. Finding she wasn't wearing anything underneath made him growl with approval before he began to devour her breasts with his mouth.

He slid his hand under the waistband of her cotton shorts and behind the band of her panties. When he reached her mound, he cupped it once, and felt her shiver under his touch. Using two fingers to open her folds, he began to trace circles around her opening, teasing her and making her want him even more.

"You are so wet," he growled while kissing her belly. "Robyn, tell me you want this. If you don't, I will stop, but you must say it now or I won't be able to."

Robyn continued to moan and pant as he teased her clit. “Yes,” she breathed. “Trigg, I want you! I want this!”

Trigg let out a low growl that reverberated through his chest as he pulled off her shorts and panties with one tug and tossed them on the floor. In the next heartbeat he settled himself between her legs.

He entered her slowly so that she wouldn’t tense. He didn’t want to hurt her. She had only experienced hurt and violence in her life and not what it felt like to make love. His body trembled at the control he was exerting. His beast roared to surge forward and pound into her, but he held back.

Easing himself inside, he felt resistance and stared down at her. Robyn had never taken a man before. Her words from the other night came back to him, words she was trying to tell him that he didn’t want to hear, not wanting to allow her self doubts to get the best of her.

A part of him was elated to know that he would be her first, *and her last*, his beast proclaimed. And, a part of him was honored that she trusted him enough to give herself over to him.

Not able to hold back any longer, he took her mouth with his and kissed her deeply as he surged forward, taking her gasp into his mouth.

Trigg didn’t move, he let her settle as he continued to kiss and tease her lips and tongue, keeping her passion going through the pain he had heard was endured during a woman’s first time.

Now he was totally sheathed in her slick heat, and he groaned in pleasure. His ears rang and his heart beat hard in his chest, but he began to love her with long, languid strokes, building a fire inside her slowly.

Trigg wanted to keep it slow and easy, to let her feel what he was doing to her. He wanted to show her warmth and tenderness, things he was afraid he didn’t have to give her.

Robyn brought her knees up to cradle him between her legs, her hands exploring his back and then lowering, squeezing his butt. “Don’t hold back, I want this,” she whispered breathlessly.

Trigg felt his blood race. He tried to hold back the beast, but it broke free at her words. He quickened his pace. The long, languid strokes became quick, hard thrusts. He heard her moans and keening cries, but they were not sounds of pain and they urged him on.

He felt her shake and her panting grew louder as her climax built, and he was rising to meet her. His fangs lengthened as his beast roared in the heat of passion.

Robyn saw it in his eyes, the intense hunger and drive. His eyes were glowing, the red tint overshadowing their normal hazel color. She saw the tips of his fangs, but wasn’t afraid. His eyes held no evil, no ill intent, just passion.

“It’s okay, Trigg. Take what you want, what you need.” She knew he had been injured the other night and that passion was stirring his hunger and his need for blood. She wasn’t afraid. She knew he would not hurt her and at that moment, she would give him anything, just to show him how good he made her feel. She wanted to show him that she loved him.

Trigg couldn’t hold back after Robyn offered herself to him and turned her head, granting access to the vein he could see pulsing in her neck.

He lowered his head, kissing his way along her jaw and down the line of her neck before swirling his tongue over her pulse. He groaned when Robyn drew her legs tighter to pull him inside of her further and dug her nails into his shoulders

Trigg sank his teeth into her flesh. Warm, sweet blood pulsed into his mouth as he suckled. Her taste was exquisite as it swirled over his tongue, tantalizing his senses.

Robyn felt the prick of Trigg’s fangs as they entered her skin. The pain was short, like an injection, and then she felt lightning soar through her veins, sending an intense wave of pure pleasure rocketing through her body. A wave far more powerful than the one she had felt the other night.

The explosion made her cry Trigg's name over and over as he continued to pump fast and hard.

She soared, going higher and higher, then ebbing slightly only to coast higher again. The climax came like ripples, one after another, a bliss she had never thought she would experience.

Trigg felt her release and heard her cry of ecstasy. The heat of her climax washed over him, mingling with the sweet taste of her blood. The connection between man and beast severed as his climax propelled him into another world, projecting him through space and time as every cell in his body exploded into bliss.

That carnal bliss made him hunger for more of her blood and he drank greedily, not wanting the sensation of her, of being inside her, to end.

Trigg had never felt so totally spent and sated in his life. His heart raced and he couldn't catch his breath. His brain was fogged and out of focus. His body tingled as he continued to spasm with the aftershocks of his orgasm. Finally, he laid his cheek against Robyn's fuzzy blonde hair as he tried to slow his breathing.

When his head cleared and his heart rate was closer to normal once more, he sensed something was wrong. He rose up on one elbow and looked down at her. Her eyes were closed, her lips parted slightly. Two small lines of blood trickled down her neck to the bed from the puncture wounds. She was pale and barely breathing.

Trigg sat up with a start and scooped her into his arms. He patted her cheeks lightly trying to rouse her. "Robyn."

Getting worried his calls became louder "Robyn! Robyn, look at me! Open your eyes, Robyn!"

She didn't respond. No sound, not even a moan.

Trigg's heart lurched. He had obviously taken too much blood. Robyn was petite, he should have been more careful. The beast had taken over and shoved reality and reason aside until he had lost all control and awareness.

He laid her back on the bed and listened to her heart. It seemed faint, distant. Trigg's hand began to shake as he caressed her cheek. "Oh, Robyn, I am sorry! Please wake up

and open your eyes!” He scooped her limp body into his arms again and cradled her in front of him.

He sliced his wrist with his nail and pressed it against her mouth. Parting her lips with his other hand, he leaned her back so the blood flowed into her mouth. He used his fingers to push up the sides of her mouth so his blood stayed in her mouth and eased down her throat instead of out the sides.

Panic rose inside him. He roared loudly in anguish and in anger at himself as well as the beast inside him.

## Chapter Fifteen

Rayne and Vane returned from another night of patrolling. It was the second night that Trigg had managed to elude them. They had sensed where he had been, but were unable to catch up with him.

Vane headed straight for the kitchen.

Rayne stepped into the living room. He was frustrated with Trigg's actions lately and his disappearing acts.

"Well, his bike's downstairs, so he must be back," Rayne said, running a hand through his hair in agitation.

"Unless he went back out on foot," Vane suggested loudly, his head in the refrigerator as he rummaged for food.

Rayne went further into the living room and saw the mess of clothes on the floor. He walked around the couch and frowned. Women's clothes, all with tags, lay on the couch and floor.

Shaking his head at the mess, Rayne bent down, picked up one of the bags and started shoving the items back inside. While he was grabbing clothes from the floor, he felt the notebook and pen. Rayne placed them on the coffee table and finished putting the clothes into the bags.

When he was finished, he picked up the notebook and sat on the couch. It only took one page to realize that the book, some sort of journal or diary, belonged to Robyn. He knew it was personal and he felt like a heel looking through it. But, he was Second-in-Command and was now in charge of the Cell until Tank returned. He had to make sure there was no mention of the Watchers, vampires or Rogues.

Skimming through the pages, Rayne felt somewhat relieved. Robyn had mentioned their names, but not who or what they were. The notebook began with depictions of things she had done around town. He smiled at her vivid descriptions and the joy he read

there. That is, until he came to the sections that spoke of Jake Carter, his ranch and the death of her mother.

The blood in his veins ran cold. Horrific stories of her past twisted his stomach into knots with each page he read.

Robyn had been locked in a dark, cold room. She had been beaten, burned, threatened, humiliated and more. Her mother had been pushed into drugs and overdosed.

Rayne closed his eyes, trying to squelch the queasiness he felt. Robyn was a gentle creature who cared about those around her. She had adopted them like a mother-hen, making sure they had good meals, clean clothes and kept the place sparkling clean. It even smelled good. She talked with them and laughed with them. She asked questions about things she was unaware of or did not understand—her mind was always open to learn.

A woeful cry reverberated through the building, jerking Rayne away from his thoughts. Vane ran in from the kitchen and looked at Rayne then up at Trigg's door.

"What the hell?" Vane questioned.

Rayne tossed the notebook on the coffee table and ran up the stairs, taking two at a time with Vane following on his heels. They reached Trigg's room and pushed open the door.

Trigg was on the side of the bed, rocking Robyn in his arms. Slowly, he lifted his head and looked at them. Dark, nearly black eyes stared at them while utter terror, almost madness, showed on his face.

When Trigg saw Rayne and Vane, he stiffened, then held Robyn sheltered against him, blocking her naked body from their view. He hissed at them in warning before yanking at a blanket and covering her.

"Trigg," Rayne said softly, slowly making his way to the bed. "What happened? What's wrong with Robyn?"

Rayne moved closer and saw two small lines of blood sliding down Robyn's neck. Her face was pale and her body limp.

“Trigg, close the wound to stop the bleeding. It isn’t much blood, but it’s not helping the situation.”

Trigg continued to stare at Rayne for a moment until his Cell-mate’s words sank in. He turned and looked at Robyn, then lifted her slightly and slowly licked over the puncture holes, closing them to stop the bleeding. He continued holding his bleeding wrist to her mouth, trying to pour his blood down her throat to revive her.

“Okay. Good. Now, my brother, you need to let me check her heart rate. She looks very pale. How long have you been trying to get blood into her?”

Rayne kept his voice cool and even as he inched closer to Robyn. Trigg was definitely unsteady and he didn’t want to provoke him. Robyn could be seriously injured if he didn’t proceed slow and easy and with Trigg’s cooperation.

Trigg swallowed hard, but kept his gaze on Robyn. “Just now. I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t know how to help her.” He looked up at Rayne, his face pained. “She trusted me and I let the beast take her.”

Rayne felt for his brother, but now was the time for focus. He had to get Trigg to back away from Robyn so that he could help her.

“Trigg,” Rayne was only a couple feet in front of Trigg now. “Lay her on the bed so that I can help her.”

When Trigg made no effort to move, Rayne spoke again. “You need to put her down and back off so I can help her. She will die if we don’t do something.”

Trigg continued to stare at Robyn for a moment and then looked at Rayne. He looked into Rayne’s eyes and Rayne knew he understood. He could also see fear, the fear of letting her go.

Finally, Trigg nodded, shifted Robyn in his arms, lifted his bleeding wrist from her mouth and gently laid her on the bed. Slowly and without taking his eyes from her still form, he got up from the bed and backed away, giving Rayne room.

As Rayne approached, a slow, low growl began to emanate from Trigg. Rayne looked at Vane for backup.

Vane entered the room and stood next to Trigg, putting a firm hand on his shoulder.

“Let him take a look at her, Trigg. Don’t be an ass!” Vane barked to get Trigg’s attention. “You need to close the wound on your wrist. It won’t do her any good to have you bleed out.”

As Trigg sealed the wound he had made in his wrist, Rayne felt for Robyn’s pulse and listened to her heartbeat. It slowly began to get stronger, most likely due to Trigg giving her his blood. He turned to the two Watchers.

“I don’t know how much of your blood she took in, but her heartbeat is improving and her breathing is not as faint. She’ll need to rest and we’ll have to keep an eye on her. I don’t want to give her any more blood.”

Rayne paused a moment, then stood and looked Trigg directly in the eyes so there would be no misunderstanding. “We need to move her to her own room. You need your sleep during the day or you will be worthless to us.”

Trigg’s eyes flashed and Rayne could see the question forming.

“I’ll contact one of Headquarters’ human employees and have her come out to watch Robyn during the day. It may take Robyn a few days to get her strength back, but I think she’ll be fine.” The words *this time* hung in the air, unsaid.

Saying nothing more, Rayne stepped back and let Trigg lift her into his arms, carefully keeping her body covered with the blanket. He took Robyn to her own bed where he laid her down gently. After covering her snugly, he turned and headed out the door without another word and went to his room.

Vane blew out a breath and scratched his head as he and Rayne left Robyn’s bedroom. “Okay... That was fun,” Vane said, no humor implied. “So what do we do now?”

They walked down the stairs. Rayne took several minutes, thinking, before he answered. “Well, first I am going to call someone to watch her, and then I’m going to bed.”

“That’s it?” Vane said incredulously. “Trigg almost kills the girl and you’re going to shrug it off?”

Rayne spun on him. “I’m not shrugging it off. You saw him. Do you want to approach him right now? What good would that do?” He let Vane digest what he said for a moment.

“Trigg did not intentionally try to hurt Robyn, he cares deeply for her. You’ve seen how he’s acted since the day we got back. Yeah, he’s been moody and strange, but that’s just Trigg. I know you saw the look on his face up there. The man is damning himself for this. He doesn’t need you or me adding to it.”

Vane nodded in agreement, then turned and headed toward his room. Rayne went to the office and made some calls. He needed someone here pronto. He was tired and ready to sleep, but dared not slip into deep sleep until someone could watch over Robyn. If anything happened to her, Trigg would be lost.

Trigg felt like a caged animal. His emotions were swirling through him so hard that he felt as though he was going to erupt—anger, loathing, sorrow, *fear*. He shouldn’t have gotten close to her. Why didn’t he just stay away from Robyn like he had planned?

This was exactly what he had been afraid of. He had lost control and had been rough with her. He was supposed to be giving her pleasure, not the carnage she had been subjected to before. There would no doubt be bruises where he had gripped her small body when the beast broke free. Robyn would be afraid of him, or hate him for what he had done. He didn’t know which would be worse. He had lost her, before they had even really begun to know each other.

Trying to control his emotions, Trigg’s fangs pierced his bottom lip as he clamped down his jaws in anger at himself. He had to get out. He couldn’t bear to see the look on her face when she came to.

Trigg grabbed a duffle bag from the closet. He folded several pairs of clothes and stuffed them inside along with underwear and socks. He packed additional weapons, which reminded him to let Rayne know that Rogues were now carrying weapons of their own. He would leave him a note, he decided. He didn’t want to face anyone. What he had

done was unforgivable. He had almost taken the life of a human. His duty was to protect them.

Hastily he scribbled out a note for Rayne, left his room and headed down the stairs. He tossed the note for Rayne on the kitchen counter on his way out the door. He would take off for a few days and let Robyn get settled where she would be safe...*safe from him*. Then he would come back. He knew he would have hell to face with Tank when he returned, and he was sure Rayne wasn't done with him either. Well, this time he felt he really deserved whatever they dished out.

Trigg started his bike and headed into what was left of the night. He had maybe two hours before sunrise to get to the other site. At this point, he wasn't so sure he cared if he made it there.

Rayne arranged for Maggie Whitefield, a retired Registered Nurse, to come over within the hour to keep an eye on Robyn. She was a widow and in her early sixties. Somewhat of a family tradition, she had worked on behalf of the Watchers since turning eighteen, following in the steps of her parents, and their parents before.

Rayne scrubbed his hands through his hair in aggravation. Things were getting out of hand and he and his Cell-mates needed to refocus and get back on track. Their job was to hunt and eliminate Rogues. Not doing that job meant humans would suffer greatly by the Rogues' merciless killing. And what would deter civilian vampires to turn away from the bloodlust? Without the fear of being hunted for their crimes, there would be nothing to stand in their way.

Thankfully Maggie had agreed to stay a couple of days until Robyn was on her feet. Stifling a yawn, Rayne left the office and shut the door. It had been a long night, and he was ready for a shower and bed. He could use a beer. When he reached the kitchen, he noticed a piece of paper on the counter.

*R.*

*Going off-site for a while but will be available if needed. Headed for the Bullitt County Cell. Heard they could use some help anyway. Robyn needs a place to stay. Last I heard a civilian vamp was moving out of the apartments on the corner of Muhammad Ali and Armory. They have a pretty good security setup and there would be others around to keep an eye on her. Just make it happen.*

*I'll be back in about a week. She needs to be gone by then.*

*T.*

*Also, I came across a Rogue carrying a knife. That may have been a one-time thing but who knows. They may be stealing weapons from somewhere or someone.*

“Ah, hell!” Rayne cursed. “The night just keeps getting better and better!” He grabbed a beer out of the refrigerator and headed back to the office. He had more calls to make. The evening couldn’t be over soon enough, he thought with a groan.

Chris Farmer caught the bus and headed towards the east side of town. He had been told over the phone that Jake Carter was very interested in the notebook he had found. “Very interested,” Chris mused to himself.

He had figured the finder’s fee should be substantial with what was written in the book, so he had taken a bus to the library and made copies of choice pages. He had left the book itself at home. Besides, Jake, like himself, was a businessman and what do businessmen do? They negotiate.

He was determined to work out a deal for the notebook. He wasn’t stupid enough to waltz in and just hand it over with a “Thanks, man”. No, he was setting himself up for the best deal he had ever made. This would be his ticket out of town. He was done with getting by, making two-bit sales. He wanted out of this city.

The bus made its way up Broadway, stopping periodically to let passengers on and off. Chris didn’t take a second glance at anyone. He was dreaming of cutting loose and almost missed his stop because he hadn’t noticed the bus had slowed and was getting ready to make a right turn.

Chris happened to come out of his reflections in time to see the storage building where he was supposed to meet Jake Carter. He stood quickly and pulled the cord, signaling the bus driver that he wanted off at the next stop.

When the bus pulled to the curb and the doors swung open, Chris bounded down the steps and walked back towards Broadway and the storage building. He wasn't nervous about meeting with Jake, he was excited. This was going to be a lucky break for him, he thought. Jake might even want someone else on his team. Hell, he wouldn't mind heading down to Texas. Chris passed through the gates of the fence surrounding the old storage building, and made his way to the side door as he had been instructed to do over the phone.

He knocked and waited.

The door opened and one of Jake's men motioned for him to enter the building. Chris' eyes bugged at the expanse of space the building offered. It didn't look that big from the outside.

Forklifts made their way through the aisles, moving and situating skids of boxes and barrels. Chris wondered to himself if this was the main distribution point for this area. He smiled as he watched the bustle around him. *Yeah*, he thought, *I'm about to move up the food chain.*

Jake's man patted Chris down, searching for weapons, then shepherded him through another set of doors and into a hallway. They stopped at the elevator and waited.

