

SHIFT CHANGE



Hannah Beckham

Changeling Press

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With a unique chameleon-like ability, Trinity Staten's problems are more than skin deep. She has daddy issues. Her biological father, Jessie, would like nothing more than to see her dead, and her two lovers -- the fathers of her unborn child -- are letting their insecurities put a rift in their Triune threesome. All Trinity wants is to forget she's not human, keep the three of them safe, and get some nookie every now and then. Is that too much to ask?

When her lover Newton Price, telepath and all around hunka-hunka, disappears, Trinity is certain he's walked out on her. To make matters worse, Merlin Davitch, her other lover and best friend -- a tantalizing combination of geek and good looks -- is acting secretive and withdrawn. The power of the Triune should bring them all together, but Trinity has never felt more alone.

Circumstances are not what they seem. And when Trinity is forced into a showdown with Jessie it could bring a permanent end to all her issues.

Dedication

For my husband, because he never asks me to get a day job. I love you, honey, broke back and all. And I'd also like to give a shout out to my friends Michele Bardsley, Dakota Cassidy, Emma Ray Garrett, and Lexxie Couper for never failing to offer support, love, encouragement, and the occasional swift kick in the ass. And I can't forget Stephanie, a great fan and reader. You rock!

“According to scientists, mutations in genetics and DNA are a part of evolutionary adaptation -- and I’m totally paraphrasing here, because I don’t do geek speak near as well as Merlin Davitch -- the good traits should survive, while the bad traits die out over a period of time. These mutations, apparently, are mostly inherited, but can spring up in new generations without ever having happened before in that particular family line.

“Natural selection, people! It exists. So much for ‘the meek shall inherit the Earth.’ It sounds to me like the meek aren’t going to get shit. This is just a general warning, a total FYI: Humans beware. There are other evolutionary species out there and they are stronger, much stronger, and they are adapting and evolving quicker than you can possibly imagine. I’m just saying... Natural selection is not on your side. Approach with caution -- or a really big gun.”

-- Trinity Staten, slayer, pregnant, cranky, but still kicking ass

Chapter One

Jessia of Caledon paced across the stone tiled floors. Anger, rage, and hatred permeated every part of him -- so palpable it could be felt on the air. He'd mourned the loss of his wife, even her second husband, and especially his child. Her death had hurt the most. Jessia had shut himself away for months after their deaths, sick with grief. But he'd gotten over it. Slowly, surely, and over a long period of time.

He'd taken the reign of Caledon, and all the role entailed as the one remaining heir to the throne. Jessia believed it was better to be feared than loved, and for thirty years it had worked, very well. And now, to find out his daughter, his baby girl, had somehow survived that fateful night...

...well, that just pissed him off.

* * *

Over the past two months, Trinity Staten had become more than paranoid, but not without good reason. Demons were trying to kill her. Okay, so they weren't really demons. Not of the Heaven and Hell type, anyhow. Apparently evolution has a sense of humor, or something along those lines.

Finding out recently her own genetics fell off a branch of the evolutionary family tree that wasn't quite human had done nothing to change Trinity's mind that most of the *others*, as Newton called them, were better off dead and six feet under.

Of course, it did explain a lot. She was stronger than most people, faster, a quicker healer. And there was the small fact that her skin turned funny colors when she was stressed, got excited, angry, lustful... actually it was easier to list the things that didn't make her shift.

For this one moment in time, she didn't feel stressed, but she felt very horny, which was a stressor all its own. Though she was nearly ninety-nine percent sure it had

nothing to do with the incubus ju-ju pheromones secreting through her sweat glands, that one percent doubt made her feel like a freak.

Either way, it had been too long. Sixty days too long, and today was D-day, or O-day, if things worked out in Trinity's favor. She strolled out of the bathroom, clad in nothing but a green towel and her birthday suit (which happened to be taking on the coloring of the walls and furniture). The television blared with an episode of *Tough Love*, a program where seven desperate women took advice from a male matchmaker named Steve on how to meet the love of their lives.

Insanely, it was a program both Merlin Davitch and Newton Price could agree on. Which, in the grand scheme of things, wasn't a bad thing, considering there was little Merl and Newt did agree on. Especially where Trinity was concerned.

Trinity rolled her eyes. If they wanted a desperate woman, here she stood. And the *loves* of her life were sitting like couch potatoes watching a reality show instead of noticing.

Steeling her will, she took a deep cleansing breath and pinched the inside of her wrist. The small pain cleared her head, but her skin continued to shimmer from one pattern and color to the next.

So much for behavior therapy. All the techniques her psychiatrist had given her to use were pretty much hit and miss in the "actually working" department. Nonetheless, she was determined to have some hot sweaty monkey love tonight if it killed her. Or she could kill them... whichever came first.

Trinity walked to the side of the couch and stared at her lovers. Though lately she could scarcely call them that. She smiled at Merlin, then stifled a chuckle. He was wearing a black T-shirt with the slogan "Welcome to the Dork Side." A shirt that fit him so well, in more ways than just the *dork* part. A month ago, the T-shirt would have fit loosely across the chest and shoulders, but he'd been working out since the demon attacks had started. Which meant his lean, wiry muscles were getting slightly more bulky.

In other words -- more hot. Trinity felt the scorch all the way to her toes. His brown hair, loose and slightly curly, framed his green eyes spectacularly, and the thickening of his jaw line from the extra weight added to the *va-va-voom* factor.

Newton had always been “filled out” in the muscle department. Dark, thick black hair, and perfectly sensuous amber eyes, Newt fit the bill for anyone’s idea of a wet dream. Trinity got the distinct impression he’d been a soldier of some kind in a past life. Even if he didn’t like guns, he could definitely handle his own in a fight. He’d chopped a demon’s head off to save her life with a move that would have made Conan the Barbarian jealous.

She watched Newton nod his agreement when Steve from *Tough Love* told one of the women to “suck it up and get over herself.” Trinity narrowed her eyes. Was Newt subliminally trying to send her a message? She rolled her eyes again.

“Whatever,” she mumbled as she stepped around Merl’s legs and sidled herself between the two men. She hadn’t needed to say it out loud; Newton could read her mind, literally. His telepathic powers included being able to not only read minds, but also project his own thoughts into the heads of the people around him. It had been very disconcerting the first time he’d done it to Trinity.

Since they’d all moved to the new super-secret hide out (a dilapidated ranch house outside the city), Trinity had made Newt promise to stay out of her thoughts. She suspected he didn’t always follow the rules.

She missed both their quirky and unique senses of humor, but their lives had drastically changed. Trinity had given up her job as a file clerk, Merl resigned his position as chair for the science department at the university and given up a hella lump sum of grant money, and Newton, perhaps he’d given up the most -- life without the complication of Trinity Staten.

Today, she hoped to gain something back, for all of them.

“Soo...” she said to anyone who would listen. “You guys want to fool around?”

“Huh?” Merl grunted. Newton remained silent.

"Come on. It's been two months, and according to Dr. Gray, I should be fine." She amended her statement. "The baby will be fine."

Besides, if she didn't get some good old-fashioned passion and soon, she was fairly certain she would die. Okay, maybe death was over-stretching it a bit, but she hadn't even been allowed to masturbate. According to the experts -- aka Dr. Myron Gray of Caledon -- the first two months of a Triune pregnancy could be delicate. It seemed the little bundle of cells needed ample time to properly implant into the womb before anything down there could be safely jarred.

Trinity desperately needed to be jarred. "Look, fellas. I'm not a china shop, but even if I were, I really think it's time to let in the bulls."

"I don't know, Trini. You sure it's a good idea?" Merl asked. She glanced at the swelling in his jeans. He might have been over-thinking the situation, but she knew where his body stood on the issue.

She stared at Newt, who hadn't taken his eyes off the television. "What about you?" *Please*. Trinity allowed her unarticulated emotions to bubble to the surface.

Finally, he turned his gaze upon her. Raw, naked passion scored his expression. She watched his Adam's apple bob with a hard swallow.

His amber eyes, full of lust, focused in tight on Trinity. It was her turn to swallow.

"Well, I think we have an answer." Inside she did the happy-flappy-Mambo dance of lust. She asked the question she worried about the most. "You guys certain you're okay with all of us in one big pile?"

It was one of the things they'd agreed on, at least Merl and Newt. They'd decided that it wouldn't be fair for either one of them to be the first with Trinity after the forced sabbatical from sex. She wasn't sure who was more insecure of the two.

"Yes," Merl said.

Newton answered with a kiss, his mouth feeding from Trinity's as his hands loosed the towel she wore. Merl, not to be left out, nuzzled the damp skin of her neck, his lips fluttering the surface, softly -- sensually.

Trinity melted back into Merl's arms, pulling Newton with her in the process. She reached down, gripping Newton's ass, and wow, what a nice ass it really, really was. If there were a "Super Fine Ass" award, Newton Price would win hands down. It didn't take long, and soon both Newton and Merlin had stripped down to nothing but a hard on. The way Trinity liked them best.

Trinity took Merl's cock in her hands, her fingers and palms tracing the silken skin. She wanted so badly to impale herself on him, to fuck him as Newton slipped his thick shaft into her mouth. To have both her lovers, Merlin Davitch and Newton Price, in bed again, or on the living room floor, as the case happened to be, felt like magic. Their relationship since the Triune had formed between them had been tenuous and strained. Trinity hoped tonight would go a long way toward breaking some of the tension.

On impulse, she raised her ass to Merl, her head leaning against Newton's thigh. Merl sat on his heels behind Trinity, his fingers sliding into her sex before he entered. She slid her pussy over his cock, not much room to move, but having him inside her felt fantastic. The moan issuing from his throat told her he was feeling pretty damned good as well.

Tilting her chin back and to the side, Trini captured one of Newton's balls into her mouth, sucking and tugging, as her hips jerked backward on Merl's cock. Newton growled, spreading his legs to give Trinity more room.

"Son-of-a-bitch," Newton muttered. When she took his shaft once again between her lips, he began to thrust in earnest, sliding his cock harder and faster into Trinity's mouth.

Trinity felt the mark on her back throb with aching pleasure. It happened every time she was in contact with both men. She'd marked them, and in return, she'd been marked. Together they made a "V" with circles at the three points. Merlin had been less than thrilled, because they looked like matching tattoos, a little too cutesy for his taste. Newton had his own problems with the marks. Trinity got the impression it had to do with him feeling like she'd somehow marked him as "property."

After one argument they'd had, Trinity accused Newton of acting like she'd purposely hiked her leg and pissed on him. He'd walked out that night, disappearing for two days without a word.

But Trinity didn't want to think of that now. She wanted to enjoy the moment, revel in the melding of their bodies coming together in a way that felt like destiny.

Newton's sac pulled tightly in her grip, tugging upward, and she sucked harder. She fucked him with her mouth the way Merl fucked her from behind. Passion overtook her as heat seared her lower abdomen when Merl's thrusting became increasingly faster, harder. The pressure of orgasm spasmed through her hips and stomach. Without thought, she took Newton's shaft to the back of her throat, her lips brushing the dense dark curls at the base.

Newton's groin jerked forward near final climax. And though they'd made the deal that Newton would stay out of Trinity's head, she knew it was next to impossible for him. In the moment of his orgasm, she concentrated on three words, *I love you*.

The jolt of her strong emotions ripped through Newton's body, and his bellows of pleasure soon followed as he filled her mouth with come.

Merl continued moving his cock in and out of her swollen heat as she swallowed Newton's semen, milking his shaft for every drop. Merl held Trinity's hips up with one arm beneath her abdomen, leaning forward as he took total possession.

Her eyelids fluttered as her mind repeated Merlin's name over and over. She moved up on all fours, letting Newton's softening cock slip from her lips. "Oh, God. Yes," she whispered, the pressure mounting hard and swift once again.

Newton maneuvered beneath Trinity, his mouth clamping over her left nipple as his right hand fingered her clit.

She grabbed the back of Newton's head and pulled him up into a kiss, passion arching her entire body as her eyes lost focus. She broke from the kiss. "Holy smokes."

Merlin called out her name, and his husky voice acted like a punk lighter to a firecracker...

“Ah!” she cried out, her body bucking and shuddering with complete and total release.

Merl moaned as he drove his cock in deep -- once, twice, then a final time. He collapsed on Trinity, and she in turn collapsed onto Newton.

They lay there for several minutes, content.

“I love you,” Trinity murmured in the afterglow.

Both men stiffened.

Contentment gone.

They did a simultaneous roll off each other. Trinity stroked both their hair, Merl’s shaggy and brown, Newton’s black, thick, but cut short to his scalp. “What?”

Newton stood up and started to dress. “I’m heading out for a while. Be back soon.”

She focused on her telepathic lover as he walked to the door. *I do love you.*

He paused but didn’t turn back as he left the house.

“What the fuck did I do this time?” She turned to Merl.

He was already up and sliding on his boxer shorts. His brow angled down, matching the frown he wore.

“Oh, for shit’s sake. I’ve somehow ticked you off as well?” She pointed to herself. “I thought the pregnant chick was supposed to be the hormonal one.”

He worked a smile on his face, but Trinity could tell it took some effort.

“You do sweet talk so well.” He threw his T-shirt on. “I’m going down to the basement. Get some rest.” Merl gave her a quick kiss before he headed downstairs to his new makeshift laboratory.

Trinity sighed as she watched the door close behind him.

Two men in her life, and most of the time she felt completely alone. Or insane. Probably the insane part was right.

Chapter Two

One month later...

"Oh my God!" Trinity rushed downstairs to Merl. He was crouched on the floor of the basement laboratory cradling his arm to his side. Shattered glass was scattered about his feet. "What have you done, Merl?"

The loud crash and a muffled "argh" had sent her charging to his side.

They'd had to move twice in the past month since Newton disappeared. This safe house had a basement like the first, and it hadn't taken Merl long to convert it. Their world crashing down around them, and Merlin still made time for science. Trinity didn't know whether she resented or respected his dedication. A mixture of both, she decided.

Newton wouldn't have liked the new place. It was a glorified box sitting amongst rows of other glorified boxes. He liked space, especially with his telepathic abilities. A twinge of ache and longing as she thought of Newton Price laced around her stomach. She dampened the pain by concentrating on Merlin's wounded arm.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Merl said through gritted teeth.

Back to reality. Trinity took Merl's arm. "What happened?" His protective sleeve was torn and blood seeped from a one-inch gash. A broken shard protruded from the wound.