"Hey, man," Chris addressed the man who let him into the building. "You work for Jake long?"

The man didn't answer. Nor did he even glance at Chris. When the elevator doors opened, the man motioned for Chris to step inside. Once they were both inside, the man pressed the button for *L3*.

The ride to the third floor was quick and when the doors opened, the man stepped out and waited for Chris to follow. He led Chris into a small meeting room, where Chris was left alone to wait.

Jake left Chris waiting. He wasn't going to run in and give the weasel whatever he wanted. Finally he made his way to the room where he had instructed his man to leave the slime ball. He opened the door, glanced at Chris, then walked over to the head chair, where he sat without speaking, taking his time to get comfortable before addressing the lowlife scum.

"So, Chris Farmer, I hear you have found something that may be of interest to me?" Jake kept his tone cool and calm, and with a hint of boredom. He didn't want to lend the impression that anything this kid possessed had any bearing on him or his operations. Besides, he was untouchable.

Chris cleared his throat, suddenly not feeling as cocky as he had before. He needed to stand his ground if he wanted to get something. One thing was certain. He wasn't going to mention to Jake about finding a birth certificate and social security card. He was going to keep that bit of information to himself since he didn't plan on handing it over with the notebook.

"Yeah, I was cuttin' through a parking garage about a week ago, I guess, and I found a bag of some clothes and shit. I dumped it out and found a notebook. I flipped through it and found your name mentioned, a lot. It was written by a girl named Robyn. There is some pretty wicked shit in there!" Chris grinned, but sobered when Jake's face remained stoic.

Jake waited a moment, then shifted in his chair slightly. "So, why do you think this notebook has anything to do with me?"

Chris was shocked at the question. He knew perfectly well that the stories were about Jake Carter. He had heard tales that had funneled through the channels about the man's control complex, and what he had read in the book had verified most of it. "Well, besides your name, as I already said, stuff's in there 'bout your business, your men and your ranch in Texas, among other things." He shrugged, trying to play Jake's game of appearing indifferent.

Jake studied him for a while. *This cocky little street rat thinks he can crawl out of his little hole and play with the big guys.* The thought began to boil in his stomach like acid. He decided to change it up a little, throw the little dirt bag off track.

“Hmm...that’s interesting. I don’t recall anyone named Robyn.” He kept his face neutral, but contemplative. “Do you have the notebook on you? This all sounds interesting and I would like take a look at what someone has written, supposedly about me.”

Chris smiled. *Now we’re talking.* “Well, I brought along a couple of pages, just to let you know that what I found was legit. You can take a look at them and decide if it’s got somethin’ to do with you, or if you are willin’ to blow it off.”

Jake clenched his fists under the table. This kid was trying to squeeze him! “Okay, let me take a look.”

Chris handed Jake ten pages, ones he had thought were the juiciest. One page documented how Robyn’s mother, Rachel, had overdosed on Jake’s drugs, and how Jake tossed her body in the back of his truck and buried her in the woods. Another page described Robyn being tied up and beaten by Jake for burning his dinner. A couple of pages described Jake’s drug distribution in precise detail.

Jake read the pages Chris passed across the table. He tried to keep his face unreadable, but was unable to control his brows coming together in a vee, forming a deep frown. Anger seethed below the surface. *How dare Robyn put all of this on paper, and why didn’t I or my men know about it? How did she keep it hidden in her room?*

Jake laid down the papers, steepled his fingers and looked across the table at Chris. “Okay, what’s your price? What do you want for the book?”

Chris sobered and put on his game face and named his price without batting an eye.

Jake held back a laugh. He wasn’t going to give the boy a cent, but he had to play along and conduct himself as the businessman he was. They negotiated for a while before Jake decided the discussion was over. “Okay, that sounds reasonable. Bring the book here and we’ll settle.”

Chris wasn't going to come back to this private place and risk the chance of being killed after handing over the notebook. He knew how these people worked. Killing meant nothing to them. He shook his head.

"No. How about you have one of your men meet me at the pizza place on Second Street by the bridge." Chris wanted to make the exchange someplace public. Bars were too crowded and dark. If the hit man was quiet, a guy could get taken out there and no one would even know until it was too late.

Jake studied him for a moment, eyes narrowed. "Okay, I'll have one of my men meet you there in, say, three hours. That should give you enough time to get the book and go to the restaurant."

Chris agreed, trying not to grin. He had hit the jackpot. This was going to be his night.

Jake told his man who had been waiting outside of the room during the meeting to walk Chris out of the building. When they left the meeting room, he paged Rico to come to his office.

When Rico arrived at the spacious office that had glass windows filling an entire side of the room, Jake was fuming. "Take a look at this!" He tossed the papers on the desk and Rico stepped forward, picked them up and scanned through them.

Rico frowned and looked uneasy. He knew shit was going to hit the fan. "Robyn wrote this?"

Jake nodded and flopped down in his big, leather chair. "Yes, I don't doubt it. But I'm not going to mess with this kid. He wants to meet at the pizza place on Second Street. I gave him three hours. I want you to get a couple of men and check out his apartment. I've got a feeling that's where he's headed. I seriously doubt he had the brains to hide the notebook somewhere."

He handed Rico a piece of paper with Chris' address written on it, already having done a background check on Chris Farmer to know who he was dealing with. "See if he's stashed the notebook there. Tear the place apart if you have to. If it's not there, do what you need to do to make him talk!"

Jake stood and looked Rico straight in the eye, his gaze fierce. “I want that book, Rico, do I make myself clear?”

Rico nodded. “Yes, sir. I’ll get it.” He turned and stepped out of the office, silently closing the door behind him.

Jake turned in his chair and looked out the window at the city. He blew out a long breath and ran his hands through his hair. He was aggravated to have to deal with this situation. As it was, he had a lot to focus on for the next several weeks.

## Chapter Sixteen

The downtown streets were practically deserted tonight. Being a weeknight, not many people ventured out to party at the local hot spots.

Rico took two men with him to Chris' apartment after giving the boy enough time to have arrived back there on the bus. They parked a block from the apartment building and saw that the lights were off in Chris' apartment.

"He must have stopped off somewhere. Hopefully he's not running his mouth to his buddies," Rico said over his shoulder to his men.

After about twenty minutes, they saw Chris stride down the street, walk up the steps to his apartment building and go inside. Rico and his men waited for the lights to come on in the apartment. When they did, they got out of the truck and headed inside.

Chris was dancing around the apartment like a kid on Christmas morning. He went into his bedroom and pulled out the notebook. He hadn't given Jake Carter the only copies he had made. While he had been at the library, he had copied the entire journal. It had cost him some bucks, but he was going to make enough money from that book so he didn't care.

Making a quick stop at his cousin's house before heading back to his apartment, he had hidden the copies there while he was visiting. He didn't tell his cousin or anyone else about the notebook because he wasn't letting anyone know about the money. No way was he cutting loose with any of it.

Rico put his ear to the door and listened. He could hear Chris moving around the apartment. Then the stereo came on, blasting a hard beat with lyrics Rico couldn't decipher. He wondered to himself how well Chris' neighbors liked him.

Bending slightly in the dim hallway, Rico picked the lock, then turned the knob slowly, opening the door a crack, just enough to peer inside to locate Chris.

At that moment, Chris left the room and was walking down the hall. Rico opened the door wider and he and the men stepped inside. Once inside Rico immediately spotted a notebook on the couch. He walked over, picked it up and thumbed through it. It was the book Jake wanted him to retrieve. He nodded to his men, shaking the book to indicate he had found what they had come for.

Rico jerked his head in the direction of the hallway, giving the signal for the men to take care of Chris. The two men walked down the hall silently, and found Chris in the kitchen, his head in the refrigerator. One stepped up, grabbed him from behind and put a gloved hand over his mouth.

Chris panicked. He knew what this was about. He had overplayed his hand. He tried to struggle free, but the men were too strong.

They dragged him towards the bathroom, stuffed him in the tub, slit his throat and then wiped the knife on his shirt. While leaving the bathroom, one of the men pressed the button on the doorknob to lock the door and closed it behind them. All three exited the apartment, the radio still blaring in the living room. Their job was finished.

As silent and unobserved as when they had come in, they made their way to the truck. It had taken less than twenty minutes to get what they had come for and eliminate the loose end—Chris.

Rico and his men climbed into the truck and took the notebook to Jake.

Rayne sat in the living room on the couch, waiting for Maggie to arrive to take care of Robyn until she regained her strength. He put his feet on the coffee table, then glanced at the notebook he had found earlier.

With a heavy sigh, he picked the notebook up and began reading again, knowing he wasn't going to like what it contained. It explained a lot about Robyn and most likely why she was in Louisville, alone, with no money or place to stay.

Rayne wasn't sure what, if anything, they could do about Jake Carter. Her ordeal had taken place in Texas, far away from Louisville. Maybe he could contact the Cell closest to Jake's ranch, and have them...*have them do what? Kill him?* Watchers didn't go around killing humans, but they were allowed to protect themselves when necessary. Killing was something Rogues did, thus the reason they are hunted and eliminated. No. Regretfully, he would have to let it go. There was nothing he could do.

Maggie arrived an hour later by taxi, carrying a small suitcase since she had agreed to stay a few days. She walked to the door and pressed the intercom button.

Rayne opened the door and let her inside. He had explained, as best he could, the situation over the phone. Surprisingly, Maggie, though she was human, showed no sign of judgment or distaste in regards to the situation.

He relieved Maggie of her suitcase, gave her a quick tour of the first floor and explained the security system before heading upstairs. He led her to the guest room where she would be staying and placed the suitcase on the bed.

Maggie then followed Rayne to the next room where Robyn lay in a deep sleep. Rayne had given the woman an overview of what they had done for Robyn, including the fact that Trigg had given her some of his blood, though how much she had ingested was not known. Maggie nodded and walked to Robyn's bedside, where she donned her stethoscope and listened to her breathing and heart rate.

Maggie walked back over to Rayne who was standing in the doorway. He looked exhausted and concerned. "We'll just have to let her sleep and keep an eye on her to make sure she doesn't grow weaker. Her body is trying to recover its blood supply. When she is awake, I'll be sure to get some orange juice down her and start building her strength." Maggie put a hand on Rayne's arm and patted him lightly to comfort. "She'll be fine. Everything will be okay."

"I've arranged for her to stay at an apartment when she is able to leave," Rayne told Maggie.

Maggie nodded. "I'm sure it is for the best. Vampires and humans don't mix well in relationships. It's not common, but not unheard of either. I'll keep you posted on her progress. You go and get some sleep. You need to rest and take care of yourself too." She smiled at him and he returned her smile.

Maggie was going to be a great help, Rayne thought with relief. He could rest a little easier knowing that Robyn would be cared for. Watchers couldn't take care of a dog, much less a sick or injured human. They slept during the day and were out hunting all night. There just wasn't any time to care for anything or anyone but themselves.

Rayne left Maggie to tend to Robyn, took a shower, then went to bed. He was asleep by the time he pulled the covers over himself.

When Robyn awoke, it took her a few minutes to get oriented and figure out where she was. Her throat was dry and she was very thirsty.

She lay there for a few minutes before the memories came flooding back, the night with Trigg and how wonderful he had made her feel. He had bitten her. A momentary pain followed by the most exhilarating feeling. After a while, she had been drifting away, floating down a river without her body. Then, nothing.

Robyn reached up and touched the spot on her neck where Trigg had sunk his fangs. It felt a little tender, but that was all. She shifted in bed, trying to judge her ability to move her limbs, which felt heavy and sluggish. With some effort, she was able to sit and slide her legs over the side of the bed.

The room spun. Robyn covered her face with her hands and fell back onto the bed. She lay there until the world stopped spinning and groaned aloud. The worst thing was she needed to use the bathroom.

Slowly she raised herself from the bed and tried again. The room swayed as she stood, her legs unsteady and weak, but she held on to the bedpost until she felt she could remain standing without falling on her face.

The walk to the bathroom wasn't easy. She knocked into the doorjamb with a curse as a sharp pain shot up her shoulder. Finally, she made it to the toilet.

Nausea built and she stood motionless in front of the toilet until her churning stomach settled and the nausea faded.

Extreme fatigue wasn't the only thing dragging Robyn down. She felt oddly cold inside. A hot bath would be just the thing, she told herself as she turned on the faucet to fill the tub. It would ease her aches and warm her as well.

The steamy hot bath felt so good that she moaned. She had filled the tub as high as possible without it overflowing when she had sat down.

Robyn closed her eyes and drifted for a while. Her thoughts kept coming back to Trigg. She wondered where he was. When she slid out of bed she had glanced at the clock. It was still a little early yet for the guys to be out of bed.

Robyn relaxed in the bathtub until the water became uncomfortably cool and her skin pruned. She pulled the stopper out of the drain with her toes, stood slowly and grabbed a towel. Sitting on the lid of the toilet seat, she dried herself, feeling too tired to stand.

As she dried her stomach, she noticed bruises on her hips and she frowned. Looking herself over, she found bruises on her buttocks as well. Suddenly, it dawned on her and the confusion disappeared. A smile creased her face as she remembered how they had gotten there. It wasn't intentional. That she was sure of. She was just a scrawny little thing, especially compared to Trigg.

The trip back to her bed was easier than her trip to the bathroom. Robyn's legs were steadier and the room had stopped spinning. She felt refreshed after the long, hot bath, and her stomach was growling.

The bags of clothes Trigg had bought for her were lying on the floor by her bed. A rush of warmth spread through her heart. He had gone to the trouble to do that for her. Just for her. Her smile widened as if it was Christmas as she dug through the bags for a pair of jeans and a shirt.

When Robyn pulled the clothes out of the bag, her notebook tumbled out onto the floor, giving her a start. She picked it up, trying to remember putting it in there.

Her brain was a little fuzzy about everything that had happened last night, except how Trigg had made her feel. With a shrug, she tossed the notebook on the bedside table

and headed for the kitchen before her stomach growls became even louder and she ended up waking the guys before it was time. All she needed was to have to put up with three grouchy vampires—she snickered.

When Robyn walked into the kitchen, she jumped when she saw a short, grey haired woman at the counter holding a mixing bowl. The woman spoke without even turning around.

“You’re finally awake. How are you feeling, child?”

The woman’s voice was smooth and caressing. Robyn could picture herself having a grandmother like this. The thought made her heart ache.

She stepped into the kitchen, standing next to the table. “I’m feeling a little tired, but otherwise I’m okay. Uh...who are you?”

Maggie chuckled at the note of uncertainty in Robyn’s voice. She continued mixing hamburger, breadcrumbs, onions, peppers and spices together in the bowl. After a moment, she stopped to look at Robyn and gave her a warm smile.

“I’m Maggie. Rayne called me to come out and take care of you. Seems you were a little *under the weather*, so to speak.” Maggie turned back to her mixing bowl and continued to stir and fold the mixture together.

Robyn could see that Maggie was making meatloaf for the guys’ dinner. She glanced up at Trigg’s door and a feeling of anticipation came over her.

Maggie caught Robyn’s movement at the corner of her eye and pursed her lips.

“So, I guess they’re all still asleep?” Robyn asked.

Maggie nodded, working on her meatloaf. She stopped, wiped her hands on her apron and retrieved orange juice from the refrigerator. She took a glass from the cabinet. With the cabinet door opened, Robyn noticed that all of the glasses had been moved to a lower shelf where she could reach them. *Trigg*.

The woman set the glass and juice on the table and motioned for Robyn to sit. Robyn did and waited as Maggie poured her a glass of juice. She was still feeling extremely thirsty.

“Are you hungry?” Maggie asked. When Robyn nodded, she made a heaping plate of eggs and bacon and topped it off with several slices of toast.

Robyn was ravenous. It didn’t take her long to wolf down most of the food. She and Maggie talked for a while as the woman finished putting together the meatloaf and popped it in the oven.

She learned that Maggie worked for the Watchers, following in her parents’ footsteps. The woman explained that several generations of her family had done the same and she believed wholeheartedly in what the society was doing and vowed to do everything she could to help.

“They risk their lives for us every day,” Maggie said solemnly.

Robyn couldn’t agree more. She had spent over a week with them and saw firsthand what they did and how dangerous their job was.

Maggie was silent for a moment, then she spoke again.

“Robyn, would you like to talk about what happened the other night?”

When Robyn’s eyes grew wide and she gave a startled look at the question, Maggie tried rephrasing it. Of course Robyn didn’t want to talk about what had obviously happened between her and Trigg, Maggie thought to herself. It was the bloodletting that she felt needed discussing.

Maggie shook her head and lightly patted Robyn on the arm. “Oh, Robyn. I was only referring to Trigg’s taking of your blood.”

She waited a moment for Robyn to decide whether or not she wanted to talk about it or if there was anything she wanted to ask. After a few moments, it looked as though Robyn either didn’t want to talk about it or didn’t have the courage to. Maggie decided to give her some information, hoping some of it would cover whatever questions circled around that young head.

“I know it is a rather *personal* topic. But I just thought you should know a little more about them...vampires...and their ways. Normally they don’t take blood from humans. In fact, it could be very dangerous. You see, that’s what the Rogues do. They crave human blood and live to kill. They revel in it. So, it could get pretty hairy for a vampire to

consume human blood. Addiction is a high possibility, as well as the possibility of turning Rogue.”

Maggie placed the mixing bowl she had been using for the meatloaf in the sink before turning back to Robyn.

“And there could be a danger to the human as well. We can only afford to lose so much blood and each person is different. It all depends on their health, their body make up...” Maggie shrugged and her voice trailed off, hoping that she had said what needed to be said without sounding too harsh.

Maggie watched Robyn as she ate, trying to determine if her words were sinking in. She wanted to get the point across to the girl that a relationship with Trigg would be a very bad idea.

Robyn bit into a piece of toast and chewed while she listened to what Maggie was telling her about vampires. Her heart began to squeeze when the realization of how true the woman’s words were.

Trigg had said they did not need to feed from humans. They got what blood they needed from eating rare meat. It now occurred to her the reason behind that. They chose to eat meat to keep away from the craving of human blood, the bloodlust that the Rogues were under.

Being with her could cause Trigg to become a Rogue. Her heart didn’t want to believe that. She kept telling herself there was no way that would happen. Trigg was too strong to let that happen. As much as she tried to hold on to that hope, it quickly faded.

Robyn’s heart ached and she suddenly lost her appetite. What had she done? Trigg joined the Watchers to fight those monsters and now she was quite possibly the one thing to blow it all to hell, making him become the very thing he loathed and hunted each night.

Maggie’s talk about blood loss and how dangerous it was for humans also haunted her thoughts. She had awakened weak and couldn’t even stand for quite a while.

She sucked in a breath and thought about the other guys. Rayne was currently Trigg's leader. Did she get Trigg into some deep trouble? Would he be punished for breaking a Watcher or vampire law? She anxiously glanced towards Trigg's room.

Robyn's hands began to tremble and she almost dropped her glass of orange juice. Instead, it hit the table with a loud thud when she set it down.

"Maggie?"

Maggie saw the look of great concern and even fear on Robyn's face. "Yes, child. What's wrong?"

"Did Trigg break some sort of rule by taking my blood?"

Maggie understood what was upsetting Robyn. She gave her a reassuring smile to ease her worry. "No, he didn't. You weren't attacked...right?"

Robyn shook her head in earnest.

"Well, then. I wouldn't worry about it. You look tired. Now you go on into the living room and watch some television. You need to relax and let your body rebuild its energy."

Maggie waved her out of the kitchen. Robyn was indeed feeling a little tired so she didn't argue. She settled on the couch with the throw blanket and flipped on the television. A half hour later, she was asleep.

Rayne walked into the kitchen later and greeted Maggie. She was taking the meatloaf out of the oven and smiled at him.

"She came down a while ago and I fed her some juice, eggs, bacon and toast. She's asleep on the couch." Maggie said.

Rayne turned his head and looked into the living room. He saw Robyn curled up on the couch, sound asleep. "Is she going to be okay?"

"Oh, she's going to be fine. Don't you worry. I think by tomorrow she will be feeling much like her ol' self." Maggie hesitated a moment. "She thought Trigg was still sleeping. I didn't say anything 'cause I didn't feel it my place to. You are going to have to talk to her and let her know what's going on."

Rayne nodded grimly. He dreaded having to tell Robyn that Trigg was gone and that she would need to leave. He had gone over in his head how to put a positive spin on the situation to help make her feel better.

Blowing out a long breath, he headed for the living room where he sat in one of the overstuffed chairs and flipped through the stations, settling on the local news. When Robyn stirred, he knew she was waking up. *Well, here we go.*

Robyn awoke from her short nap to find Rayne sitting in the chair, watching television.

Rayne glanced at her. "How are you feeling?" He kept his tone light.

Robyn suddenly felt a little embarrassed. Surely Rayne and Vane knew what had happened, *and how*. She groaned inwardly. "I'm okay. Uh...how's everyone? Anything going on?" *Is Trigg going to be in trouble...all because of me?*

Robyn rose slightly and rested against the armrest. The couch was really comfortable with its pillowy back. Each time she sat, her body sank into the cushions, or more like melted into them.

Rayne shut off the television and turned towards her. "Everyone's fine. I had Maggie come and take care of things for a few days." He paused, agonizing over how to break the news to Robyn.

"Listen, I know what happened to you has probably shaken you up a bit, but I'm sure you know that Trigg would never have intentionally hurt you."

"Of course I know that, and he didn't hurt me. I'm fine!" Robyn's tone was defensive but she didn't try to hide it. She didn't want anyone to think that Trigg had done anything wrong or without her consent.

Rayne nodded and spoke again. "Trigg went to stay at another site for a while." He watched a confused look cross Robyn's face. "He stepped over the line and he's pretty shaken up about it. He needed to get his head straight, so he left."

Robyn was stunned and she felt what blood she had left drain from her face. She lowered her gaze to where she was absently twirling the fringe on the throw cover. Trigg had left, and her chest ached as if someone had plunged a knife in it.

“When will he be back?” She asked quietly, not meeting Rayne’s gaze.

“I don’t know. He didn’t really say.” *He just didn’t want you to be here when he returned.* Rayne couldn’t tell her that was what Trigg wanted. It would hurt her too much.

Rayne shoved a hand through his hair. He didn’t like having this conversation. He knew it was distressing to her.

“Arrangements have been made for a place for you to stay. It’ll be a chance for you to start a life here, if that’s what you want to do.”

He waited for Robyn’s reply. When she said nothing, he continued. “There’s an apartment available downtown, and it’s fully furnished. Headquarters owns it, and it’s there for as long as you need it. We could help you find a job, too, if you want.”

Robyn let what Rayne said sink in. Trigg had left her and she was going to have to leave. She may never see him again. It was obvious he needed more than she could give. Her frail, human body couldn’t handle it, so he must have figured she wasn’t worth the trouble. And, speaking of trouble, it seemed she had caused him enough already. He didn’t want her to stay here anymore and he left so he didn’t have to tell her himself.

Robyn could feel her heart crumble. She felt worthless and dejected. Trigg probably thought she was so fragile she couldn’t handle his making love to her. *Damaged goods*, she thought.

Schooling her inner turmoil so that it did not show on her face, she looked at Rayne. “So when do I need to leave?”

Rayne was stunned by the sudden acquiesce, though something told him she wasn’t as okay with this as she wanted him to believe. Outwardly she pasted on a brave face, but inside, he knew she was devastated.

“Whenever you are feeling better. I don’t want you to be alone while you are this weak.”

Robyn sucked in a breath, pushing past her hurt and sadness, refusing to let it show on her face. She didn’t need anyone’s pity. Now was the time to get started with her new life.

“I’m okay. I’ll go ahead and get my things ready. Maybe I could get settled in tonight while I have you and Vane to help me.”

Rayne nodded his agreement as she rose from the couch. She went back to her room and started packing. She would try her best to look at this as an opportunity. A new beginning.

When dinner was over Robyn gave Maggie a hug and thanked her for all her help. Afterwards Rayne and Vane took her and her things to the apartment where she would be staying.

Standing outside the building, Robyn took in the sight. To her, it resembled an old hotel. She wondered if it had been one in the past. She followed Rayne who carried a couple of boxes—Vane following her with more of her belongings—into the lobby where she noticed a security guard. The guard nodded at them as they walked to the elevator. Rayne had said during the car ride to the apartment building that he had called ahead to notify security they were bringing a new occupant.

Robyn’s apartment was on the third floor. She noticed that three other apartments occupied that floor as well.

Rayne unlocked the door, then reached inside and flicked on the lights. He stepped aside to let her enter.

The apartment had shiny, hardwood floors with gorgeous wood molding throughout. The first room was a rather large living room that opened into a small dining room. Off to the side of the dining room, a hallway led to the kitchen.

Robyn stepped into the kitchen and stared. The floor tile was terracotta and set in a beautiful Tuscan design. Modern appliances filled the appropriate spots and a center island with a butcher-block surface caught her gaze.

Noticing another hallway, she turned and walked to the end, finding the bedroom, with a queen-sized bed and a private bath.

Robyn walked back into the living room and stared at Rayne and Vane, unable to control her awe. When she first stepped off the bus that rainy night, her only thought had been to find a shelter to stay at until she could get on her feet. She had figured it would be

quite a while before she could even afford an efficiency apartment. Now she had everything she needed.

Rayne and Vane stayed in the living room as Robyn took in her new surroundings. Saying goodbye was not going to be easy, Rayne thought. He and his comrades had warmed to her presence and enjoyed her company. They had even looked forward to the evening meal and her delicious cooking. Robyn had seen to their needs and kept everything clean for them so that they didn't have to think about anything but doing their job.

Rayne cleared his throat to get Robyn's attention. No matter how much he hated this, it was for the best. "The kitchen is fully stocked, and as I said, we can work on getting you employment if you want. Just let us know. If there is anything you need, give us a call."

As Robyn took a look around her surroundings, Rayne thought she looked a little lost standing in this big place. She would be fine, he told himself. He knew that from reading her journal. She had been through a lot. More than most humans could bear. But she had held it together and didn't let Jake break her. Robyn had kept her head and escaped.

Robyn gave them a small smile. She knew they were doing what they felt was best for her, and for Trigg. Putting her in the apartment was far beyond anything she had ever expected. They could have simply shown her the door.

She walked over and gave each of them a hug and a quick kiss on the cheek. "Thanks, guys. This is great and you've been so nice to me. I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. I'm going to miss cooking for you. It was nice to have someone appreciate my cooking." She winked at Vane after that statement and he laughed, showing his charming smile.

The two Watchers said their goodbyes and left Robyn to settle into her place. She carried her clothes to her bedroom and began unpacking. She told herself that she wasn't going to think about Trigg. She was going to enjoy the thought of making a new start on her own.

## Chapter Seventeen

Robyn had finished putting away her clothes when she heard a knock at the door. Her heart leaped. Could it be Trigg coming to check on her? She rushed to the door and flung it open with a smile.

It wasn't Trigg.

Standing outside the door was a beautiful woman with silky, golden hair that spiraled past her shoulders. Her skin was the color of creamy caramel and her eyes were smoky grey. She wore a beautiful red, sleeveless dress that came to her knees.

The woman smiled warmly at Robyn and held out her hand.

"Hi. I'm Rosa Bella, your neighbor." She pointed to the door across the hall.

Robyn, though disappointed it wasn't Trigg at her door, smiled and shook Rosa's hand. The woman's hand felt cool to the touch, but her smile was bright and it made her eyes sparkle.

"Please come in. I'm Robyn. It's nice to meet you."

Robyn didn't bother to give her last name. She was still leery of who would find out where she was hiding.

Rosa walked into the front room. Robyn blinked. She could have sworn the room brightened with the woman's presence. Her walk was graceful, as if she was gliding across the floor with her feet barely touching the surface. She turned as Robyn was closing the door.

Robyn motioned to the couch and chairs for them to sit. Rosa walked to the couch and sat, leisurely crossing her legs. Robyn took a seat in one of the chairs, and pulled a leg up under her.

Rosa glanced around before turning to Robyn, flashing another glowing smile. "I just wanted to stop by and welcome you. I think you'll find most people in the building are

quite pleasant. I was getting ready for work, and I heard voices so, nosey me, I had to check it out. I saw the two gentlemen helping you carry in your things.”

Rosa had heard gossip from the vampire community about the two men. She didn’t know their names, but she had heard they were Watchers. She wondered what this human girl had to do with them.

Robyn nodded. “They’re just friends of mine. They helped me get this place and wanted to make sure I got settled in.”

“So, you’re living here alone?” Rosa looked concerned.

Robyn hesitated, but she felt no ill intent or threat from this woman. No warning bells were going off to tell her not to answer truthfully. “Yes.”

Rosa proceeded to ask about family and friends in town. Robyn did the best she could with her answers. She told the truth but did not get into details why she was in Louisville. She didn’t say much about Rayne and Vane, whom Rosa had seen carrying her things into the apartment. She just kept to the story that they were friends she had met when she first arrived in town.

Robyn found herself relaxing while talking to Rosa. The woman was cheerful and warm, and easy to talk to. She was also a wonderful listener and had a great sense of humor.

Rosa checked her watch and then stood. “Well, guess I better head to work.”

“Where do you work?” Robyn asked. Maybe Rosa could help her get a job.

“I’m a singer at the Black Panther Lounge. It’s one of those up-scale bars on Fourth Street.” Rosa shrugged. “I love to sing so it’s not really work.” She smiled again.

Robyn rose from the chair and walked her to the door. “It was nice to meet you, Rosa”.

“It was nice meeting you too, Robyn. Maybe we can get together sometime, have coffee or something. Since you said you are new in town, maybe I could show you around a little.” With that, she waved a small goodbye and walked out the door.

Robyn closed the door and felt a little joy at having met someone and actually having a pleasant conversation with another female. That made her think about her mother, and she sighed heavily.

Robyn was glad she hadn't asked Rosa about getting a job at the Black Panther Lounge. Now that she thought about it, it was too risky. There would be many people around her every night, and she didn't want that. She needed to lay low and stay hidden. Maybe the next time they talked, she would ask Rosa for some ideas. She'd just tell her she had a fear of big crowds if Rosa mentioned her working at a bar or restaurant.

Jake was standing at the window when Rico came into his office. He didn't turn around when he spoke. "Did you get it?"

"Yes," Rico answered, then stepped forward and laid the notebook on Jake's desk.

Jake turned and looked at the notebook. He then looked at Rico. "Is it taken care of?"

Rico knew he was asking about Chris Farmer. "Yes. Seems there was a drug deal gone bad."

Jake nodded, then smiled slightly. He had Robyn's notebook and the cocky kid who found it was dead. And dead men don't talk, he thought smugly.

Jake sat at his desk and motioned for Rico to sit in one of the chairs.

"The next thing is to find Robyn. She's here in the city somewhere. I know we don't have many men to spare on this with getting the shipments ready and all, but I want at least two men to begin searching the city, men who have seen her before and would recognize her."

Rico nodded in understanding.

"She's got to be working somewhere unless she's living on the streets. Have them check the shelters. Just be sure they keep a low profile. I don't want her bolting to another city. I don't have time to play games."

Rico nodded again.

When Jake didn't say anything else, Rico knew he had been dismissed. He stood. "I'll get Martin and Davis. They spent some time at the ranch and have seen her. I'm sure they would recognize her if they saw her again."

Jake grunted in agreement and proceeded to read the notebook as Rico exited his office. He read several pages and his blood began to boil. Robyn had written in vivid detail what had happened to her at the ranch and about Jake's drug operation. "That little bitch won't get away," he muttered as he slammed the notebook on the desk.

Robyn listened for signs of Rosa all day. She was eager to talk to her about finding a job around town. Finally, she wrote a note on a piece of paper, and taped it to Rosa's door, telling her she wanted to talk to her.

At about six o'clock, Robyn heard a knock at her door. It was Rosa. She opened the door and let her inside.

"Hey, Robyn. I got your note. You wanted to talk to me?"

"Yeah. I need to find a job and was wondering if you had any ideas."

They moved into the living room and sat. Rosa seemed to be thinking over some ideas to offer. "Well, what things can you do? I mean, what type of work are you looking for?" Rosa asked.

"I can cook and clean, but that's really about it. The big problem is that I don't have a diploma. You see, my mother started home-schooling me and then after she died..." Robyn shrugged.

"Hmm... Well, that could be a problem at most places. Have you ever considered getting your GED?"

Robyn shook her head. "No. It just wasn't possible where I was, and actually, I just got here and I'm not quite settled." She had felt sick when she remembered her birth certificate and social security card had been in her journal. Now, there was no telling who had them or what they would do with the information. Hopefully, she thought, there would be someone who would hire her without her having to produce them. *Maybe the Watchers could help me get another copy.*

“Well, I’ll keep thinking and will ask around. Say, have you eaten dinner?” Rosa asked, breaking into her thoughts.

Robyn shook her head.

“Want to join me? I’ve got the night off.”

Robyn squirmed a little and Rosa could tell she wanted to, but something was holding her back. “Hey, it’ll be my treat to welcome you to the building.”

Finally Rosa coaxed Robyn into agreeing to have dinner with her. She waited while Robyn changed.

Robyn hurried into her bedroom and slipped into one of the dresses Trigg had bought for her. She also put on her little white cap.

They left the apartment building and took a nice walk to a restaurant Rosa liked, settled into a small booth and looked over the menu. Robyn was shocked when Rosa ordered a steak, specifying it to be rare. The woman certainly didn’t look the type to go after a beefy steak. Plus, she was so slim. Robyn expected her to order some kind of tiny salad or something.

When the waiter looked at Robyn, she had to make a quick decision. She blurted out the first thing that came to mind—Chicken Alfredo.

They carried on a nice conversation until their food arrived at their table. Robyn tried not to stare as Rosa cut into her steak. Blood-tinted juices oozed onto the plate as she cut. When Rosa opened her mouth to take a bite, Robyn was sure she caught sight of the tips of fangs.

Robyn quickly forked up a bite of Chicken Alfredo so that Rosa wouldn’t notice she had been staring. At first, she felt a little nervous, until a thought occurred to her. Trigg, Rayne and Vane were vampires. They had treated her exceptionally well even though they didn’t know her, nor owed her anything. Instead of turning her away, they had taken her in and helped her.

Rosa had been kind since they met. Robyn actually felt good when she was around her. So what if she was a vampire. She certainly didn’t have the crazed eyes like the Rogues, as Trigg had called them. Robyn finally gathered up enough courage to ask.

“Uh, Rosa, can I ask you something?”

Rosa was well into her steak, her face showing enjoyment of every bite. “Sure.”

Robyn leaned in close, so that no one could overhear, even though the restaurant was quite noisy. She looked Rosa in the eye. “Are you a vampire?”

Rosa stopped chewing and just stared. She didn’t move, didn’t blink. Robyn felt a little uneasy and wondered if asking had been a really bad idea. Suddenly, Rosa smiled and she leaned in, mimicking Robyn’s move for privacy. “Yes. I am.”

Robyn sat back and smiled. “I was just wondering. That’s all.”

Rosa raised an eyebrow at her comment. “Okay. Now, can I ask you a question?”

Robyn started to feel a little nervous. “Okay.”

Rosa didn’t hesitate. “I assume you know about us from your *friends*?” Rosa had put the emphasis on *friends*. “What were you doing with the Watchers?”