Merl stood with some effort. "I said I'm fine." He stared at Trinity as if seeing her for the first time. "You're not clean."

"What the fuck, Merl?"

He smiled. Simple, but reassuring. Very cute, and sexy, in an annoying sort of way. "I only meant, this is a clean room, Trinity. You came barging in here and didn't use protocol."

"Nag, nag." Trinity placed Merl's forearm on the counter. "I thought you were being attacked!"

"This room has no access to the outside other than the door at the top of the stairs. Seriously, who would have attacked me? The lab mice?"

"After all the experiments you've been doing lately..." She shrugged. "Never know."

He raised an eyebrow. "Hmm."

She ignored his skepticism. "Anyhow, we should get this glass out. It looks like you're going to need stitches."

"Stop. Okay? I told you I'm all right." His green eyes sparkled with intensity, and the stern turn of his bow-lips melted Trinity's insides into a gooey mess.

She stroked his cheek. "Okay, tough guy."

Merl grabbed a first aid kit off the wall while Trinity cleaned the floor. Opening the kit, he poured a reddish solution over the wound then used tweezers to retrieve the glass. After dabbing up the excess blood, he used some kind of glue to seal it all up. "There. See, all better now."

"Wow, what a big boy you are." Trinity grinned. "You didn't even flinch."

"Didn't I?" He smiled, a bit too proudly. "Guess it was all the adrenaline."

It was her turn to raise a brow. "And what caused your adrenaline to spike?"

"If I had to guess..." He wrapped his arms around her waist. "...I'd say it was you."

Or the pheromones, she mentally added. Stupid sex demon. Trinity's DNA, Merl had discovered, adapted and changed whenever an *other* exchanged bodily fluids with her. She'd managed to share blood with a *scrofa* and had been poisoned by a *polandrial*.

The *scrofa* ju-ju sent her into a berserker rage occasionally. They still weren't certain what effects would happen because of the *polandrial*. All she knew for certain was that the sample Merl had extracted from her had killed a bunch of white mice.

She couldn't even begin to fathom the great big *ewww* factor the whole scenario held. A consistent feeling of lust appeared to be a byproduct. Although she'd had naughty thoughts about Merl for years, the lusty demon mojo intensified the feelings. One thing was certain, Trinity knew she couldn't live without Merl, especially since Newton...

She kissed Merl softly on the lips, pushing the bad ju-ju to the back of her mind. "Oh yeah? Tell me about it."

"How about I show you?" He nuzzled her neck, his hand sliding up her side to cup her breast.

If her skin had legs it would've been jumping for joy. "Even better." Trini melted against his tall frame.

Merl slid Trini's pink sweater down and off her right shoulder. He brushed his lips over the bared skin. "Mmmm. You smell good."

"Better than antiseptic."

"No contest. So much better." Using both hands, he pulled the sweater up and off Trinity. "Even better still." She wasn't wearing a bra.

"Fair's fair." She helped Merl out of his lab coat and his white T-shirt. "Goddamn, you look fine."

"The real question is..." He took Trinity's hand and placed it on his hard cock. "...how do I feel?"

"Oh, I'd say really good, but I think that'd be an understatement."

Merl grinned. "I'm going to show you just how good I feel." He dropped to his knees and pulled Trini's jeans down, revealing her pink cotton panties. Written across the front was a big "C" for carbon and the words "I'm looking for something to bond with."

"You're wearing them." Merl looked up, biting his lower lip and smiling.

"You did buy them for me."

"I love them on you. But I think they're going to be even better off. But first..." He licked the already wet fabric between her legs. "Mmm, you are delicious."

Heat, pressure, tingling -- Trinity thought she would lose it right then and there. With her legs turning to gelatin, remaining standing was getting harder and harder. Merlin caught her thighs and held her steady. He pushed the pink fabric to one side and slid his tongue along the folds of her pussy. Next he slid her underpants down her legs and off, then lifted Trinity's leg over his shoulder.

"Hold on." His teeth found her sweet spot, nibbling her swollen clit as Trinity braced herself against the counter.

Merl's lips fed against the sensitive skin. He sucked and licked and nibbled her pussy until his face shined with her fluids. Trinity squirmed forward, her hands tangling into his wavy brown hair. The tip of his tongue flicked against the spot just inside her, sending Trini's body bucking forward.

Her hands slipped off the counter, spilling them both to the floor. Trinity's fingers worked the buttons on Merl's slacks. "Shit, you've got on too many clothes."

She desperately wanted him inside her -- needed to feel his cock sliding in and out. Trinity could feel his shaft harden, engorged with hot blood, filling her mouth and throat. The sensation caused her stomach to flutter and she felt her own juices wet on her thighs.

Her breathing was irregular, harsh and ragged. "Fuck." She stood and leaned over the lab counter then slid her legs apart to give him easy access.

Merl kissed up Trinity's thighs, licking and nipping until his mouth rested over her sodden sex. His fingers slipped inside her pussy. Shallow, not deep, playful. He stood behind her, his strong hands tugging her hips back until his jutting cock brushed her opening.

It was like torture waiting for him to enter. "Please, Merl."

"It's all about thermodynamics, baby." He chuckled, lust dripping from his voice. "I'm just trying to bring the heat."

"Funny, Einstein." She bit her lower lip and added sexily, "Geeks are soo hot."

"I'll show you geek." And boy did he. Merl entered her, his cock sliding into her wet hot pussy with one smooth stroke. No hesitation and all demand.

She felt the pressure mounting in her clit, her pussy swelling against his cock as he thrust in and out of her with a steady pace.

"It's so good," she murmured pressing her head against the cool counter top. She arched her back to meet his strokes. Her fingers gripped the far edge of the table as she rocked her hips to meet his. "Faster," she panted. "Deeper."

He plunged his cock into her with a voracity she hadn't seen in Merl before. She cried out his name as he took his pleasure without mercy, his shaft sliding in and out at a fevered pace.

So good, so good. Just the right amount of pain. She screamed as a hard orgasm quaked through her, causing her entire body to drop forward in shuddering ecstasy.

Merl held her firmly on his cock until her orgasm quieted then continued fucking her, slowly this time, the pain ebbing as his cock grew a little smaller, but still hard as steel. "I'm going to make you come again."

He slipped from her pussy, sliding down onto his knees, lapping and licking at the juice of her orgasm -- his tongue flickered over her sensitive clit. Heat bloomed again as the nub grew tight and firm against his lips.

"Wooo-sahh," she sighed, moving her body backward, crushing his face against her pussy.

He stood back up again, but this time only the tip of his cock went inside her. He rubbed the tip in and around the sensitive area only an inch or so inside her channel. A staggering breath escaped her mouth.

"Ahh!" she roared as another orgasm took her. Trinity's knees buckled and Merl dropped to the floor beneath her, impaling her onto his cock, triggering his own climax. The tremors took them both to the ground.

When the quakes subsided, Trinity opened her eyes. She stared into Merl's deep green pools. Breathless and completely sated, she teased him, "Don't worry. You'll be better next time."

Merl smacked her on the shoulder. "Hey!"

"Kidding. Can I just say *wow* and fucking *wow*."

"Yes, you may." He smiled.

Trinity snuggled into the crook of his arm.

"You miss him. Don't you?" Merl said, rolling to his side. He stroked Trinity's forehead.