Robyn almost dropped her fork but quickly recovered. She tried to look confused. “Watchers?”

Rosa smiled “Oh come on, Robyn. You know exactly what I’m talking about and don’t give me that innocent look.” Her tone was light, not angry or accusing.

Robyn swallowed. She didn’t know how to answer. She had sworn to keep their secret and she wasn’t about to break that promise. They had gone out of their way for her. If not for them, she would be on the street, or worse, dead. She gave Rosa a pointed look.

“They’re just normal guys. When I got here, I had no money and no place to stay. They helped me out.” She shrugged.

Rosa’s face showed that she was contemplating her answer. Finally, she smiled and said, “I’m sorry. I’m being nosey again. Please forgive me.” Then she gave a small laugh and returned to her dinner.

They picked up again with light conversation, even sneaking glances at people and laughing over fashion sense, or lack of, by some of the other customers. After dinner they walked back to the apartment building and called it a night.

Over the next several days Robyn enjoyed little chats here and there with Rosa, and she had volunteered to take care of a few things for Rosa that were best done during the

day. The look on Rosa's face when she had made the offer had been priceless. Robyn was beginning to understand the life of vampires and how difficult it was to get things done because of their daytime restrictions.

They had struck a deal where Rosa would pay Robyn for her services, like a personal assistant, but Robyn didn't want to take any money. She had told Rosa that she was doing it as a friend, but Rosa insisted on paying her. Robyn had soon found that Rosa usually got her way.

Robyn heard a knock at her door and found Rosa on the other side, dressed for work at the lounge. She had to smile because Rosa seemed to be excited about something. She let her into the apartment and followed her into the living room.

Rosa was very animated when she explained how Darla, who also lived in the building, had said that she, and her husband, Phillip, were in need of a sitter. Their little girl was a year old and Darla wanted to go back to work. She had been a RN at one of the local hospitals and was ready to get back into the swing of things and didn't want to turn her back on her education and hard work.

"When I told her about you, you should have seen her. Her eyes lit up with hope."

Rosa's face was so full of joy that Robyn couldn't help but say yes. Besides, from the way Rosa had told it, Darla had her hopes up and if she said no, she would be disappointing two people. "It sounds pretty good. I think I can handle a one-year old."

Suddenly realizing that she would be watching a vampire child, Robyn started to worry about what she had just agreed to do. "Uh, Rosa, is there anything *different* that I should know about a baby vamp?"

Rosa burst out laughing.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Robyn. You should have seen the look on your face, though." Then she sobered.

"Actually, no. Vampire babies are like any other baby. It's not until they begin puberty that things start to change, much like it does for humans. You see, at puberty

their fangs begin to lengthen and they must learn how to control them. They also start to feel the need for blood.”

Robyn couldn't help the gasp that escaped, and her eyes grew wide. She couldn't get past the “need for blood” statement. Although she knew what they were, it was still a little unnerving.

Rosa seemed to ignore Robyn's shock at her statement.

“Babies don't have blood cravings. It's not until they are teenagers that they have to deal with it. Blood craving can be offset by introducing them to mostly rare meats during that time. If they haven't tasted warm, human blood, they won't know what they are missing. But if an infant or pre-adolescent was given human blood, then their fangs would develop while they are very young, and that's not good. At that age, they don't have the reasoning and coping skills to control it.”

Rosa gave a small shrug then continued. “Also vampire babies are different than human babies as they don't require so many feedings. I hear that human babies can eat every two hours, even during the night when the parents are trying to sleep. Luckily most vampire babies, even newborns, will sleep eight hours before waking for their feeding. Less food means less waste, so there are no wet diapers waking them. Having to get up multiple times during the daytime sleep of a vampire to tend to the baby would seriously present a problem and affect the parents' health.”

Robyn mulled over the information Rosa was giving her and when Rosa stopped, she asked her to tell her more. She was finding it fascinating.

“The difference between vampires and humans lies in our blood and our chemical makeup. Of course, you know that our bodies heal faster, and then there are the fangs and claws. Our skin and eyes are super sensitive to sunlight. Our senses are much stronger—sight, hearing and smell. It takes a toll on our bodies with all this supersensory and chemical stuff, so our bodies need to regenerate daily, which is why we sleep deeply during the day. Well, that's it in a nutshell. Vampire 101.”

Rosa shrugged again as if everything she had just said was perfectly normal. Robyn almost laughed at that thought. *Of course it was normal. She's a vampire.*

The information Rosa had given her regarding vampire children had relieved her anxiety about taking the job. She was also thankful for the insight into vampires in general.

“Speaking of children...” Robyn began to feel a little flustered at the question that had formed in her mind. “Can a vampire and a human produce a child?”

Rosa frowned and tapped her chin. “Actually, I don’t think so. You see since our bodies are different, I don’t think the blood would mix well, especially if the female was human. Her blood would pass through to the baby. I don’t think the baby would survive. I’ve never heard of that happening, I seriously doubt it is possible.”

Robyn understood and agreed. She hadn’t known exactly what the differences were in the two species. She also couldn’t believe she had asked such a question. Why couldn’t she get the idea of having a future with Trigg out of her head?

Rosa handed Robyn the name and phone number for Phillip and Darla. Robyn decided to call them to schedule a day and time for them to meet and discuss the sitter position.

After Rosa left, Robyn dialed the number. The phone rang a couple of times before a woman’s voice answered. “Hello? Is this Darla?”

“Yes it is,” the woman said.

“Hi, this is Robyn. Rosa asked me to give you a call. You are looking for a babysitter?”

The woman sounded overjoyed. “Yes! Yes! When can we meet?”

Although Rosa had said Darla was anxious to get back to work, she hadn’t expected the woman to be this anxious.

“Uh, well, I don’t have any plans. I can meet anytime that is convenient with you.”

“Okay. Would an hour from now be too soon?”

Wow, Robyn thought. She really did want to get back to work. She must miss it. Either that or her daughter was a real handful.

Robyn suddenly wondered what she was getting herself into. “Uh, sure. That wouldn’t be a problem,” she said after a moment of hesitation.

“Great! We’re on the fourth floor, apartment 404. My husband, Phillip, will be here, too, to meet you. We’ll see you then.”

Robyn hung up the phone and went to shower and change into something presentable. She wanted to make a good impression. She finished her shower and settled on a pretty sundress, one of the new items Trigg had bought for her. *Don’t go there, Robyn.*

After donning her little white cap, she sat on the couch, tapping her foot as she anxiously watched the clock. *Tick. Tick. Tick.*

Robyn took the cap off and held it in her hands. She ran her fingers over it reverently, remembering the night Trigg had pulled it out of the mound of shopping bags to give it to her. He had made the effort to buy her some much needed clothes, and most of all, he had thought about how self-conscious she felt about her hair.

*Trigg.* She could see him in her mind. Hear his low, slow, voice. The feel of him. The way he smelled.

Robyn bit back the tears. Not thinking about him was impossible. She missed him deeply and cursed herself that she couldn’t be the woman he needed, a woman who wouldn’t break if he barely touched her.

Who was she kidding? She’d heard what Rosa had said. They were nothing alike. She was a frail human, not a strong vampire. It wouldn’t work. It wasn’t *normal*.

Robyn knocked on apartment 404 and heard a child’s laughter from behind the door. The door opened and Darla stood in the doorway, giving Robyn a welcoming smile.

“Come on in, Robyn. Sit. Sit.”

The woman fluttered around, moving baby toys out of the way.

Robyn noticed the layout of the apartment was the same as hers. When she turned, she saw the most angelic looking girl sitting on the floor squeezing a stuffed bear, causing a little squeaker inside to go *squeak*. With each squeak, the girl let out a giggle—one that could melt your heart.

The little girl had beautiful, thick black hair that hung in ringlets. Her eyes were so blue the whites of them could not be seen. Each time she grinned, she showed one little tooth sticking out of her front, lower gum.

Robyn sat on the couch, and the little girl got up from the floor and carried the bear over to her. Robyn couldn't help but smile at the little darling. Inwardly, she admonished herself for letting her imagination get the best of her. There was no way this little girl was anything other than sweet.

"I think Abigail likes you already." Darla beamed and Robyn laughed.

Abigail handed Robyn the bear, then squeezed it to show her the funny noise it made. When the bear made a *squeak* sound, they both laughed.

Phillip, Darla's husband, came into the room. He was fumbling with his tie and Robyn thought he must be getting ready to go to work. Although Rosa hadn't mentioned what Phillip did, he looked rather important by his fancy, well-pressed suit.

Darla looked up and frowned at her husband before leaving her chair to stand in front of him. She batted his hands away from his tie and proceeded to tie it for him.

"Phillip, this is Robyn. Robyn, this is my husband Phillip." Phillip leaned to the side to look around Darla and smiled a hello.

"Nice to meet you," Robyn said pleasantly.

Darla rose on her tiptoes and gave her husband a quick kiss on his lips, then returned to her chair.

"I'm sure Rosa told you that I am going back to work and we are in need of a sitter for Abigail. I had worked downtown in the emergency room and they have been asking me to return for quite some time."

Robyn could detect almost a pleading tone from Darla as she spoke. It was obvious the woman was doing a mental finger cross that she would agree to be Abigail's sitter.

"They want me for the seven at night to three in the morning shift," Darla continued, in that same tone.

Robyn nodded in understanding. She wanted to take this job, but didn't want to jump into something before she thought it out first. That had been one of her mother's major mistakes with Jake. One that had cost her her life.

Darla smiled and sat forward in her chair slightly. "I know you are aware of what we are. Rosa and I talked quite awhile about you."

Robyn didn't know if she should be angry at being the topic of conversation, but she was glad Rosa had gone to the trouble of getting this set up for her. She nodded at Darla's statement, then bent down to retrieve a toy Abigail had dropped.

"She told me you were associated with the Watchers," Darla continued.

Robyn's head snapped up. She didn't know what to say, hoping that wasn't a question.

"It's okay. We know how secretive they are, and we also know why. The thing is it must prove that you are something special and someone we can trust." Darla smiled wryly. "Of course, I'll still have the mommy *boo-hoos* when I have to leave Abigail, but leaving her with you would ease my mind."

Robyn was flattered. She felt at ease with them, too, and Abigail was such a doll. With a warm smile that reached all the way to her heart, she bent, picked Abigail up and sat her on her lap.

Abigail let out another squeal of laughter, causing everyone to laugh as well. "It would be my pleasure to watch Abigail. I can start anytime."

Darla and Phillip looked at one another with relieved grins. Robyn could see their affection for each other pour out of them. Just the way they looked at each other made her want to say, "Hey, get a room."

The couple decided that Robyn would come over for a short time for the next couple of nights so Abigail would get used to both her mother and father being gone and only having Robyn there with her. All three had thought it best that Abigail be tended in her own home, someplace familiar and where she felt safe.

The visits with Abigail held no problems. The girl was such a sweet child that Robyn began to envy Darla and Phillip. She wondered if she would ever have a child of her own. That was a big problem since she knew no man would want her. *Damaged goods.*

## Chapter Eighteen

Rosa invited Robyn and Darla to watch her sing at the Black Panther Lounge. Phillip took the night off to stay with Abigail so they could have a girls' night out.

As Robyn and Darla entered the club, they heard a saxophone playing. Slowly, they made their way to the table Rosa had told them would be marked *Reserved*.

The club was indeed more upscale than the dark and dingy country bar Robyn's mother had worked at in Texas.

Their table was about ten feet from the stage. The chairs were very plush, covered with red velvet that made them very comfortable.

A waitress, dressed in a white dress shirt, black tie and short black skirt, came to take their drink orders. Darla ordered a glass of white wine. Robyn asked for a soda since she didn't drink alcohol.

Rosa entered the stage to cheers and whistles from the crowd. She flashed a warm smile at them and adjusted the microphone that the saxophone player had used. A man sat at the piano, ready for her signal. She turned and saw Robyn and Darla at the table she had reserved for them and gave them a little wave. They waved back and giggled like two schoolgirls.

Rosa glanced at the man at the piano, and he began to play. To Robyn's surprise, Rosa's voice was hauntingly beautiful. The tones and notes floated through the club, touching everyone as it flowed through the room. The music held feeling and rich emotion. She sang a love song, which left Robyn longing—longing to see Trigg once again.

Robyn glanced around and noticed hardly anyone stirred while Rosa sang. Talk about a captive audience, she mused to herself.

Rosa sang several songs before the saxophone player took the stage again for his next set.

“So, what did you think?” Rosa said when she reached their table.

Darla spoke first. “Rosa, I knew you could sing, but wow! That was terrific.”

Robyn nodded. “Yes. It was wonderful! You really had the crowd in the palm of your hand. That first song was my favorite.”

Rosa beamed at their approval. “Thanks, you guys. I’m really glad you could come. The place isn’t so bad.”

Robyn pulled the chair next to her out from under the table so Rosa could sit. She was enjoying herself and thought how wonderful it was to have two friends. Her life was going in a positive direction and that made her smile.

Jake Carter sat at a table in the corner of the club. He had been in the club several times while in town. This, however, was the first time he had seen Rosa sing. He took a sip of his whiskey and marveled at her beautiful body standing on stage.

After her set he watched Rosa walk over to two women sitting at a table. He looked closer at the skinny one sitting on the left wearing a white cap, then froze. *Robyn!* He had found her. *What are the odds of that?* he mused.

Jake had a lot to drink that night as he watched Robyn and her friends, his hand clenched tightly around his glass. The idea she had written everything in a notebook and had it hidden all that time angered him and her escape from him made the situation worse.

She had humiliated him in front of his men and she would pay for it, and tonight would be the night. He smiled to himself. Tonight was going to be a very fun night after all.

The sun was deep in the horizon in the western sky when Trigg had left the Bullitt County site on his bike for the ride back to Louisville. He pulled into the garage and felt a pang of anxiety. He hadn’t spoken to anyone since he had left, but Rayne had left a message for him that Robyn had been moved to a safe place.

Trigg popped the kickstand on the bike and turned off the engine. He swung his leg over the side and put his gloves in the saddlebag. His heart felt heavy coming back, knowing Robyn was no longer here, and it was because of him.

He walked into the kitchen to find Vane at his favorite spot—the kitchen table—eating. It was as if the Watcher lived for only two things—females and food. Guess he only knew one letter of the alphabet—*F*.

“Trigg, *mi amigo*. It’s good to see you!” Vane said around a mouthful of food.

Trigg gave him a quick nod in greeting, ignoring how his Cell-mate was watching his every move. He pulled a beer from the refrigerator and twisted the top off with so much force the top of the bottle cracked. With a growl, he tossed it into the trashcan and grabbed another from the refrigerator.

Vane arched an eyebrow. “Got something on your mind, bro?”

Trigg shook his head, and it wasn’t in answer to Vane’s question. He felt utterly defeated. No matter how hard he had tried, he could not get Robyn out of his mind, or out of his heart. Lowering his head, he set his beer on the table and sank into a chair.

“I can’t do this, Vane.” He raised his head and looked at Vane with pained eyes. “I’ve got to see her, just to know she’s okay.”

Vane shifted his gaze to his food and took another bite, but not before Trigg had seen the conflicting emotions on his Cell-mate’s face.

“I’m not going to talk to her or anything. I just need to know she’s okay. I can look after her. I *need* to look after her.” Trigg couldn’t keep the desperation out of his voice. If he didn’t see her soon, he was going to go insane.

Vane put his fork on his plate, pushed his chair back from the table and sighed heavily. “Trigg, my man, you are in one deep hole, you know that? I don’t know what it is that has you so wrapped up in that girl that you are losing yourself. But if it will help, I’ll tell you. I certainly hope you don’t make me regret it.”

Trigg was relieved. He picked up his beer and took a long pull.

“If you wait until I’m finished, I will walk over there with you and we’ll case the place tonight just to make sure everyone’s safe.”

When Vane finished eating and cleaned up after himself, he and Trigg made their way out to the street.

“Where’s Rayne?” Trigg asked. He thought that perhaps Rayne had left to meet with Tank to apprise him of all the goings on there and how he had fucked up once again.

“He was called to check out the Charlestown State Park in Indiana. Seems a DNR employee, who also happens to be an employee of Dr. Olivia’s, reported a black wolf has been running around the park killing Rogues.”

Trigg stopped and looked at Vane. He couldn’t believe what his comrade had just told him.

Vane shrugged. “I know. Sounds crazy, but hey, anything can happen. I’ve never personally seen things like werewolves or stuff like that, if that is indeed what is going on there.” He let out a chuckle. “Hell, people don’t think *we* exist either.” He jabbed Trigg in the side with an elbow in a joking gesture.

Trigg shook his head. “Too weird. Well, if anyone can find out about that sort of thing, it would be Rayne. He can track anything. It’s in that Indian blood of his,” he said with a sideways grin.

They continued down the block, heading towards Robyn’s apartment building. Trigg was silently praying he would see her. Even just a glimpse, he thought.

Robyn and Darla waited until Rosa finished her last set and then walked home, laughing and teasing each other along the way.

Robyn felt so happy. She had a place to stay, a job caring for a beautiful little girl, and two wonderful friends. There would be only one more thing to make it complete, and that would be having Trigg back in her life.

Darla’s voice snapped her out of her thoughts.

“I hope Phillip doesn’t mind that I stayed out a little later than I intended.”

Robyn laughed, “Oh, I’m *so sure* you two fight like cats and dogs.” She glanced at Darla sideways and Rosa laughed.

“Yeah, I know what you mean. They are so *kissy, kissy* it’s sickening!” Rosa said a little too loudly and all three laughed some more.

Jake followed the three women at a distance. He wanted to find out where Robyn was staying and hoped that was where they were heading.

“So,” Rosa said, turning to Robyn. “Did you check out any of the hot guys at the club? I’m sure I saw a couple of them looking your way.”

Robyn smiled and ducked her head. “No. I’m not interested.” Then her smile faded. “I don’t want to go there again.”

Rosa noticed the change in Robyn’s voice. “Does it have anything to do with the two Watchers who moved you into the building?” Rosa knew she was being nosey, but couldn’t help herself.

Robyn didn’t look at her. “Sort of.” She blew out a sigh. She was having so much fun with girls that she was beginning to loosen her lips a little. “God, I can’t believe I’m going to talk about this...but it only seems right since you two are...well...you know.” She made a sweeping gesture with her hands. “I think you’ll understand.”

“Well, spill it, girl!” Darla said, laughing.

Robyn told them of the events that led up to her moving into the apartment. Rosa and Darla were astounded at the story.

“So, what was this guy’s name?” Rosa asked.

“Trigg.” Robyn couldn’t help the longing in her voice and she was sure both women had heard it.

“So, you and Trigg have, or *had*, a thing?” Darla asked, trying to sound nonchalant, although she knew mixing vampires and humans was a bad idea.

“Yeah, I guess you could say that. At least, I think it was something, but a very short-lived something.” Robyn sighed. “It...it just didn’t work out.” Her voice broke off.

Robyn didn’t feel like discussing Trigg and the relationship that never was, so she stopped talking, and they continued walking silently the last few blocks to their building.

Jake had been close enough to hear everything the women had said. He didn't have a clue what a Rogue was, but was pretty shocked to hear Robyn tell them she killed someone as if that was nothing. *Guess she got a taste for it after killing my man at the ranch when she escaped.* This thought interested him, and he smiled. He knew she had spunk but it seems she had more spunk than he had given her credit for all these years.

The women reached the building and murmured their hellos to the security guard on their way to the elevator. Rosa was complaining that her feet were hurting and she was dying to get out of her shoes. Darla was concerned about Phillip being aggravated that she stayed out so late. Robyn could only think of Trigg.

Robyn, Rosa and Darla reached the elevator when Darla suddenly snapped her fingers. "Oh yeah. Why don't you two come up to my place for a few minutes? I want to show you the dress I bought to wear to a fundraiser at the zoo. Phillip's work is sponsoring a table. The dress just came in and I would really like your opinion."

The elevator doors opened and Robyn and Rosa stepped inside. Darla was getting ready to follow, but suddenly stepped back.

"Oh, shoot! I forgot to get the mail today. You two head on up and I'll be there in a sec."

They agreed and the elevator doors closed. Darla turned and walked down the hallway and through the door to the room where the mailboxes were located.

From outside the building, Jake watched Robyn and the singer from the club get in the elevator and the third woman go down the hall. He pulled out his knife, hid it from view and stepped inside.

The security guard was at his station and watched him enter. Jake pasted on a confused look as he approached the man. The guard stood to look at him, stretching a little as he did so.

“Uh, hi. I’m here to see Robyn, but I don’t remember her apartment number,” Jake said as he stood beside the desk.

The guard pulled out his tenant listing and scanned it. He found a listing for Robyn but noted the comment section was marked *CONFIDENTIAL*. That meant that under no circumstances was information to be given out about that tenant. He looked up at Jake. “Sorry, there’s no information here about anyone named Robyn.

Jake knew the security guard was lying. However, she could be using a fake name, or, someone could be hiding her. As he thought about it, he noticed the security guard giving him a peculiar look.

“Sir, have you been drinking? I am going to have to ask you to leave the premises.”

As the security guard was beginning to step around his station to walk him out, Jake took action. He grabbed the guard and plunged the knife into his chest. When the guard slumped to the floor at his feet, he dislodged his knife then folded the man under the desk and out of sight.

## Chapter Nineteen

Robyn and Rosa made their way to Darla's apartment and knocked. Phillip opened the door and let them in.

"Where's Darla?" he asked.

"She stopped to grab the mail. She'll be here in a minute," Rosa assured him as she turned and made her way down the hall to the bathroom.

Abigail was still up and Robyn was happy to see her. She walked over and bent to play with her. Abigail reached her hands up to her, indicating she wanted Robyn to hold her.

Robyn smiled and scooped her in her arms, giving her big kisses with loud smacking sounds and making her giggle. Robyn felt so much love for the little girl. She was glad to have met this family and been given the job of babysitting. She had become good friends with Darla and Phillip and had even shared dinner with them several times.

Phillip sat in his chair and flipped through the television channels. He asked Robyn if they had a good time and she nodded enthusiastically and told him that they had had a wonderful time. She thanked him for letting Darla go, which he shrugged off.

Jake made sure the security guard's body could not be seen. When he heard footsteps, he headed for the elevator and hid behind the wall that led down the other hallway towards the rear exit.

Quietly, he peered around the corner and watched the woman who had been with Robyn tonight walk around the corner and press the button for the elevator. She was looking through her mail as the doors opened.

As she stepped inside, Jake made his move and stepped in the elevator behind her. He stood at the back of the elevator, not uttering a word or making eye contact with her. She would lead him right to Robyn, he thought to himself with an inward smile.

Darla hadn't paid much attention to who entered the elevator behind her, as she was too engrossed in her mail. Before the elevator doors closed, she glanced up and noticed the guard was no longer at his station and she frowned. Maybe he had stepped out for a smoke or a bathroom break, she wondered to herself.

The elevator started its ascent and Darla began to feel uneasy but dared not look at the man standing behind her. The only floor selected was four, her floor. She knew everyone on her floor and had the feeling this man didn't belong. That thought made the hair stand up on the back of her neck.

When the doors opened, she cautiously stepped off the elevator. The man moved quickly and grabbed her from behind, cupping a hand over her mouth hard and putting a gun to her head. The stench of whiskey and cigarettes filled her nostrils and she tried not to gag.

"Which apartment is yours?" he whispered in her ear in a low, menacing tone.

When Darla made no move, the man pressed the gun harder to the side of her head. Then he leaned over and looked at her mail.

"Number 404 is it? Move!" He shoved her forward, towards the door numbered 404.

Jake maneuvered Darla towards the door to her apartment then knocked. Robyn opened the door so Phillip didn't have to bother with getting up from the chair where he was obviously comfortable.

When the door opened, Jake shoved Darla inside then pushed the door shut behind him.

"What the...?" Phillip exclaimed as he started to get out of the chair. Jake ran over and slammed the gun against the side of his head.

Phillip fell over the chair and landed on the floor and lay in an unconscious heap. Darla screamed and started to run to her husband. Jake pointed the gun at her.

"Don't move!" he ordered, waving the gun, signaling her to back away.

Although Darla was a vampire and was much stronger than the average human male, she didn't dare make a move while he was waiving a gun.

During all the commotion, Robyn had backed away and was now across the room, holding Abigail who had begun to cry. Abigail had been frightened and Robyn was rocking her and stroking her head, trying to comfort her.

Jake refocused his aim on Robyn. “Robyn. So good to see you again. Did you miss me?” He gave her an evil smile. “Where’s the chick from the club? I saw her get on the elevator with you.”

Robyn shook her head. “She got out on her floor. She didn’t come up with me.” Robyn hoped Rosa would not pick this time to come out of the bathroom and walk in on this.

“Well, I guess you will just have to lead me to her then. When I am done with you, she’ll accompany me back to Texas. You know how lonely I get.” His smile deepened.

Robyn shuddered. It was clear he planned to kill her, but at least she wasn’t going back to his ranch. She wouldn’t lead him to Rosa, no matter what he did to her. She wouldn’t put anyone through what he had done to her and her mother.

“Jake, please don’t hurt anyone! I’ll go with you!” Robyn pleaded.

He laughed. “Darling, you should be worried about yourself. I’m not pleased at the stunt you pulled at the ranch. You killed one of my good men.” He shook his head and made a *tsk* sound. “Did you think I wouldn’t find you sooner or later?”

Jake pulled the notebook from his jacket and waved it in the air.

“This led me right to you, darling.”

Robyn’s eyes widened as she saw her journal in his hands.

“I wasn’t too pleased when I saw that you wrote about all our good times together.”

Robyn was shaking her head, pleading with Jake. “Please, Jake! I was only trying to keep myself from going insane. The beatings, the humiliation. You killed my mother!” She thought if she just kept him talking, she could keep his attention off Darla, Phillip and Abigail so they would be safe.

Jake laughed at her. “That bitch killed herself! She was the one who shot herself up. Not me! I wasn’t even there!”

Robyn retorted, “You may not have held the needle to her arm, but you were the one who got her hooked on drugs! She couldn’t take it anymore—what you were doing to us.”

Robyn knew she was going too far, but her hatred of him was boiling up inside of her.

Abigail continued to wail.

“Shut that kid up before I do it for you,” Jake barked.

Robyn said in a quiet tone without taking her gaze from Jake, “Darla. Come take Abigail.”

Darla walked forward slowly with her arms outstretched and Jake eyed them carefully. They were careful not to make any sudden movements as Robyn passed Abigail to Darla. Only then did she take a moment to look at her friend.

“I’m so sorry, Darla,” she whispered.

Darla gave her hand a hard squeeze and Robyn took it as a silent gesture that she understood and didn’t blame her for what was happening.

Darla had once told her about an abuse case at the hospital and had said that a lot of the men would stop at nothing to get a woman back if she left him. She explained that it was all about control.

Darla took a couple of steps away from Robyn and started to turn and walk across the room.

“No! You stay right there where I can see you.”

Jake was keeping watch out of the corner of his eye to make sure Phillip was still out cold.

Rosa was in the bathroom, humming softly to herself. She was getting ready to open the door when she heard raised voices and Abigail’s cries coming from the living room. Whatever was happening wasn’t good, she worried. She opened the door slowly, and tiptoed down the hall, keeping herself plastered against the wall.

Rosa listened to the conversation between Robyn and the man Robyn had called *Jake*. Her hand flew to her mouth to stifle a gasp when Robyn spat out what he had done to her and it became all too clear as to why Robyn had come to the city and seemed to keep to herself.

She then heard him speak of his plans to kill Robyn and take “the chick from the club” back to Texas with him as his new playmate.

Rosa’s heart leapt in her throat and her mind screamed that she needed to get help. This man was surely planning to kill them all.

She inched her way back to the bathroom and quietly shut the door. After removing her shoes, she opened the bathroom window and took out the screen. At least she was skinny enough to fit through the small window, she thought. There was one problem, though. She was four floors up and nowhere near the fire escape.

Rosa scooted out the window feet first, keeping her hands on the ledge while preparing to jump. Being a vampire, she could withstand a fall from that height, but hated doing it nonetheless.

Trigg and Vane crossed the street and were arriving at the building.

“You were right about the vacant apartment, so we brought her here,” Vane told Trigg. “She’s on the third floor in apartment 301.”

They heard a noise and stopped. Several floors up, they saw a woman wearing a blue dress, hanging from the window. Before they could move in further, the woman released her hold and fell to the ground.

Trigg and Vane took off at a run. They expected to find a human woman sprawled on the ground. Instead, they saw the woman, on her feet and staring at them.

Rosa recognized one of the two men standing in front of her as one of the men who had helped Robyn move into the building.

“Thank God! Watchers! You’ve got to help us!” Rosa cried out to them.

Trigg and Vane glanced at each other at the recognition then looked back at the woman standing before them, wringing her hands and trembling. Her eyes were wide with fear and concern.

Before they could question her, Rosa blurted out in a panic. “There is a guy upstairs. He has a gun on Robyn. She called him Jake. He’s insane. He’ll kill them all. You’ve got to help them!” She was shaking profusely, tears filling her eyes.

Vane couldn’t help but take in the sight of this beautiful female standing before him, but jerked at the name she uttered. Rayne had told him about the notebook and what Robyn had written. He turned to Trigg.

“That’s the man Robyn is running from. Jake is the one who beat her and kept her locked in a room in his basement. She had written it all down in a journal. Rayne told me about it. He didn’t get a chance to talk to you because you had already taken off to Bullitt County when he found the notebook.”

Trigg didn’t wait to hear any more. He had to get to Robyn. He turned and ran inside the building, Vane and Rosa right on his heels.

They ran up the stairs, not waiting for the elevator. Rosa called out to Trigg that they were on the fourth floor, apartment 404.

“You’ve cost me a lot of money and time to hunt you down, Robyn. I’ve got shipments to distribute during the next couple of weeks and should have been focusing on that. You have humiliated me in front of my men and my providers. You’re going to pay dearly for that. I’m going to get back every cent from you, right out of your hide,” he said, half snarling.

Jake began to shift a little, apparently becoming more agitated at Abigail’s cries. Suddenly he yelled, “I said to shut that kid up!” He turned the gun on Darla and Abigail and fired.

Robyn felt the world stop and then move in slow motion. She watched Jake aim the gun at Darla and Abigail, and pull the trigger.

Instinctively she hurled herself sideways, pushing Darla aside, out of the bullet's trajectory. It sliced through the side of her neck and she felt herself falling, hitting the floor hard.

The door flew open with a crash. Trigg rushed in and saw Jake standing there with the gun. In a flash he was on the man, wrenching the gun out of his hand. Anger pulling a feral growl from him, he grabbed Jake's head with both hands and yanked it sideways, breaking the man's neck with a sickening crack before flinging his body to the floor.

Trigg's chest heaved from the adrenaline rushing through his veins and his fear for Robyn's safety.

Rosa ran over to Robyn, who lay in a crumpled heap on the floor. Blood was flowing from her neck and down her back, pooling underneath her.

"Oh God! Robyn!" Rosa cried.

Trigg ran to where Robyn lay on the floor and knelt beside her. Tears filled his eyes at the sight of her frail body lying in a pool of blood. He pressed his hand to the wound on her neck, trying to staunch the blood flow.

"Call an ambulance!" he yelled.

Rosa knew that Robyn would die before the ambulance got there, much less live long enough to make it to the hospital. She was bleeding out fast.

Rosa looked at Trigg, her eyes full of sorrow, wondering how she could make him understand.

Vane was helping Phillip, who was slowly coming around, to stand. Darla was crying and trying to help as well.

"Let's get him to the bed," Vane said softly.

Darla looked over at Robyn who lay on the floor, bleeding from the gunshot wound to her neck and her heart sank, for there was nothing anyone could do. Robyn was human and could not heal herself from this.

She turned back to Vane and slowly nodded in agreement. While carrying Abigail, whose cries had turned into breathy hiccups, she followed Vane as he helped Phillip to the bedroom. Phillip was leaning heavily on him for support.

Trigg pressed hard on Robyn's wound. He knew that his saliva wouldn't close it or stop the bleeding. There was too much blood and the wound was too deep.

A towel appeared before him and he took it without bothering to look to see who handed it to him. He pressed the towel to the wound, trying in vain to staunch the blood flow or slow it until help arrived.

"I said call an ambulance!" he bellowed.

Robyn slowly opened her eyes and saw Trigg leaning over her. She smiled a little at him and tried to speak, but found that all she could do was whisper.

Trigg stared down at her. His face etched with pain and fear. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. I should have never left you. I was angry with myself for hurting you and I was afraid I would do it again."

"Shhh," Robyn mouthed to Trigg. She lifted a shaky hand and wiped a tear from his cheek with her thumb. She whispered slowly, hoping Trigg could hear her words.

"I'm sorry I am weak. I wish I were strong like Rosa and Darla. Then I could have given you what you needed."

Robyn's eyelids began to flutter, and Trigg knew she was fading.

"Call an ambulance now!" he spat at Rosa.

Rosa laid a hand on Trigg's arm. "Trigg. She's not going to make it. They wouldn't get here in time to save her. She has a fatal wound." Rosa said softly as tears ran down her own face.

Trigg let out a howling cry in agony. A sound full of sorrow and desperation.

Vane ran back to the living room and stopped. He knew Robyn was dying. The smell of her blood permeated the room. Deep sorrow filled the room, blocking out the bloodlust in them.

Trigg removed the towel he had been holding over the wound in Robyn's neck, bent down and began to suck out her remaining blood.

Rosa stood and backed away, giving him room.

Vane started forward. "Trigg! What the hell are you doing?"

Rosa ran over to Vane and put her palms on his chest, stopping him. “No. Let him. He’s trying to save her.”

“He’s trying to turn her. We don’t know exactly how that works or what will happen. It may kill her,” he yelled at Trigg.

Rosa tried to calm Vane. “Robyn is dying. This may save her. Let him try.” She hoped her reasoning would convince Vane not to interfere with what Trigg was trying to do for Robyn. She knew the Watcher loved Robyn and no one was going to be able to stop him from his attempt not to lose her.

Vane watched Trigg drink from Robyn, wracking his brain for what to do. He couldn’t just stand there and not help his Cell-mate. Finally he said, “Rayne may know more about this and what to do, but he is out of town. I’ll try to reach him on his cell.”

He pulled out his cell phone and stepped away from Rosa. After a few minutes, he flipped his phone closed and announced that Rayne had instructed him to call Dr. Peltier who headed a clinic strictly for vampires in Lexington, Kentucky. An ambulance was on its way to take Robyn to a helicopter that would airlift her to the clinic for emergency treatment.

Trigg continued to take Robyn’s blood, fighting to hold back his emotions, which threatened to overwhelm him. He couldn’t lose her. She was the only person who made him *feel*. She was the only person to make their way into his heart. He would be nothing without her and the beast that had been so close to the surface for many years would be released forever. He would become the hunted instead of the hunter.

Rosa knelt beside Robyn and felt her pulse. It was slow and barely there. When the beats stuttered erratically, she knew it was time for the transfusion. She placed a hand on Trigg’s arm to get his attention.

“Trigg, you’ve taken enough. Her heart is threatening to stop beating. It’s time to give her blood. I am willing to help if you need me.” She gave Trigg a small smile for reassurance at what he was attempting to do.

Trigg ran his tongue over the wound in her neck several times in an effort to stop what little blood she had left from seeping out of the torn tissue and muscle.

Vane stepped forward. “As will I, brother.”