She squeezed her eyes with shame. "Do you hate me for it?"

"Never," Merl said softly. "It's not your fault, Trini. Biologically you are connected to Price, same as you are to me."

It wasn't just science for Trinity, though she didn't think she could convince Merlin. She wished she could make him believe. "I lov --"

Merl put his fingers to her mouth to stop the words. "I love you, Trinity. That's enough."

He wouldn't let her say it. He never did. Biology or no biology, she loved Merlin Davitch. Just as she loved Newton Price. Her soul cried out with loss over her other lover. A month earlier, Newton had left -- nothing as clichéd as going out for a pack of cigarettes, but pretty damn close -- and never came back.

Newton wasn't dead. It was the only thing Trinity was certain of, and that left only one option. He'd left her. She couldn't blame him. Hell, she was surprised Merlin hadn't gone running for the hills. Although, the fact that Trinity wasn't altogether human, okay, not human at all -- well, it just made Trini an even more interesting specimen to study as far as Merl was concerned.

One baby, two fathers -- it was enough to freak out anyone. Shit, Trinity was completely freaked out most of the time. If she could've run away, she might have taken that road as well. But it's hard to get away from the ten-pound elephant in the room when wherever you are, there it is.

Chapter Three

Newton could hear them coming. Not the scurrying feet as they trampled down the narrow halls, but their minds. They were coming to get him, once again, and bring him before Jessie. For nearly three weeks he'd endured horrific torture at the hands of the acting king of Caledon. Newton's ability to read minds only served to make the "sessions," as Jessie called them, even more unbearable.

"I can't go. I can't see it. Do you see it? It's all around. The air is thick with their tears," the desperate lunatic who shared his cell whispered. His voice escalated, building to a roar. "Don't say a word. Don't. Why won't you stop crying? Why? Stop crying. Stop!" Turning his wild eyes to Newton, he pointed with a shaky finger. "They're coming for you, Newton Price. They are coming for you!"

Newton cupped his ears, squeezing his eyes tight. Nothing helped. The madness of the man's words was bad enough, day in and day out, but the images he projected in his mind -- a mangled mess of death and despair -- nearly crippled Newton. There was only one thing, one object of focus in Newton's mind, that gave him strength.

Trinity.

If he could hold on, hold out, she would be safe. Her and the baby. Newton missed her touch, her lips on his own, and her breath on his skin. He focused in on those feelings. Tangible. Palpable. In moments he would be dragged before Jessie once again.

He would be tortured in ways he didn't want to think about. Couldn't think about and still maintain any of his own mind. It had become a daily ritual. Jessie would remind him of Trinity's devotion to Merlin Davitch. She would give him up to save Merlin, but she would never be disloyal to Merl -- not ever. Newton, he would always

be second best in her heart. All the while, Jessie's man Connor would do things... heinous... He couldn't get rid of the memories, but he could refuse to give it voice.

Newton had resisted, though there were times... such doubts. He prayed as the guards grew closer to his cell. Prayed he could withstand one more day. Prayed that even if he believed Jessie was right, he wouldn't be that guy. The one who in bitterness and fear betrays.

* * *

Dr. Myron Gray tap-tapped his fountain pen against the yellow pad as his foot, crossed over his knee, wiggled at the same pace. "How are your breathing exercises working? Are you finding it easier to control your abilities?"

"Don't you mean disabilities?" Trinity bit her lower lip, then held up her hands. They'd taken on the coloration and pattern of the white jacquard lounge chair she'd been gripping. It gave a whole new meaning to *white-knuckled*. "What do you think?"

Next she pinched her wrist and breathed deeply. The color returned to normal. Finally, she had some control. Not much, but it was better than before.

He raised a bushy brow. "Better, but you can work harder."

Dr. Gray was a smallish man, thin and short. What he lacked in hair on the top of his head, his eyebrows more than made up for, and his pop bottle glasses made his small brown eyes alien in appearance.

Scratching her nose, Trinity leaned forward. "That sounded like a value judgment to me." She shook her head. "Not very shrink-like."

"No, you're correct. But it *is* very much like an uncle who doesn't want to see his niece dead."

Trinity smiled. She'd recently found out she had a living relative. Myron Gray, her psychiatrist, was Trinity's uncle on her mother's side. Her biological mother -- not the woman who'd raised her. The one who'd raised her, well, Trinity had about a dozen issues to work out about that, considering her adoptive parents were the hired assassins who'd killed the biologicals. At least two of them.

Gray, who was a son of Caledon, but not royalty, had been away to college when the slaughter had taken place. He secretly returned to the area, but could do nothing to save his people. Because, while Myron had been born to only one father, Trinity's mother had two, and only a member of the Triune could rule.

She put her hand to her belly. Her own child would be of the Triune as well, which only served to increase the danger they were all in.

The light next to the door flickered, indicating someone was waiting for Dr. Gray out in the lobby. He pushed his glasses up his nose. "Excuse me a moment."

"Sure, no prob." Trinity slumped back into the chair. She watched Dr. Gray exit the room and shake hands with a young man as he closed the door behind him. That guy probably had normal problems like cheating on his wife, wife cheating on him, depression, bi-polar disorder, OCD, maybe even schizophrenia -- Trinity thought all those conditions preferable to her own.

She thrummed her fingers on the chair until boredom and curiosity got the better of her. She stood and walked to the door, quietly, carefully putting her ear to the door. She could hear bits and pieces of the muffled conversation on the other side. But two words stuck out: "Newton Price."

Her knees nearly buckled where she stood. Myron Gray was talking to someone about Newton. Newton, who'd been missing for a month. Frantic for news, she dropped to the floor and butted her head against the threshold where there was a minute crack between the bottom of the door and the floor. They sounded far away, but at least Trinity could make out the conversation.

"He's still alive then?" she heard her uncle ask.

Who was alive? Newton? No. They couldn't have been talking about him. Trinity would have known if he were in trouble. She would have felt it. Right?

"As of yesterday, that was the case, sir."

Relief mixed with anxiety. Trinity's heart threatened to leap from her throat.

"I don't know if that's good news or bad news." There was a pause. Then Gray continued. "Thanks for stopping by. Next time call ahead."

Oh crap, Gray was heading back into the room. Trinity scrambled up off the floor and practically jumped into the chair.

Her uncle walked in rubbing his dome like the Buddha was nesting on his head. Trinity rubbed her palms, anxiously waiting for whatever news he had to tell her.

Gray leaned against his desk, pursed his lips, and placed his fingers to his brow. "I think that's all for today, Trinity. Keep working on the daily focus and I'll see you in a couple of days."

She could feel her mouth drop in a "what the fuck" way. "Uh-uh."

"Pardon?"

"Pardon, my ass."

"Are you feeling all right, Trinity? With the exception of your clothing, you've all but disappeared. Has something happened?"

"You're kidding me, right?"

Gray raised an eyebrow quizzically. "I'm unaware of --"

"Just stop already. I heard you." She pointed a finger in accusation. "Newton's alive. May be a good or bad thing? Although in my book it's definitely good... unless he's taken up with some hussy on a tropical island somewhere." She shook her head vehemently. "No, even then I'd want him to be okay. So, whatever it is you know, I want to know, just so you know that I know... For fuck sake!" Trinity threw up her arms. "Just tell me."