Trigg and Vane looked each other in the eye, and in that silence, Trigg understood he had his brother’s total support. He turned to Robyn and pulled her into his lap. Bracing his back against the wall, he put his wrist to his mouth and opened the vein.

## Chapter Twenty

Trigg used his free hand to open Robyn's mouth and pressed his wrist over it, just as he had done when he took too much of her blood during their heat of passion.

The blood flowed from Trigg's wrist down her throat as he massaged her neck, trying to make her swallow. He looked at her small, pale form. Her color was gone and her lips had a tint of blue. He spoke in her ear, praying she could hear him.

Trigg spoke of his love for her and how much he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. He told her things they could do together and places he would take her. She would see the world and all its beauty. She would never be alone or afraid again. He would always be by her side to love and cherish her, if she still wanted him after this.

Vane walked to the bedroom to check on Darla and Phillip. Phillip was resting so he could heal from his head wound. Darla had gotten Abigail to sleep and all three were lying on the bed as a family, in each other's arms. When he came back to the living room, he went through Jake's pockets.

He found Jake's wallet in the man's pocket. He pulled it out and opened it, sifting through its contents. A business card for the storage company Jake owned caught Vane's attention and he looked over at Trigg.

"According to Robyn's journal, this guy is a big time drug dealer. Looks like he owns a storage company here in the city. Probably uses it as a distribution point. After I get this body taken care of, I'll phone in a tip to one of the civilian vamps on the force. If my guess turns out to be right, then it'll be a good night for the narcotics division to keep it from hitting the streets. If the place is clean, no foul."

Trigg didn't answer. He was sitting against the wall with his eyes closed, cradling Robyn in his arms.

Vane stopped and turned his head, listening intently. "The ambulance is here."

He looked at Rosa, silently letting her know it was time for Trigg to stop the blood transfer. The EMTs could be human and they didn't need to see a man forcing blood into an injured woman. It would raise too many questions.

Rosa walked over to Trigg while Vane moved Jake's body out of the room.

"Trigg, it's time to stop. The ambulance is here to take her to the clinic." She reached down and slowly lifted his wrist from Robyn's mouth.

Trigg opened his eyes and looked down at Robyn. He brought his wrist to his mouth and closed the wound, then wiped the blood from her mouth and face. He was feeling weak and dizzy from giving her so much blood.

There was a knock at the door. Rosa opened it as two EMTs maneuvered a stretcher, pushing it into the room. The lead EMT went over to assess the situation.

Rosa could sense the two were civilian vampires and she felt a little relieved. They would quickly understand the situation and would, hopefully, know what to do to keep Robyn alive.

The lead EMT knelt and spoke softly to Trigg. He could see Trigg was hanging on by a thread, both mentally and physically.

"I'm Jason with Care-One Medical Services. Dr. Peltier contacted dispatch for us to take this call. I need to do a quick check of her condition. Do you understand?"

Trigg nodded.

Jason took out his stethoscope and listened to Robyn's heart. He then took her pulse and blood pressure, noting them all on the papers attached to the clipboard he carried.

He moved her head slightly to the side to check the wound on her neck and then froze when he heard a low growl coming from Trigg. Jason looked up at him and they silently stared at each other for a moment.

Rosa knelt next to Trigg, speaking softly in an attempt to soothe him.

"Trigg. You need to let him help her. I know you feel you need to protect Robyn, but it's going to be okay. We are all here with you and no one is going to hurt her. You can stay with her, okay?"

After Rosa gave Jason a slight nod, he continued his examination.

“Are there any other injuries?” he asked, looking from Trigg to Rosa.

Rosa shook her head. “There has been extensive blood loss, but her heart is still hanging on.”

Jason nodded and looked at Trigg again, “Did you give her blood?”

Trigg nodded.

“Okay, that may help her to hang on while we get her to the helicopter that will take her to the clinic, but we need to go.”

Jason motioned for the stretcher to be moved closer where it was lowered next to Robyn and Trigg. He hesitated a moment, looking Trigg straight in the eye.

“I need to remove her from your arms. I know you don’t want to let her go, but we have to do this or she won’t survive. There isn’t much time left for her otherwise.”

Trigg looked at Robyn’s pale face for a moment, then agreed. He helped the EMTs get her on the stretcher, feeling cold and empty after they took her from his arms. The beast roared to pounce on them and take her back, but he locked on to his control by clenching his fists at his side.

He followed them to the door, stopping only for a moment when Vane laid a hand on his shoulder and gave it a tight squeeze. Trigg knew without a doubt that his Cell-mates would be there to help him through this, though he wasn’t sure if it would help him now.

They entered the elevator and made their way down to the ambulance parked in front of the building.

Vane watched as Trigg followed the EMTs and the stretcher into the elevator, worry filling him for his comrade and for Robyn. He turned slowly and shut the door.

Rosa had gathered some towels and was cleaning the blood from the floor. Suddenly she stopped, raised her hands to her face and broke into sobs.

He walked over, pulled her up from the floor and into his arms, rubbing her back in a slow circular motion, trying to comfort her. She felt warm and soft in his arms. His heart, already heavy for Trigg, threatened to break at her sorrow. The night had been a tragedy for all involved, especially for Robyn who was fighting for her life.

“Shhh,” he crooned. “Everyone is safe now. It will all work out.”

When her sobs slowed, Rosa pulled away and began to wipe her eyes. To her surprise, Vane lifted his hand and did it for her. She gave him a small smile. “I’m sorry. I hope I didn’t ruin your shirt.” She tried to laugh, but felt no humor inside.

Vane stared at her a moment, then smiled. “It wouldn’t matter if you did.” Then his face became serious.

“Your exit from that window was very smart, not to mention very brave. Your quick thinking probably saved them all.”

Rosa shook her head, not feeling very heroic.

“I’m Vane, by the way. I’m glad to meet you, but I wish it was under better circumstances.”

Rosa smiled a little. “I’m Rosa. Rosa Bella. Robyn’s neighbor...and friend.”

“Rosa. Thank you for befriending Robyn. She has been through so much and deserves all the friendship she can get.”

Vane looked around the apartment. He hated to leave Rosa, but there was work to do to cover what had happened here this evening before dawn arrived. “Rosa. Do you have a car? I need to get rid of the bodies.”

“Bodies?” she asked. “You mean someone else is dead?”

“Yes. I smelled blood downstairs when we first came in. I’m sure I’ll find the guard. Are there security cameras in the lobby or elevators?”

Rosa shook her head then quickly retrieved her purse from the bathroom where she had left it earlier.

“No, since the guard is stationed down there, the building owners didn’t feel the need, plus I’m sure it was a money issue. It usually comes down to that.” She answered sarcastically,

Vane took the keys she held out and gave her a compassionate look. He touched her cheek softly, brushing his thumb over her smooth skin.

“Are you going to be okay?”

When she nodded quietly, he went to the other room, flung Jake's body over his shoulder and headed out the door. It was a good thing, he thought, vampires lived in all of the other apartments in this building. Most of them were civilians, but there were some who were also employees housed there under the direction of Headquarters for various reasons. No one would call the cops when Watchers were involved, knowing whatever the situation, it would be handled quietly.

With a second glance at Rosa and a silent promise to get to know her better when all of this was over, he stepped out the door and into the hall, carrying the weight of Jake's body, and heard the door close silently behind him.

The ambulance ride to the helicopter seemed to take forever and Trigg felt he would go crazy with every passing minute. Robyn remained unresponsive, but at least her heart was beating.

Trigg watched the EMT as he worked on keeping Robyn stabilized during the ambulance ride. He remained watchful and the beast coiled, ready to strike if anything happened to her.

The pulsing of the helicopter blades echoed in the night. When the airlift team told Trigg that he could not ride with them, Trigg hissed, showing fangs, and letting out a fierce rumble. Jason walked over to the lead team member and told him it would be best to let Trigg ride along or someone was going to get hurt, maybe killed, and that Watcher was a loose-cannon, ready to go off at the slightest thing.

The lead airlift team member made room for Trigg. He hopped inside the helicopter, not bothering to buckle in as they left the pad and headed towards the clinic in Lexington. The man advised that it wouldn't take long to get there and Robyn would receive excellent care, though Trigg barely heard a word the man said.

He couldn't stop touching Robyn, reassuring himself she was still alive. His heart was beating fiercely in his chest in fear of losing her. He cursed himself for leaving her. It was all his fault, he thought. He had told Rayne to find her another place to stay. She had

been perfectly safe with them. There would have been no way Jake could have gotten to her there.

This was all his doing. He had been scared of his feelings for her and for his lack of control. If he had tried harder, he would have been able to leash the beast and still be with Robyn without fear of harming her.

Trigg closed his eyes and held back the tears. Tears he would not shed in front of these men.

Trigg didn't realize they had arrived at the private clinic in Lexington. His entire focus was centered on Robyn, silently willing her to live. The helicopter hovered a few moments above the landing pad before it slowly descended.

When the landing was complete, the airlift team hopped out of the helicopter and lowered Robyn's stretcher to the ground. Trigg assisted them, holding her IV bag and helping them get her ready for transfer into the clinic. He barely glanced at the arriving dawn.

The team maneuvered the stretcher to a set of doors, keyed in a code and waited until the doors opened fully before entering. The doors opened to a well-lit hallway that gradually sloped. They hustled down the hall and burst through the next set of doors.

Medical staff had scrambled in the clinic, getting the small emergency room ready. Trigg knew Vane had given the details to Dr. Peltier so all the necessary preparations were ready for their arrival.

As the team wheeled Robyn into the small room, a nurse ran forward and took the IV bag from Trigg's grasp. He felt a little overwhelmed. So many people were milling around her, sending his protective instincts into overdrive.

Dr. Peltier strode in, glanced at Trigg, then made his way over to Robyn as they were transferring her from the stretcher to a hospital bed.

The airlift team left the emergency room with the stretcher as quickly as they had come in, leaving Trigg standing there feeling helpless and trying to keep a tight reign on his chaotic emotions.

Trigg moved back in an effort to stay out of the way of the medical staff. He didn't want anything to impede Robyn's care, but he couldn't make himself move very far from her.

He kept a watchful eye on the doctor as the man examined Robyn and checked her vital statistics. The doctor was a vampire, but was highly experienced in treating both vampires and humans.

Although Trigg had never claimed Robyn as his mate, he was having a hard time controlling his predatory nature watching another male in such close proximity to her.

Dr. Peltier instructed the staff to prepare Robyn for surgery. The damage to her neck was extensive and needed to be repaired as soon as possible. Although Trigg's saliva had stopped the bleeding, the tissue and muscle were in bad shape.

As his instructions were being carried out, he turned to acknowledge Trigg.

"You are Trigg?"

Trigg nodded without looking at the doctor.

"You are one of the Watchers?"

Again, Trigg nodded, growing a little agitated with the questions. He was impatient to hear what could be done for Robyn.

"You attempted to convert a human who was dying from a mortal wound. May I ask what possessed you to do such a thing? You, a Watcher, know the code. You know the implications. I am required to report this to Headquarters. You are aware of that, right?"

Trigg turned his face away from where Robyn lay and slowly met the doctor's gaze, unable to control the growl in his voice as he fought back a hiss of displeasure of the doctor's condemning tone.

"Damn the implications and the code. I don't care if you notify the President of the United States!"

Trigg flashed his teeth but quickly turned his face from the doctor, then ran his hands through his hair in agitation. He didn't want to alienate himself from Dr. Peltier. He needed the doctor's help, regardless of his condemnation or not. Robyn's life was in this doctor's hands.

Trigg turned back to the doctor. “Just help her. I *need* her!” Anguish and fear showed on his face and in his eyes.

Dr. Peltier considered Trigg a moment, then blew out an exasperated sigh. He had seen cases where both rogue and non-rogue vampires attempted to convert a human for companionship. Many times it was done without the human’s consent. In those cases, the outcome wasn’t pretty.

Many converts went mad. Their minds couldn’t accept the change, something they hadn’t asked for but had pushed upon them. However, Dr. Peltier didn’t feel that was the case in this situation. Finally he spoke again in a matter-of-fact tone.

“I’m sure you already know that a human’s body is vastly different than our own. Her body will go through some drastic changes. She may come through it, or she may not. It will be completely up to her strength and her will to survive. We will do the best we can to keep her stabilized and minimize the symptoms. If she regains consciousness, she will be in great pain. I can’t medicate her because it could affect the change.”

“You’ve seen this before, a human conversion?” Trigg asked anxiously.

“Yes, I have, but the outcome was not always favorable. There have been deaths, and there have been those who survived, only to succumb to the bloodlust. A Trueborn vampire is usually not subjected to the bloodlust, being sheltered from it by his or her parents. Through good upbringing and the support of the family, a Trueborn learns to satisfy needs through animal blood.”

Dr. Peltier hesitated a moment, then turned to regard Robyn who lay motionless on the hospital bed.

“A converted human does not always have the advantage of proper support. If Robyn survives the conversion, once it is complete she will immediately feel the hunger. If she does not have someone to care for her, she will find the first available source, most likely a human.”

The doctor turned back to Trigg and studied him to make sure he understood the severity of the situation and what must be done for Robyn if she survived the conversion.

“Look, I know I don’t have to explain this to you. You, being a Trueborn yourself, know the importance of proper training and support. I am saying this to you so that you will understand the implications. If Robyn survives, she will need someone to guide her until she can handle the bloodlust and understand what happens if she cannot or simply chooses not to. If that happens, she *will* be a Rogue, and she would have to be destroyed.”

Trigg’s heart grew heavy. Could he possibly have the strength to destroy Robyn? Especially since he had been the one to make the choice to convert her? It was his selfishness not to let her go that had led to this situation.

“What happens after the surgery to repair her neck?”

“She will be taken to a private room, and then we must wait. Her symptoms will be monitored and cared for as necessary.”

Trigg cut him off. “What are the symptoms?” His concern was growing for what Robyn would have to endure.

“Her body will naturally fight the vampire blood. Since her organs have relied upon her human blood to function, they will have to convert to functioning with the new vampire blood that is now in her system. The cellular structure will develop the need for the absorption of blood for survival, thus the reason for craving blood upon completion of the conversion. The blood you gave her started the process of the conversion, but will not be enough after the conversion is complete. Either you can provide for her or we can.”

Trigg nodded in understanding.

Dr. Peltier continued with his explanation of the conversion symptoms. “She will run a high fever as her body fights the conversion. The high fever puts her body in jeopardy of damage to her organs. We will have to keep the fever below dangerous levels. There are usually convulsions and seizures involved, and, as I said before, much pain.”

Trigg began to sweat as his fear and concern grew for Robyn. He hated to hear what the doctor was telling him, but he needed to know what would and could happen, and what, if anything, he could do to help her survive the conversion.

It seemed like an eternity that Robyn had been in surgery. Trigg had tried to sit for a while, but his edginess would not allow it. Finally a nurse came and addressed Dr. Peltier, advising him that she was out of surgery and had been moved to a private room to ride out the conversion. The doctor nodded to the nurse, then turned back to Trigg.

“Do you wish to stay with her during the conversion?”

“Yes. I do.”

“Then follow me.”

Dr. Peltier led Trigg down the hall towards a series of rooms. The door to Robyn’s room was made of thick steel with a single window for viewing purposes. The doctor explained that the rooms were built to be secure in case a vampire was unmanageable or dangerous to the medical staff. Special vampire sedatives had been developed by vampire scientists since human sedatives did not affect them.

Trigg entered the room and walked quickly to Robyn’s bedside. She was pale, almost translucent. A large bandage covered the side of her neck where she had undergone the surgery to repair the damage from the gunshot wound. Machines beeped in the room, and an oxygen cannula had been placed under her nose to help her breathe. Her arms and feet had been placed in restraints to minimize the risk of injury during a convulsion.

Trigg was glad he had killed that bastard, Jake, for putting Robyn through this, but he also felt the pain of guilt. She had lived the past four years of her life in hell, subjected to all sorts of torment. Now she was going through more. First he had pushed her out of his life and now he had taken away what life she finally had started for herself. What would she think of him when she awoke? Would she damn him for what he had done? He couldn’t bear the thought of her hating him.

His sorrow threatened to crush him. Pulling a chair closer to the bed, he grasped her hand in his, and waited.

The next few hours began with Robyn’s body heating to an alarming degree. Trigg bathed her with a cool washcloth as instructed by one of the nurses. Each time the fever broke, it left her body dripping with sweat and her sheets damp. Trigg would undo her restraints, towel off her body and hold her in his arms while a nurse placed clean, dry

sheets on the bed. He did not want to see her lying in her own sweat. He would give her some dignity while she suffered through this hell.

When Robyn had gotten sick as the conversion process expelled everything from her stomach, he saw to her needs there as well, raising her slightly and turning her head so she did not choke or aspirate on her own body fluids.

Robyn's torment seemed endless and he prayed each minute that it would soon be over. Luckily, she never seemed to regain full consciousness. He thought she had come around a few times, but the fever and pain had kept her totally unfocused and unaware of what was happening to her.

Finally, when she seemed to quiet for a while, Trigg settled into the chair at her bedside and held her hand tightly in his. He placed his cheek on her soft hand, and rested.

He closed his eyes for a moment. Images of Robyn in his bed, as he made love to her, clouded his mind. He could still feel her warm, soft body under his as kissed her softly, tasting her.

Trigg knew he cared for her deeply. If he lost her, he would lose himself.

An alarm sounded on one of the machines, rousing him. When the fog cleared from his mind, he froze. The heart rate monitor had flat lined. Robyn's heart had stopped beating.

Trigg leapt from his chair and flung open the door, yelling for the medical staff, but they were already hustling towards the room with the Crash Cart.

Trigg was ordered by one of the nurses to step out of the way, which he reluctantly obeyed, not wanting to leave Robyn's side.

Dr. Peltier burst through the door of the room, glanced at the monitor, then quickly assessed the situation.

Trigg watched, his heart beating fiercely in his chest, as the medical staff frantically worked to restart Robyn's heart.