Myron Gray scrunched his nose and pushed his glasses back again. "Did you develop a supersonic hearing ability that I don't know about?"

"Hello." Trinity pointed to the door. "It's called eavesdropping. Not everything has to be *otherly*. Now quit stalling and give."

"I still have friends."

"Well, blessed be, I'm happy for you. What does that have to do with Newton?"

"I still have friends among the Caledon. Friends who would like to see Jessica unseated and you in his place."

Oish. Trinity could barely run her own life. The idea of running a “people” or whatever was too much to even think about. “Tell me.”

“Sources say that Newton Price has been captured by Jessie. They report he is being questioned about your location.”

“For a month?”

“Not exactly. Newton went in under false pretenses. As a mediator between the Caledon and the Shamora.”

Feeling her gorge rise, Trinity fought to push the panic down and bury it deep. “And just whose brilliant idea was that?”

“His.”

“And you arranged this, right?”

“Yes.”

“And now he’s being *questioned*?” Trinity finger quoted the word.

Dr. Gray winced. “Yes.”

Suddenly it dawned on Trinity. “Oh my God. They’re torturing him, and I’m just now hearing about this?” And if he was still alive, it meant he was enduring. Keeping Trinity safe at great personal cost. “We have to help him.”

“Trinity, it’s not a good idea --”

“I don’t give a shit what rationale you’re about to spew. Even if you don’t want to help me, I’m going to get Newton, and I’m going to bring him home.” For once, she played the family card. “I need him home, Uncle.”

Myron Gray, apparently in deep thought, looked out his office window, blinked slowly, then nodded. “All right.”

“Thanks,” she said, not sure if she was thankful at all.

On the way home, Trinity pulled off to the side of the highway and cried. Newton hadn’t deserted her. She’d been thinking the worst of him, while he’d been trying to save them at great personal cost to himself.

Biting her lip, Trinity pulled back onto the highway. She had to make arrangements with Merl, then she would meet with Gray's men outside the Caledon compound to mount a rescue. Easy-peasy.

Goodbye, frying pan. Hello, fire.

Chapter Four

Merlin Davitch locked the door to his laboratory. He didn't want Trinity walking in on him. Not today. He'd known for a while monsters existed. Maybe he'd fooled himself for a while thinking they weren't a threat, or a problem. But since they'd started coming after Trinity, all those foolish notions had gone out the window.

Ethically, he had always been opposed to such practices as eugenics and genetic engineering of human beings. Morally, he had a huge problem with selective breeding or the idea of a "super soldier." But righteously, he was beginning to think he had an obligation to make certain humans would have the tools to defend themselves if the *others* ever decided to go to war with mainstream society. A checks and balances, of a sort.

Merlin, finally, after three months of painstaking experiments using recombinant DNA from Trinity and using endonucleases to combine it with human cells, had finally developed a serum that could potentially do just that -- even the odds. His first human experiment would start with himself.

The last batch hadn't killed the lab mice, and though some of the results were unexpected, they appeared more vigorous, energetic, and stronger than normal. Of course, even as he held the injection to his arm, Merl's justifications did not hold up in his mind. He could present all the reasons genetic modification would be good for human existence, when in reality he knew at the core of his work, he didn't really care or believe his own rhetoric.

Trinity was his first and only priority, and she would need more than his intellect to keep her safe.

The red light at the top of the stairwell blinked.

Crap. Trinity was home already.

Quickly, Merl disposed of the empty syringe and put away the serum before leaping the stairs three at a time to the top.

He opened the door of the small clean room, then exited into the living room. Three men were rifling through their stuff.

The largest of the three stared at Merl and raised a gun.

* * *

They took the bag from his head, and Newton Price blinked as the room came into focus. A room he was now all too familiar with. Gray slate walls, a large flat rectangular stone, at least six feet long and three feet high. There were shackles connected to chains bolted into the floor at the four corners of the monument of torture.

An insidious figure emerged from the edges of darkness in the corner of the room. "Will today be the day?"

He was tall, thin, and deceptively frail-looking. His short white hair didn't contrast much with his pale aged skin or bright gray-green eyes. He wore a blue sweater vest over a white button down shirt and gray slacks.

Jessia, on all accounts, looked like a tenured college professor.

Newton braced himself against Jessia's thoughts -- calm, calculated, and cruel. During these long sessions, Newton had come to know Jessia very well. He understood his motivations, maybe even more than what was comfortable. Jessia had allowed his fears to drag him over the line of sanity.

Maybe Newton would go that way as well. *Have I not already?*

"Let's begin," Jessia said.

The man, Connor, as Newton had come to know him -- as much as anyone can come to know their nightmare -- stepped up to the stone slab. He was around Newton's height, pale blond hair with even paler blue eyes.

Unlike most, his mind was a blank to Newton. It had been almost a relief in its own twisted way not being able to see or hear Connor's thoughts. Newton didn't want to know what he was thinking or feeling. He didn't think he'd have made it this long knowing how much his pain satisfied the man.

Connor held an instrument much like an ice pick, only longer and thicker, in his left hand.

Involuntarily, Newton's cock grew hard. He cried out his frustration. Pain had become pleasure. Pleasure had become pain. It had all been part of Connor's torturous training.

Connor's right hand massaged Newton's shaft and balls. The ice man then gripped Newt's hard cock and stroked as his left hand pushed the spike slowly through the muscle above his right collarbone. The searing pain made his body intensely rigid. Much like his traitorous cock.

"Tell my liege and lord what he wants to know, and this can all end." Connor's voice held a metallic quality. "Don't you want this to end?"

"Yes," Newton said through gritted teeth. He felt his cock jerk in Connor's palm.

The ice man pursed his lips. "Maybe you don't want this to stop. Maybe you enjoy it too much."

Newton heard Jessie chuckle in the background. The old man enjoyed the show, even if he didn't like to get his hands dirty in the process. It's why he'd hired someone to kill his family, rather than do it himself.

The stroking of his cock become more insistent and Newton couldn't stop from moving his hips to meet the rhythm. Shame mixed with pain mixed with excitement, but mostly shame, filled Newton. "Kill me."

"Ah, I cannot. Not yet," Connor said, twisting the rod in his shoulder.

"Why?"

Connor's answer was simple and succinct. "I serve at the pleasure of my liege."

The blond man's left hand pushed the spike further into his shoulder, as his right hand cupped Newton's balls, squeezing gently. His finger drifted over Newton's anus and Newton cried out. The pain intensified the orgasm. Newton's semen saturated his stomach while his body jerked spasmodically. After, his mind numbed for a moment as Connor withdrew the rod from his shoulder and stepped back.

Crossing his arms, Connor shook his head. "In a moment, we will begin again. Unless there is something you want to tell us?"

* * *

Trinity could see three men inside her house. Three strangers, but it was hard to see their faces. Their words were so muffled through the thickness of the glass that she couldn't hear what they were saying.

"What the fuck," she mouthed. Had she not parked on the street and walked around the side of the house, she would have never seen them.

They weren't friends of his. Merlin didn't have friends, other than Trinity, and they'd been best friends since childhood, so she'd know. Of course, the fact that they were holding guns on him seemed like an obvious clue.

Quietly and efficiently, Trinity began stripping off her clothes. A rush of adrenaline charged through her body as her skin's color shifted to adapt to the brick wall, the grass, the walk, the sky -- for all appearances, she had simply disappeared into nothing.

The men holding Merl seemed human enough. Maybe they were simply robbers, not some *others* with nefarious plans to continue the ruination of her life.

A girl could hope, right?

Now the only problem was getting inside without the bad guys wondering why the door was opening and closing on its own. Suddenly, the solution availed itself. From out of nowhere, the windows of the house imploded -- a shower of broken glass cutting through the thugs holding Merl.

Trinity screamed, fear for Merlin coursing through her as she leapt through one of the windows, shards cutting into her feet as she scrambled to the four bodies lying on the floor. Blood mixed with the crystalline pieces littering the hardwood.

Flipping Merl's body, Trinity lay her fingers across the right side of his neck and exhaled a breath she hadn't realized she was holding when it bounded beneath her touch.

She looked around the room. The three thugs were bloody and unmoving, while Merlin didn't appear to have a scratch on him. Why had the windows exploded inward? And why wasn't her lover damaged by the debris?

"Merl." She shook his shoulder. "Merl?"

His eyes opened, his hands shooting toward her neck. He gripped her throat tightly, staring through Trinity as if he were in a trance.

The grip didn't tighten, but Trinity could feel the breath being pulled from her lungs, and it was impossible to get it back. She tried to pull his hands away, tried yanking away from his grasp, but something possessing Merl had given him inhuman strength. Trinity kept trying to say his name as her vision went dark. An intense pressure built inside her head and chest. In her mind she screamed at Merl, shouted for him to stop.

He blinked. His hands slowly relaxed their hold. "Trini?"

Scurrying backward, the glass cutting her hands, she put distance between them. Her throat hurt as she wheezed in several deep breaths.

Merl sat up, horror apparent in his expression. He looked at his palms.

Trini slowly crawled toward the nearest window. Whatever had happened with Merl, it scared her.

His head turned sharply in her direction. "Trinity? Are you there?"

She froze stock still. Of course he couldn't see her. Her camouflage made Trini a ghost. Holding her breath, she waited, still uncertain of his state of mind.

"Trini," he said softly.

Her racing heartbeat slowed. He sounded like himself, sort of. What had they done to him before she arrived? "I'm here," she whispered. "Are you okay?"

Trinity's skin began to shift back to normal, her natural defenses falling.

"I'm fine. Honestly." His voice trembled slightly, leaving Trinity with the feeling Merl didn't believe the words coming out of his mouth.

"Who were they?" She gestured to the dead bodies.

He shook his head. "I'm not sure. I walked in on them ransacking the living room. They pulled their weapons on me, then... well, you know what happened next."

"No. I really don't. At all."

Merl had the good sense to look embarrassed. "Trini... I have to tell you something. Something I don't think you're going to like."

She didn't like any of it so far. How had these men found her, then? Had Jessica managed to break Newton? Had Newton given up her location? If he had, did Jessica have any reason to keep him alive anymore?

Newton's rescue! Trinity had almost forgotten why she'd come home in the first place. "Merl, we have to pack some gear and get moving. Newt's in trouble, and I'm afraid he doesn't have much time."

"Much time for what?"

Trinity stared at Merlin as if he'd grown a second head. "To live."

Chapter Five

"Are you sure it's way out here?" Merl asked for the umpteenth time on the long drive out of town and on to all the backwoods roads.

"I think I can follow directions, thank you very much," Trinity snapped. "If you're not going to be helpful, I wish you'd shut the hell up."

Normally, Merlin would have come back with a witty response, and Trinity needed him to act normal. To say something normal. Instead, he just clamped his lips tightly together and stared out of the window at the closing darkness falling on the trees that lined the road.

Caledon rose in the distance, meeting the setting sun. Ridiculously enough, it was an old looking colonial farmhouse surrounded by some outbuildings, wooded hills, and grassy plains. There was a security gate around the entire property.

"This is it?"

"What?" Merl asked.

Trinity hadn't realized she'd voiced her lack of awe. "I just thought there would be more... well... you know. More. You have to admit, the place doesn't scream *other*."

"No, I'd say more Farmer John."

"Exactly."

After passing the long drive, Trinity parked the car nearly a mile up the road. "We're going to have to hoof it. You up for that?"

Merl smirked. "I think I can make it."

Trinity put her hand on his shoulder. "Gray's people are meeting me a half of a click from the perimeter in the woods, and we'll need a fast getaway if we can get Newt out."

"What does that mean anyway? There's no such measurement."

"A click is a kilometer."

"Ahh. Oh. Never mind then."

"So you'll stay here and be the driver?"

"Forget it."

"Don't be difficult. I can be stealthy. You are more... on the klutzy side. Do you really think it's a good idea?"

"You didn't think I was so klutzy yesterday." He wiggled his eyebrows.

"No, no, you were not."

Merlin opened his black jacket. "Besides, I can totally dress for stealthy." He was wearing a black T-shirt that said "Base pairs bond for life."

Trinity's chest tightened. She loved this man before her more than just about anything or anyone. He wasn't going to take "no" for an answer.

Overwhelmed, she threw her arms around his neck and pulled him down into a passionate kiss. It was difficult ending the kiss, a kiss that held the promise of so much more.

"I can't lose you." And she meant it. Losing Merl would be like losing her head. She couldn't live without either.

"You let me worry about me. You worry about keeping yourself safe."

Nodding, Trinity placed her forehead against his chest.

His hand splayed open on her back, he rubbed in a comforting fashion. "Trini. There's something I've been meaning --" A beeping noise interrupted.

"Crap, that's the phone. Gray's people are in place. They're going to take the perimeter alarm out in ten minutes. It will only be off for a few minutes, so we have to go and quickly."

Merl grabbed a small black bag from the back seat. "Ready."

"Hmmm." Trinity hadn't noticed the bag before now. "Is that your ninja gear?"

Merl simply smiled. "Something like that."

She chewed the inside of her lower lip, then shrugged. "You didn't bring some kind of chemical whatcha-dooickey, or anything did you?"

"Don't we have to be somewhere?"

"Yes." Tension thrummed beneath her skin. "You didn't answer me."

He leaned over and kissed her forehead. "I know."

Trinity watched Merl as he walked up the road toward the rendezvous point. Something about him felt different, foreign. Shaking her head, Trinity followed after him.

Wild grapes grew all over the property. They looped themselves in tangles over the smaller trees and up the sides of the big ones, choking out the plants around them. Trinity felt like she was being choked as well when a voice echoed through her head.

Don't come for me.

"Newt?"

Trinity. Don't come. It's not worth it... I'm not worth it.

* * *

Jessia paced the small room. He'd been alerted to a breach in the sixth quadrant of the compound. Only his most trusted advisors were aware that his daughter existed and what significance Newton Price played in her life.

"Trinity," Newton mumbled as he tugged futilely at the restraints. "No. Don't come."

Jessia saw tears leak down the sides of his prisoner's face. Panic-spiked adrenaline raced through his system. Trinity could not be here. No one could find out about her. If they did, it might not be the end of Jessia's hold on the Caledon, but it would certainly put a kink in his power base. Some would lose faith if they knew about the Triune.

Why won't this child just die? Another thought entered his head. If Trinity had come, then he no longer needed Price. He gestured to Connor. "Kill him."