The defibrillator was brought out and prepared. Dr. Peltier set the machine, yelled "Clear!" and placed the paddles on Robyn's chest. The force of the shock sent her body arching off the bed.

Dr. Peltier checked the monitor. No response.

## Chapter Twenty-One

Robyn was alone and in the dark, seemingly floating on air. A fine, white mist floated around her, but she could not feel her body. From afar, she noticed a shining light. As she moved closer, it completely enveloped her.

In the blink of an eye, Robyn suddenly found herself standing in a great meadow surrounded by the loveliest flowers she had ever seen.

The air smelled like sweet jasmine. When she recognized the scent, tears filled her eyes. It was the scent of her mother's favorite perfume. Robyn had bought it for her for a Mother's Day present the year her father had walked out on them.

A slight breeze ruffled Robyn's hair as she turned in a complete circle, trying to find the source of the jasmine scent. When she turned back to the beginning of the circle, her heart stopped.

Rachel, Robyn's mother, was standing in front of her, less than ten feet from where she stood. Her mother looked so beautiful, Robyn thought.

Rachel's blonde hair shone as if kissed by the sun. It flowed in the breeze, gently touching the white dress she wore. The dress was covered in lace and was long enough to brush the ground lightly as it swayed in the breeze.

Her mother smiled at her. It was a warm, loving smile from a mother to her daughter.

"Robyn! I've missed you so much!" Rachel had tears in her eyes that she fought to keep at bay. She didn't want anything clouding her vision of her lovely little girl standing before her once again.

"Oh, Mom, I've missed too!" Robyn cried as she ran to her mother's outstretched arms. She felt warm, protective arms envelop her as Rachel held her close and kissed the top of her head.

Robyn sobbed as she laid her head on her mother's shoulder. Now that she was older, she was taller and only a few inches shorter than her mother.

Rachel crooned softly to her daughter, trying to quiet her tears. "I am so sorry I left you. Please forgive me."

Robyn pulled back slowly and looked at her mother's face. At first she had been angry with her mother. Angry that her mother had abandoned her, leaving her all alone with Jake. But, her anger had soon faded to sorrow.

Robyn had missed her mother dearly, each and every day. As the days of torment from Jake went by, she had begun to understand. She understood that her mother could not face what was happening. Her mother had blamed herself for placing her daughter in such an awful situation and she could not protect her from Jake's madness.

"No, Mom. There's nothing to forgive. I understand why you did it, and I don't blame you for anything. All the blame lies with Jake, and he has paid for it. He cannot hurt me or anyone else anymore."

Robyn's mother nodded. She already knew about Jake's fate.

Rachel dropped her arms and grasped Robyn's hands in hers. Her face grew serious.

"Robyn, you have a choice to make. A very important choice."

Robyn was confused and began to feel a little uneasy about her mother's sudden change in demeanor.

"I don't understand. What kind of choice?"

"You must choose to either remain in this world, or return to your own."

Robyn tried to understand what her mother was telling her.

"Are you saying that I must choose to either live or die?"

Her mother nodded, but showed no expression on her face.

"If I stay, I would be here with you?" Robyn asked.

Rachel nodded again. "If you choose to return, you must know one thing. You will not be the same."

Robyn frowned. "What do you mean that I won't be the same?"

"Your body is undergoing the conversion from human to vampire. You were dying from a bullet wound to your neck from Jake's gun."

Robyn now recalled the incident at Darla's and Phillip's apartment and fear settled on her face and in her heart.

"What happened to me?" she whispered.

"Trigg tried to save you. He drained your blood, then gave you his. He wanted you to live, but it is up to you now," her mother answered.

Robyn's head was beginning to spin as she tried to process all that her mother was saying. The past events began to overwhelm her. She put her hands to her temples and tried to think. *Trigg*. He had tried to save her when he could have just let her die. She was a human, yet he cared about her.

If she stayed, she would be with her mother again. This time, she would not have to fear that Rachel would leave her behind. She would have her mother to love and care for her, like she had before Jake entered their lives and tore it apart.

But what about her life if she went back? Would she be like Rosa and Darla, or would she be like those crazed rogue vampires?

Robyn's face was full of concern and indecision.

Rachel smiled at her daughter as if she read her thoughts. "Robyn. It will be up to you to decide your fate if you return. It will be your choice on how you live your new life—good or bad."

Rachel paused a moment before she continued.

"If you stay, you know I will never leave you. We are at peace here, and no one can harm us. You will never be afraid of anything, ever. There is only happiness here, no fear or pain."

Rachel took her daughter's hands and gave them a firm squeeze. "Do not be afraid, but you must make your choice."

Robyn felt a sharp pain in her chest. She stared at her mother in confusion and panic.

"They are calling you back, sweetheart. You must decide, now."

"What about you, Mom?" Robyn's face was streaming with tears.

Rachel smiled warmly. "I will be fine. If you choose to go back, I will always be with you."

Robyn felt the pain again. The image of Trigg and how he had tenderly, then passionately made love to her, and then the look of sorrow and pain on his face as he had held her while she slowly bled to death in Darla's apartment, where he apologized with all his heart for leaving her.

The image in Robyn's head shifted to her mother, Rachel. Her heart had ached for so long to see and talk to her mother.

When she had found her mother dead in Jake's bedroom, she had felt a part of her die as well. Rachel was now standing right in front of her and she was being given a chance to stay with her forever.

She looked at her mom, and then smiled. She had made up her mind.

It seemed as though time stood still. After a few moments, a beep sounded on the monitor. The sound started out slowly, and then steadily became stronger.

Trigg ran to the bed, and with a nod of approval from Dr. Peltier, the medical staff stepped aside to allow him room. The doctor could see in Trigg's eyes that holding him back would be like trying to hold the tail of a tiger as it sprang towards its prey.

Tears made a slow stream down Robyn's cheeks from beneath her closed eyelids. Trigg bent and gently kissed them away. Dr. Peltier hovered on the other side of the bed where he bent over her and lifted one of her eyelids to shine a light into her eye.

"She seems to be in a semi-conscious state. Hopefully, she will come around soon and then we will be able to tell more about her condition."

Without another word, the medical team and Dr. Peltier filed out of the room. After everyone had left, Trigg was alone with Robyn. He spoke softly to her, hoping she could hear him.

"Robyn, I hope you will forgive me for what I have done and for putting you through the conversion. I didn't...I *couldn't* lose you. You make me feel alive. You bring happiness into my heart and meaning into my life. Until you came, my life was just a soulless existence. My days were spent in the dark, alone, and my nights were filled with the need to fight to fill that void. I used the fighting and killing of Rogues to convince

myself of the reason for my existence. I have been alone for so many years that I forgot how to feel. You changed that for me. Please. Please, stay with me, Robyn.”

Robyn heard the sound of Trigg’s low, melodic voice. It sounded far away, then seemed to grow closer. Suddenly, she could make out the words and they touched her heart greatly.

Trigg was pouring his heart out to her, begging her to come back to him. Robyn fought, trying to make her way up to the surface, through the darkness and the weightlessness that held her.

Robyn’s eyes fluttered and Trigg felt his heart leap. He ran his finger along her cheek, hoping to bring her back to him. Then her eyes slowly opened. Those big, dark blue eyes, like two pools of water, stared at him.

Trigg held his breath as he stared back at her, searching for any sign of hate or bitterness, but neither was there. Her eyes held only warmth, and, *love*? He waited for her to move, to speak, for anything.

Robyn stared at Trigg’s face. It was full of concern and slight apprehension. She didn’t know why he seemed so guarded, as if ready to receive a blow of some kind. She wanted to wrap herself in his arms, to feel his warm lips on hers, to hear his beautiful voice speak to her. She tried to talk, but found her throat was extremely sore and her voice nonexistent.

“Shhh...don’t try to talk. You’re going to be okay.” Trigg smiled at her slightly. His heart ached for what he had to tell her. What he had done to her.

“Robyn, I should probably wait to tell you this because you are still so weak, and I don’t want to upset you or hurt your recovery. But I don’t know how much time before you begin to find out for yourself, and I don’t want you to be afraid.”

Robyn already knew what Trigg needed to tell her. She knew she had been converted and understood the reason. It broke her heart to see Trigg struggle. He seemed afraid of how she would react. She wanted desperately to reassure him, but didn’t know how since she could not talk.

Slowly, Robyn lifted her hand, the one Trigg held, squeezing hard so he would not let go. Trigg looked at her intently, and she gave him a warm, reassuring smile. She crooked her finger, gesturing for him to bend down closer. Puzzled, he did so.

Playfully, Robyn touched her index finger to his lips, nudging her way inside to brush one of his fangs. She then released his hand and brought it to her own mouth, then nodded. She kept her gaze on him and never let her smile falter. She wanted him to know that she understood, and that it was okay.

Tears filled Trigg's eyes as he leapt from his chair and kissed her. His heart felt elated and relieved at her acceptance. When he released the kiss, he looked down at her, brushing a strand of damp hair from her face.

"I was afraid you would hate me for this. I just couldn't lose you, Robyn. I love you."

Robyn's heart jumped. She had never thought she would hear that from any man, must less from the one she most wanted to hear say those three words.

A curious sensation slowly began to creep up on her. Her mouth watered and she felt a throbbing in her gums. Panic followed as she felt her canines lengthening.

Trigg saw the panic on Robyn's face and knew the thirst had come upon her. He spoke softly, to ease her fear.

"Robyn, you are in need of feeding since you just went through the change. Don't be afraid, I can get you through this."

Robyn's mind started to race. She recalled the images of the rogue vampires with their bloodstained teeth and the bloodlust in their eyes. She began to shake her head in denial.

Trigg cupped her face in his hands. "No. It's okay. You do not have to feed from humans. I won't let you. By never touching human blood, you will not have to worry about succumbing to the bloodlust. *I* will provide for you."

Robyn's eyes grew wide, and Trigg gave her a sly smile.

"Vampire blood is much more, shall I say, intoxicating." He grinned even more and gave her a wink.

Trigg lowered the side railing of the bed and pushed the IV stand out of his way. Since the conversion was complete, it was no longer needed and her IV, oxygen and restraints had been removed.

Gently, he sat beside her on the bed and pulled her onto his lap. She felt good cradled in his arms.

He bent down to her lips and kissed her softly, then deepened the kiss, sweeping his tongue inside and tasting her. He had missed her fiercely, and his growing erection was telling them both just how much.

After reluctantly pulling back and releasing the kiss, he unbuttoned his shirt, revealing his lean, hard chest and pulled it off, letting it drop to the floor. Robyn smiled at the anticipation she could feel coming from him. She watched the red flames flicker in the depths of his hazel eyes.

Robyn nuzzled his chest, planting soft kisses and laughing softly at the rumbling low growls of pleasure Trigg was making. She trailed kisses all the way up to his neck and felt her mouth water once again. Her breathing grew rapid and her fangs readied themselves to feed.

Robyn looked up at Trigg for reassurance and he smiled. Placing a hand softly on the back of her head, he pulled her to his neck, indicating the spot from which to feed.

Trigg felt the quick prick of pain from her fangs before the wave of pleasure flowed through him as Robyn pulled deeply at his neck. He felt their connection—whole, complete. He wanted her to feed until she felt sated, until she felt at peace.

Once, as Robyn fed, she tried to pull back. He knew she had not taken enough and that she was concerned about taking too much from him. But Trigg was strong. He was a Watcher. A warrior for his race and he would give all he had to her.

When she had taken what she needed, Robyn instinctively ran her tongue across the wound on his neck to seal it, and he groaned in ecstasy.

Trigg was breathing hard, trying to control his desire. Moments later, he noticed her breathing had slowed and the tension was gone from her body. She was still weak and had fallen asleep.

He had no desire to move from that spot. Robyn was curled against his chest and they were both settled on the hospital bed. He looked at her petite form and smiled. *His mouse.*

She was warm and soft against him, like a security blanket. His smile widened at that thought because it was so true. She was his security, the place of peace in his dark life.

Thoughts of Robyn and how he had almost lost her swam through his head. He could not, would not, let her go.

Robyn slept a few hours, and so did Trigg. When he felt her stir, he opened his eyes and looked at her face. She was looking at him with her big, blue eyes. They held so much light, he thought to himself, so much love. Even though she hadn't told him yet that she loved him, he didn't have to hear it from her voice. He could see it in her eyes and it was written all over her face. Trigg had no doubt when she was able to speak, she would say the words.

"How are you feeling?" Trigg asked softly.

Robyn could only look at him and smile. He loved her. This beautiful, virile man who was holding her protectively in his arms, loved her.

"I'm feeling much better."

Robyn's voice was a little hoarse, but he noticed she didn't wince when she spoke. Gently he pulled back the tape to check the bandage on her neck, then he smiled.

Robyn watched Trigg's face and frowned. She slid her fingers up to her neck and discovered why he was smiling. The gunshot wound was almost healed, with only a few tender spots remaining.

She couldn't believe it. The wound to her neck had nearly taken her life and should have left her lying in a hospital bed for quite awhile. Now, less than twenty-four hours later, it was almost gone. *Guess I won't have to worry about health insurance coverage,* she mused to herself. *Now I need a good dental plan.*

A questioning look spread across his face and Robyn couldn't help but laugh. When Trigg asked her what was so funny, she just shook her head and nuzzled his neck, pressing lazy kisses to his skin.

Trigg's heart began to beat faster. It was now or never. Time to lay his heart on the line and make a leap of faith.

"Robyn, I want to claim you as my mate. I want that so badly I can't stand it." Trigg's voice was husky with arousal. "But you have to make the choice. You have the control. I will not force you to mate with me."

Robyn stopped kissing his neck and sat to look at him. She saw the anxiety on his face as his glittering eyes stared into hers. When she started to speak, he placed a finger on her lips to quiet her.

"Before you came into my life, I wanted nothing and no one. I lived day in and day out caring only about my mission to seek out and destroy Rogues. You have shown me something I have never felt before—love. I almost lost you and I couldn't bear it. Will you have me as your mate?"

Trigg waited intently for her answer, holding his breath.

Robyn looked up at him and smiled. She pulled him down for a deep, passionate kiss, accidentally pricking his lower lip with her new fangs.

Trigg tasted his blood in her mouth and it aroused him even more. He hoped that kiss meant her acceptance of him.

Gently, he shifted Robyn from his lap, and laid her on the bed. He walked over to the door, locked it and then pulled the curtain around the bed for privacy, then went to the bed and undressed, taking his time to stare into her lovely face.

Robyn held out her arms to him, wanting him.

Trigg climbed on the bed, lifted Robyn into his lap and then lay down beneath her. He placed Robyn on his chest, letting her straddle him.

"Robyn, say you want to be my mate. Say yes. I need to hear it from you."

Robyn pulled her hospital gown over her head, gave him a wicked grin, then leaned down and feathered kisses over his chest. She loved how muscular and broad it was and how his skin tasted on her lips. "Yes," she whispered against his chest.

Trigg felt a wave of relief and joy. *His mate*. He watched her as she slowly made her way across his abdomen, feathering kisses along one hip and down the thigh. His erection pulsed in anticipation.

Robyn slid down his legs further and placed her mouth directly above the smooth tip of his erection. He groaned as she breathed hot air upon the surface, swirled her tongue lazily around the top, then slid it inside her mouth.

Trigg rocked his hips to the rhythm of her mouth moving up and down his shaft. She nipped lightly then licked the tip and along the sides, making him hiss as he clenched the sides of the bed, hanging on to his control with all that he possessed.

Finally taking mercy upon him, Robyn slid back up to his chest, lifted and positioned herself, then took him inside her, letting out a gasp of pleasure as he filled her.

Trigg almost climaxed immediately from the feel of her heat and slickness, her muscles enveloping him like a glove. Robyn began a slow rhythm, which quickly increased to a passionate pace as they both sought the glory of release.

He pulled her down to him, and ran his tongue along the pulse on the uninjured side of her neck. He swirled his tongue around the spot several times before he sank his fangs into her delicious flesh, letting her warm, sweet blood swirl over his tongue.

Robyn cried out in pure ecstasy as Trigg sank his fangs into her neck while he plunged himself into her deeply, thrusting wildly. The dual penetration pushing her higher until the urge to take almost blinded her. She sank her fangs into the flesh closest to her mouth, his shoulder, joining them together as one. Sealing their love for one another.

Trigg roared his release, matching Robyn's cries as climaxes rocked them both, crashing through them over and over, until she collapsed onto his chest and his arms fell to his sides.

Neither could move. They were both breathing hard, floating back to Earth as feathers on a light breeze after the wonderful release they had shared.

Finally Trigg regained the strength in his arms, shifted Robyn to his side and cradled her tight against his body. He heard her voice, just barely a whisper, in his ear.

“I love you, Trigg.”

His heart had never felt so light. He feathered kisses over her forehead as she fell into a deep sleep, smiling faintly.

Trigg, feeling extreme male satisfaction, smiled himself, then closed his eyes and drifted to sleep beside his love.

## Epilogue

Rosa was startled at the knock at her door. She had been keeping herself busy with cleaning her apartment, helping Darla, with Abigail and had recently gone on a baking frenzy. Everyone in the apartment building had been treated to a fattening dessert of one type or another.

The knock sounded again and she hurried to answer it, wiping the flour off her hands with a dishtowel.

“I’m coming,” she called before reaching the door. “Who is it?”

“It’s Vane, may I come in?”

Rosa’s heart stuttered and she was flooded with a variety of thoughts and emotions.

Quickly, she unbolted the locks, something she had not worried about until after what had happened to Robyn.

Vane stood there in the doorway, his gorgeous Latino body filling the frame. It was enough to take Rosa’s breath away.

“Come in,” she finally said after seeing his eyebrow rise. She hadn’t realized she had been staring at him as he stood in the hallway, waiting for her to invite him inside. “Have a seat,” Rosa said anxiously, leading him into her living room.

“I wanted to bring back the keys to your SUV. I appreciate you allowing me to use it the other night. I’m sorry it was under those circumstances and that it has taken me so long to return it.”

“Oh, thanks,” she said as he handed her the keys. She shuddered at the thought that two dead men had been in her SUV. He had taken both Jake and the security guard’s bodies for disposal. She had no idea where and really didn’t care to know.

Rosa pushed that aside when the thought of Robyn entered her mind. “So tell me, how’s Robyn? Is she adjusting to her new life okay? What about Trigg? Did the Watchers’ Council do anything to him for converting her?”

She stopped the onslaught of questions when Vane chuckled.

“Robyn’s doing great as far as adjusting goes. Although going back to Texas was difficult.”

Rosa pressed a hand to her chest and lowered her eyes. “Oh, that’s right. The Watchers’ Headquarters is in Houston. It must have been awful for her to go. I wish I could have been there for her.”

She understood the reason she had not been allowed to accompany them, but it stung nonetheless. The Watchers were very secretive and she was an outsider.

Vane covered her hand with his and surprised Rosa. “I’m sorry you couldn’t go, Rosa. But everything worked out and they should be coming back soon. Trigg is helping her with the retrieval of her mother’s remains from Jake’s ranch to give her a proper burial. Maybe that will help Robyn put that part of her life to rest.”

Rosa nodded, looking down at Vane’s large hand covering hers. His warmth seeped through her skin and was traveling throughout her entire body. She couldn’t explain it, but it felt good. When he removed his hand, she found herself longing for him to touch her again.

“What about the Council?” she asked, coming back to the topic at hand.

Vane blew out a sigh before he answered. “That worked out well too. They seemed to have grown a little more tolerant over the years. Actually we believe it was the fact that Robyn was Trigg’s mate.”

Vane shrugged slightly and Rosa looked up at his face as the tone in his voice lowered to a near growl.

“It is our nature to do anything, no matter the cost, in a situation like that. When we find our mates, we would kill to have them by our side and protect them with our lives.”

Rosa had started to voice her relief at Trigg’s pardon by the Council, but closed her mouth when she saw Vane’s face.

His emerald green eyes had darkened, but only for a moment, when he had made that last statement. It was there, but then it was gone. Rosa thought maybe she had imagined

it, or maybe he was thinking about someone else. That thought was like lead in her stomach, making her want to crawl under a rock.

Vane cleared his throat. He didn't know what had come over him. At that moment, he had felt something very strong and primal move through him, but now he had control again.

"Well, I guess I better get going." It was time Vane got back to his duties of patrolling the streets of downtown. Rogues were certain to be out there stalking their prey on this warm Friday night.

Rosa smiled and walked him to the door. With a quietly spoken "goodbye", she closed the door as he walked out to the hallway.

Vane let out a long breath and ran a hand through his hair. He wanted nothing more than to stay with Rosa, but he couldn't. Besides, what excuse would he give? They had only recently met. Hell, she may be involved with someone. That thought burned and he clenched his teeth.

With a groan and a silent prayer that their paths would cross again, he stepped into the elevator. All was well, at the moment, and it was time to get back to the mission that he, as well as the other Watchers all over the world, had undertaken—hunting and eliminating Rogues and protecting humans and civilian vampires.

## About the Author

D. McEntire calls southern Indiana home and relishes life in the peace of the country along with her husband and two children, not to mention the menagerie of animals on the small farm.

An avid reader of romance novels, she decided to try her hand in putting some of the ideas bouncing around her head to paper, and thus The Watchers Series was born.

To learn more about *D. McEntire* please visit [www.dmcentire.com](http://www.dmcentire.com). Send an email to Diane at [diane@dmcentire.com](mailto:diane@dmcentire.com).

*There's only one place left to run—into forbidden arms.*

## Regina in the Sun

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A Children of the Goddess story.

When she arrives at Ye Olde Haven Pub, the sanctuary for Trueblood Vampires, Regina is wounded and desperate. Her only thought is to save the Deva Clan, her family, from the dangerous Loups De L'Ombre, the Shadow Wolves. She knows she will not exactly be welcomed with open arms. She is, after all, an Unborn, the lowest caste of Vampire.

As a natural born from the purest line, Zander Sariel knows the rules are sacrosanct—a Trueblood mates with his own kind. But one taste of the young Unborn is all Zander needs to know that rules were made to be broken.

With enemies at every turn, Zander risks everything to save Regina from the monster that hunts her, his own kind's ignorance and—if he must—her lack of faith in her own unique abilities.

Only together do they have a chance to defeat the shadow that haunts their future, and save their entire race from extinction.

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Regina in the Sun:*

Reggie had a hangover. At least, that's what it felt like. Either that or two irate and frustrated little gnomes were taking turns using her head as a ping-pong ball. She lay as still as possible, trying to get her bearings while praying for the gnomes to get bored with her and decide to pester someone else.

The last thing she remembered was...*Haven*. She'd made it. She'd actually gotten there and, if she was remembering correctly, she'd spoken to Lux.

Her shoulders relaxed and the banging began to fade as relief rushed in. Elizabeth and the others would be safe now. She just knew it. And she could continue with her plans without regret or guilt at knowing she'd almost been responsible for a catastrophe.

“I think a slight change in plans might be in order.”

She froze at the sound of the voice. It was close. A little *too* close. Almost as if it was coming from—she groaned in silent mortification as a large, masculine arm slid around her bare waist. What did she do last night?

A male chuckle washed over her. The arm, already causing a tingling heat to spread across her skin, squeezed her gently. “You didn’t do anything, Regina. You were hurt and we took you upstairs to tend to your wounds.”

The gnomes were renewing their efforts with gusto. He knew her name. *And* what she’d been thinking. He shouldn’t be able to read her thoughts so clearly. He shouldn’t be able to read her at all.

She tried to block him, a gift she’d always taken for granted and rarely had to use, but she could sense his amused patience at her attempt. She didn’t stop to think that she might be able to read him in return, her fear turning to anger as she raised up on her elbow, whipping around to confront him.

Her brain registered several facts at once. The first being the pain in her side that, while it still stung, was dramatically less than it had been only yesterday. Secondly, she was lying naked beside quite possibly the sexiest man she’d ever seen. Her eyes glazed and her mouth watered with desire as she slowly looked him over.

Once.

*Pause.*

Twice.

Okay, perhaps sexy was too weak of a word. But he wasn’t beautiful. She wouldn’t even say he was exceptionally handsome. He looked too hard for that. Too raw and elemental and male.

He lay above the covers in unbuttoned black dress pants and nothing else. His thighs bulged as if trying to escape their cloth prison, and she knew instinctively that this man had to have clothes created just to fit him.

A fine line of hair disappeared beneath the lowered zipper, where another growing and rather impressive bulge looked as if it might be planning its escape. Her gaze flew

upward swiftly, past the enviable six-pack, up to the smooth, hairless pecs and along the tightly corded neck before working up her courage to face her mysterious bed partner.

Short, sandy hair looking a bit tousled from sleep framed a strong jaw, sharp cheekbones and a regal nose. It was a face that was saved from being too harsh by the hint of dimples, which appeared when his firm lips tilted slightly at her scrutiny.

Eyes the color of blazing sapphires narrowed with desire and obvious intent. She suddenly recalled that this man had been able to read her thoughts. That was why she'd turned in the first place. She tilted her chin, ignoring the blush heating her cheeks, determined to retain her righteous indignation even in the face of such edible eye candy.

His blue eyes widened in shock before he rolled onto his back with a surprised shout of laughter. "*Edible eye candy?*"

His rude guffawing was cut short with an "Oomph!" as she whacked him with the nearest pillow. She started to get up, determined to escape the gorgeous mind-reading lunatic, only to find herself trapped beneath him while he grinned in amusement, utterly ignoring her warning glare.

"Regina," he murmured as he focused his attention on her full lower lip. "If you're saying you find me attractive, then let me just tell you that the feeling is entirely mutual."

His head lowered slowly, giving her ample time to reject his advance. On any other day, she would have been stunned by her own inaction. She couldn't seem to move. Not even when she felt the first touch of his lips on hers.

Their fingers laced together above her head, the gentle restraint adding to her arousal. He took his time, torturing her with featherlight kisses and gentle nips.

The strange, sweet intimacy of the moment stretched out until she found herself straining her neck to get closer, her mouth opening in invitation. Greedy for more of the delicious stranger's kiss.

He sucked her lower lip between his teeth, biting gently before soothing the sting away with his tongue. She gasped with arousal and he pulled back to look into her eyes for a heartbeat. Angling his head, he took her mouth in a soul-consuming kiss that had her moaning wantonly into his mouth. The sound encouraged him to taste her more fully,

their tongues sparring for control in her mouth as he shifted his hardening erection into the apex of her thighs.

She wrapped her lips around his tongue, sucking him deeper into her mouth. He jerked against her, and then he was reciprocating in a way that made her entire body tremble. On and on, lips and fangs and tongues warred for supremacy in a sensual battle that neither wanted to end.

Never had she experienced anything like the need that flooded through her from the first touch of his lips. He was like a narcotic, drugging her limbs and causing her heart to beat a panicked tattoo against her breast. His taste was both darkly mysterious and achingly familiar. His lips burned against hers with a blaze like the noonday sun, so hot she was sure she'd melt beneath him.

He thrust his hips gently against her sex and even through the sheet that separated them she felt an answering rush of arousal dampen her thighs. She'd never imagined she could be so close to coming from a kiss. A hot, unbearably sexy kiss, but a kiss nonetheless.

He groaned as she arched against him in return and she reveled in the knowledge that his desire was just as strong as hers. That he wanted her, his *grathita*, more than he'd ever wanted another. She was *his* and he would—

She must be sensing his thoughts. Picking up on them as if they were her own. At the same moment the realization struck her, he pressed his body fully against hers, causing her to cry out in pain at the forgotten injury.

He leapt off her as if he were on fire, the lust in his eyes turning quickly to worry. Kneeling on the bed, he bent to check her mending wound, ignoring the hand that tried to slap him away.

“I’m really going to have to work on my timing.”

The wry voice caused the two to jump apart, startled. Reggie felt her cheeks heat as the man she'd just been groping leaned his back against the bed frame with a sigh, subtly trying to cover Regina's naked frame with the blanket, hiding her from the other man's view.

Without a word she jerked the fabric from his hands, pulling the cover up to her neck defensively. She looked towards the glorious creature standing at the edge of the bed, the memory of being carried from the dance floor surfacing in her mind. This was Lux.

He held up the overflowing bag in his hand, which showed the name of a well-known clothing store. “I brought you something to wear. Your other clothing was, well, unsalvageable.”

He waited for her to accept his offering, but she merely nodded her thanks and looked at him pointedly until he turned his head and shut his eyes.

She reached out with her mind and gasped at the amusement hiding in Lux’s thoughts, as well as the memory of undressing her after she’d collapsed. At her sound of outrage, Lux spun his head back around, looking towards her in shock before glancing at the other man—*his brother*, Reggie suddenly realized—for an explanation.

“I don’t know why you’re looking at him. Just ask me.” She crossed her arms over the blanket that she had wrapped around her, realizing her breasts were plumping over the edge when Lux couldn’t seem to tear his gaze away from the view. Her golden eyes rolled and she shook her head. “After all the stories Liz told me, I thought you’d be a bit more, well, genteel.”

The charming smile Lux had been wearing since he’d arrived turned sinful, causing her to shiver at the change. “Genteel? Ahhh. Well, yes, I like men if that’s what you’re inferring. But that doesn’t mean I don’t enjoy women just as thoroughly. Especially when they have such undeniably charming...assets.”

Reggie turned away with a blush to see the object of her recent lust sprawled casually on the rumpled bed, a sensual smile on his face.

“Of the two, Lux is far more notorious than I, Regina mine. Ask anyone. No one’s safe when he’s on the prowl.”

*Bullets won't bring down this killer. It'll take a vampire.*

## Trust the Night

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Having survived a violent husband, Homicide detective Beth Andrews has no patience for abusers. In her eyes, “Mad Jack” is committing the ultimate abuse against the women of Oklahoma City—murder—and she she’ll stop at nothing to bring him to justice. Even risk her own life.

The sexy “mind scientist” she’s been paired with is a distraction she doesn’t need, but he’s getting under her skin in more ways than one. She spends her days investigating the murders. Nights, discovering Sam.

Criminal psychologist Sam Jordan knows he is two things Beth doesn’t trust: A shrink, and a man. But Beth needs his help more than she knows, because like the killer they hunt, Sam is a vampire. And he’s been pursuing Jack the Ripper for longer than Beth’s been alive.

Revealing himself would do more than destroy her fragile trust. It could make her Mad Jack’s next target.

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Trust the Night:*

Stakeouts were to be kept confidential, but something inside Beth superceded the requirement for secrecy. She needed to reveal this one to Sam—and with the telling, give him the right to know. Besides, it might be her last chance to hear his voice before tonight. Definitely a sound she wanted to take with her. She picked up the phone and dialed his number.

“Hello?” It was the old lady again.

“It’s Detective Andrews. Is Sam still sleeping?”

“He won’t mind waking for *you*, dear. Hold on, I’ll get him.”

Beth waited, wondering what Sam had told the woman. Who was she anyway? His housekeeper? His mother?

“Beth? Is anything wrong?”

The sound of his voice calmed her nerves. “Thank heavens,” she said. “I didn’t know if I’d get the chance to talk to you.”

“Why? What’s up?”

“I’m going undercover. Tonight we’re setting a trap for the Ripper.”

“No. You don’t know what you’re up against.”

“Yes, Sam, I do. You did a very complete profile on him. Don’t worry, I’ll be surrounded by Oklahoma City’s finest.”

Exasperation filled his voice. “*You* don’t understand. He’s deadly. Far deadlier than you can imagine.”

“Sam, I’ve seen what he does to his victims. Seen the blood smeared on his face. He’s crazy. I’m not stupid enough to try and take him alone. Tonight I won’t be alone. It’s better than having him come upon me when no one else is around.”

“Damn it! Can’t you just listen to reason?”

She sighed. “You and George. Who appointed you guys my knights in shining armor?”

“Don’t try to change the subject. And who’s George?”

Sam’s jealousy warmed her heart. “He’s my partner. I’ll introduce you next chance I get.”

“Fine. Do that.” He paused. “Please, sweetheart, I’m asking you for a favor. Don’t go out there tonight.”

Emotion swelled in her throat. Beth swallowed it, then managed the words. “I have to.” She heard a crash on the other end of the line, the sound of breaking plaster.

*“Damn it all to hell!”*

“Sam?”

“Okay. Do this. Risk your life. But while you’re at it, keep this little thought under your hat. I’ll be watching out for you. Like it or not, I’ll protect you if need be.”

“No. I told you I don’t want you out there. You’re a civilian. Strong as you are, you don’t know how to handle yourself in this kind of situation.”

His voice held the hint of a growl. “You can’t tame me like some kind of pet dog. I do what I want. Evidently, I’m as stubborn as you.”

“Please, stay home. I want you safe.”

His voice softened, the sound of it sending shivers up her spine and heat somewhere else. “Then you know how I feel. I couldn’t live with myself if I let anything happen to you.”

“I want this over, Sam. I want to be with you.”

“Don’t go.”

“Sorry, that isn’t an option.”

“Then, for God’s sake, be careful. I’ll see you tonight.”

Beth heard the click of his handset, a dial tone. She hung up the phone, then pulled out the killer’s profile to study once more. The written text sprang out at her, reminding her of the terrifying threat that was the Ripper. The hand holding the file began to shake.

“I hope I live that long,” she whispered.

Sam stood by the terrace doors and cursed the gathering darkness. Things were moving strobe light fast, out of his control and he felt like a character in a two-bit horror flick. Hunger gnawed at his stomach to underline the reality of the creature inside him. And, for once, he felt grateful. Only someone with his unnatural powers could protect Beth tonight.

But first he must feed.

He went to the bar and pushed the button. Removed the plastic container of blood from the hidden refrigerator. Heated it in the microwave, wondering why the life giving properties in the blood were unaffected by its heating. He tipped it back, drinking deeply. *The blood is the life*. Truer words had never been written. With great gulps, he drained it dry. Then he prepared another.

A gut-wrenching feeling tore at him. He would need all his strength to fight for the woman he loved.

Hand on her hip, breasts thrust forward, Beth slinked into the squad room doing her best parody of a Hollywood movie siren playing a hooker. Wolf-whistles and catcalls made the room sound like a strip bar. Praise from her enthusiastic colleagues—she

couldn't help but smile. She did look like a two-dollar bargain in her long platinum-blond wig. Crushed red velvet clung to every curve of her body, molding to her like a second skin. She wore black nylons held up by a black lace garter belt accentuated by tiny red ribbon rosebuds. Her shoes were red with very spiked heels. There was no way she could run in shoes like these, but, if worse came to worse, she could kick them off and run in her stocking feet. And they might come in handy as extra weapons.

"Very nice, Andrews," Aikens said. "I'd go for you myself if we didn't have this job to do."

Beth laughed. The captain wasn't known for his subtlety. He knew a little humor went a long way to diffuse a bad case of nerves. She played along, pouting as she batted her eyelashes and said in her most sultry voice, "I know, Captain. Perhaps we can make time...later."

He did the most unlikely thing. Like a dad, in front of everyone, rough old Captain Bob Aikens leaned over and planted a kiss on her well made-up cheek. "Be careful out there. I want you back alive," he said so only she could hear.

He pulled back with a leer and raised his voice to include the others. "Time to go to work. Our boys are planted all over the streets thicker than trees in a tropical rain forest. Keep in sight, Andrews. We don't want any mishaps."

Beth checked her bag to make sure it still held her gun. So far, so good. She tilted her head back, took a long, calming breath and released it slowly. She only hoped her good fortune would hold.

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