One down, two to go, and Jessia could go on as leader of his people unchallenged.

Chapter Six

The distinctive scent of dirt and pine saturated the air. Just past a thick cluster of silver maple trees, Trinity could see three men hunkered down. Getting over the fence had gone without a hitch. Thank heavens. She'd needed something to go right, because so much lately had just gone wrong.

A flashlight flickered three times. The signal. It was Gray's men. So far, so good. She kept hold of a small glimmer of hope the rescue would work.

As Merl and Trinity approached, they all stood then dropped to a knee and bowed their heads.

"Huh?"

"I think that's meant for you," Merlin whispered. "Tell them to get up. It's making me nervous."

"Please." She rolled her eyes. "Hey, dudes. We don't really have time for this. Do you know where they have Newton?"

A young man she recognized from Gray's office got up first. "Yes, ma'am."

Trinity winced. She was thirty, but the whole "ma'am" thing made her feel like she was seventy. "Where?"

"He's in the main house." The man-boy pointed past the tree line where a large empty field lay naked between them and the farmhouse. There were three good-sized sheds and a barn strategically placed around the back of the house.

"What are those?"

"Entrances."

"To what?"

"Caledon."

Okay. That made no sense at all. "Are they *magical* entrances?"

The young man smirked. "No, ma'am."

"Trinity, please."

"I'm Eustan."

"Huh. Like Houston without the hard H."

"Yes, ma'am."

Ugh. He was not going to shed the ma'am thing any time soon.

The other two men stood. They seemed really young as well, no older than nineteen or twenty, just like Eustan. What had her uncle been thinking?

Then Trinity looked at them, really looked. They all had dark hair, dark eyes, around five feet ten inches and probably no more than one hundred and sixty pounds. And they, wow, they all looked alike.

"Identical triplets?"

"Yes, ma'am," one of the other boys said. "I'm Destan." He gestured to the remaining brother. "That's Max."

"Max? Your parents run out of *stan* names?"

"No, ma'am," Eustan replied. "He just prefers Max."

Trinity fought the urge to ask them if their mother knew where they were. "How are we supposed to get in?"

All three looked at each other and shrugged. Destan leaned his head toward the house. "I'm afraid getting in will be your problem. You're the only one with the ability to go in unseen. We'll wait until you're in the main house, then enter the tunnels."

Eustan added, "We have to keep our cover, ma'am. Otherwise, if you can't get Newton Price out, we'll have no exit strategy."

"I see." Holy triple whammy did she see. Trinity was on her own. Literally. They weren't going to help. Or at least they'd done all they were willing to do.

Merl put his arm around her shoulders. "I'll go in with Trinity."

Max put his hand on Merl's arm and shook his head.

"Max is right," Destan said. "You can't. We'll take you in with us."

Max nodded his agreement.

"Doesn't he speak?" Trinity asked.

"No, ma'am." Eustan toed the dirt in front of him. "Not since the liege had his tongue removed."

The horror of his statement hit Trinity like a gut punch. "Why? Why would he do that?"

Destan answered. "For the same reason he had his own family slaughtered... because he can."

"Well, that and the fact that he smarted off. Too much of our father in him," Eustan added. "You don't have much time. By now the liege knows there are people on the property who aren't supposed to be here, and he is definitely clever enough to figure out who."

He handed a piece of paper to Trinity. "Once you're in the house, follow these directions. It should take you directly to where Newton is being held."

Trinity wanted to scream. This was the plan, to just go in and take Newton? No back up? She stared at the triplets, hard and glaring. Then softened. These boys had gotten her and Merl into the compound, and at great personal risk. Could she really fault them for not wanting to go face to face with Jessie and his men?

"Okay. I'm in." Trinity focused on shifting, let all her fears for Newton, and Merl, and even for these three boys she barely knew, flood her body. Once she'd completely transformed, she stripped her clothing off.

The boys had been watching with great interest. "Amazing," one of them muttered.

She grabbed four small knives, along with some clear tape, from out of the bag she'd brought along. She then proceeded to tape them under her armpits in such a way as to camouflage them with her body.

"Weird," Destan said. "But very cool. It's like the stuff is floating on the air."

"Yeah, super cool. Whatever." Trinity put her arms down and checked to make sure the weapons couldn't be seen. "Let's do this."

* * *

"What are you waiting for?" Newton asked. He didn't struggle against the shackles. Not anymore. The reason for struggling was gone. Soon the pain would be gone. Permanently. "Kill me."

Connor turned his back to Newton. "Not yet."

"Great. Fucking great." The son-of-a-bitch wasn't through with him. "I thought you served at the pleasure of your liege. Well, his pleasure is to kill me. So goddamn it, kill me." The last bit came as a choking sob. Newton was done. Finished. If his wrists and ankles hadn't been bound, he'd have ended his own life already.

The voice of his cellmate entered his mind. *Why are you crying? Stop crying. Stop!*

"Get out. Get out. Out."

Connor turned back to him. "It will all be over soon. One way or the other."

Chapter Seven

Trinity had crossed the field without incident. Even if it hadn't been night, she would have been fine. Her ability didn't depend on light. At least it didn't require a lot of light. Of course if it had been pitch black, she wouldn't need to shift anyhow.

Again she was faced with a similar dilemma as when the three men had been holding Merl. With a guard at every window, and two sentries on the front door, how in the world was she supposed to get inside? She could make herself invisible, but she couldn't walk through walls.

Trinity paced the entire house, searching desperately for a way in. She found a locked cellar door on the back right side. She grabbed a knife from under her arm, and had the old fashioned lock opened in a few short moments. Carefully, she opened one side. The creaking sent panicky chills up and down her spine. Mentally she told the hinges to shut their pie-hole.

She heard Newton's voice again. *Go. Just go. I'm already dead. I'm dead.*

No, she thought back fiercely. If he was already dead he couldn't get into her mind. Unless his ghost had learned some weird Jedi mind trick thingy like Obi Wan.

Forget it, Newton. Get yourself together because I'm coming for you.

Fear pulsed in her stomach when he didn't answer back. Without hesitation, she crawled into the inky blackness beyond the cellar doors.

This was pitch black. She had to fumble her way forward until she found the exit. Gripping the handle, slowly, quietly, she opened the door. A putrid scent of human waste and remains instantly gagged her. A flickering sconce on the wall dimly lit the hall with barred cells on either side, only making the basement seem even more horrific.

She retched, the sound echoing off the brick walls.

"Clever, girl."

Trinity's hand instantly gripped the blade she'd used to open the lock.

A figure stepped forward out of the thickest of shadows. His form slowly transformed into that of a man. He was tall, thin, and he wore a sweater vest Mr. Rogers would have envied.

He grinned. "What? No kiss for Daddy?"

A chill of foreboding and shock ripped through Trinity's psyche. Her enemy -- her blood. "I'll kill you, you bastard."

"You're not wrong. About me being a bastard, that is. The killing part? Well, there you are just grossly mistaken." Jessie's form shimmered and faded, but his shadow remained. It moved forward, quickly and without warning, until it stopped in front of Trinity.

So Daddy had a few tricks of his own. He could shift like her. Trinity slashed out with the blade, hoping to catch him across the neck. End game.

Unfortunately, the blade met with no resistance. There was nothing in front of her but air. She waved her hand above the shadow.

She heard Jessie laugh. It sounded like a whisper of wind. Then suddenly the shadow at her feet took shape. And there he was, standing right in front of her. His arm snaked out like a cobra -- *snap*. He gripped her throat with more strength than she could have imagined his frail form capable.

Swinging up with her right hand, she tried to slash him again. He knocked the blade out of her hand and slapped her across the face almost simultaneously.

Damn. Shit. Piss. Fuck. He was fast.

"I should have never sent fools to do what I could have done so easily myself. At least then I would have known the job was done right." He sniffed. "Nevertheless, I'll rectify the situation now."

Jessie examined Trinity. He shook his head. "You look so much like your mother." Even with Jessie's reminiscing, he didn't stop. The pressure on her throat grew crushing.

Trinity couldn't breathe. Couldn't speak. In an act of pure self-preservation, she allowed her body to go limp, praying the move would break Jessie's grip but not her neck.

It didn't work, but it surprised him enough that Trinity was able to punch him in the groin without him blocking the action. That move made the ruler of Caledon let go. He doubled over, howling in pain.

"Not so smug now, huh?"

Before Trinity could get off another shot, he disappeared once again into shadow. Okay, so maybe he was still a little smug.

The ghosted form went up the wall, across the ceiling, and came back down behind her.

More prepared, Trinity waited until he began to shimmer back into form. She leaned back into a side kick. The old fellow was quick, and moved just in time to prevent solid contact, but Trinity countered with a sharp jab, catching him in the mouth.

Jessie wiped his lip and spat blood. His eyes glittered with rage.

His rage was met with her own. She could feel the *scrofa* demon's berserking essence permeate her being. "I won't be caught off guard again, *Daddy*." She flicked her knife at him. "Come on. You wanted your kiss."

She cried out her wrath as she attacked full force using all the fighting skill her adoptive parents had taught her. She slashed, kicked, and punched. Jessie fought back adeptly. He blocked some of her hits, while some landed, and not for nothing, he landed quite a few blows of his own. The *scrofa*'s hormones allowed her to ignore the pain.

Even still, Jessie was faster, stronger. He swooped his leg under Trinity's, causing her to land on the hard cement floor with a thud.

Straddling her thighs, he pinned her arms to the ground. He leaned in close to her face. "Here's your kiss, daughter."

His mouth met hers. Gently, chaste. “Ahhh!” Trinity screamed. Then she bit him on the lower lip, tearing fiercely into his flesh.

Jessia’s eyes grew wide with disbelief. “You’ve poisoned me? But how?”

She guessed the question as to how and when the poison from the *polandrial* would work in her body had been answered. “Good. Now die.”

“Oh,” he smiled, even with pain apparent in his eyes. “It will take more than that to kill me. So, you first.” He raised his elbow and caught her against the jaw. Blinding, white hot pain exploded in Trinity’s head.

Her vision clouded, but didn’t completely fade. She watched as Jessia prepared his next blow, unable to do anything to stop it.

Merlin and Newton. She’d failed them both. And the last thing she’d see on this earth was the smiling face of her powerful and maniacal father.

Or so she thought. An explosion sounded from somewhere deep in the house, or maybe outside. Suddenly, Jessia’s eyes widened again, and he gasped for breath. He rolled off Trinity, clutching at his throat. She looked around the darkened hall, unable to get a bearing.

Merlin Davitch came into view. “Merl,” she whispered, her mouth and throat dry and swollen.

He held out his hand in Jessia’s direction. Concentration furrowed his brow. Trinity rolled onto her side and watched, since she hurt too badly to do much more.

This is it, she thought. Jessia will die, and no more fighting.

Instead of dying, he dissolved into darkness once more. The shadow scurried across the floor and under the door of the room leading to the outside cellar door. Gone. Just gone.

Dead would have been better, but for the moment, Trinity allowed herself to feel relief. “How?”

Merl squatted next to Trinity and helped her to stand. He checked her over from head to toe for major injuries. And since she was naked, and no longer shifted, it wasn’t hard for him to get a complete picture. “Are you okay? Does anything feel broken?”

She thought about Newton, and his last words. *I'm dead*. She hadn't heard him since, and she feared the worst. "Only my heart." Trinity shook her head. "Merlin. How did you do that?"

"Long story short? I've been doing a little experimenting at home. I'll explain more later. Right now, we have to get moving if we want to get Newton out of here."

Trinity barely managed the words. "If he's still alive."

"He's alive, Trinity. If he wasn't, your mark would have lost a leg. You're not the only one who's been talking to Myron Gray. Anyhow, I checked your back. The mark. It's intact. Which means we're not too late."

Emotion, threatening to manifest in a wave of tears, washed over her. She didn't have time to break down. Not now. It could wait.

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, but we'll find him."

"The explosion?"

"Yep. Little black bag."

"We'll find him."

"For sure." He squeezed her hand. "Let's go."

As if on cue, a blond man appeared at the end of the hall. He carried a bundle of human over his shoulder. Merl put himself between the man and Trinity.

"Wait." The man held up his free hand. He deposited his burden gently onto the floor. It moaned.

"Newton?" Trinity walked toward them with difficulty. Her legs were sandbags -- thick, heavy, and hard to move.

"Kill me," Newton rasped.

Trinity choked back a sob when she saw the state of him. He was naked, his body covered in dirt and dried blood. His normally robust frame was gaunt and drawn.

"What have you done to him?"

"I'm returning him to you."

"Why? Why are you helping us?"

The blond man dropped to his knee before the three of them. "I serve at the pleasure of my liege."

He stood, and with the same flourish he'd arrived, the blond man disappeared.

As soon as he left, Trinity could once again move freely. She dropped to Newton's side. "Newt? Oh, God. Merl, help me."

"The guy," Newton mumbled.

"What guy?" Trinity asked.

"In the cell. The cell." He raised a shaky finger to indicate which one. "Can't leave him here."

Trinity walked to the cell. It was empty. She went to the next, then the next. All of them were empty. She went back to Newton's side. "There's no one down here but us."

"I hear him still. Can't you hear him? I hear him..." Newton's voice faded and he passed out.

Merl checked Newton's pulse and glanced over to Trinity. "He's alive. I'll carry him. We can't wait any longer though. We have to go now."

Firming her resolve, Trinity stood and helped Merl get Newton off the cold floor.

Chapter Eight

Two weeks had passed since they'd rescued Newton and returned to the safe house. They were still in hiding. It turned out that unless Jessie was dead, he was still in control of the Caledon. And while a few might defy him to assist with bringing Trinity in as the rightful heir, most would not. They were terrified of him.

All Trinity had to do to understand their feelings was to think about Max and his missing tongue -- the state of Newton Price was also a good indication of how truly horrific Jessie could be. She was grateful they'd gotten out of the compound with their lives, but worried for the triplets, Eustan, Destan, and Max. She prayed Jessie would never find out about their roles in helping Trinity.

On the "bigger problems at hand" issue, Trinity had to deal with the fact that Merlin had decided to *enhance* his body by injecting an *other* serum cocktail. The full range of augmentation and side effects were unknown, and add to it the fact Merl would use himself as a guinea pig -- frankly, it scared the shit out of Trinity. One of his gifts appeared to be the ability to suck all the air out of stuff he focused on, like the room where the windows imploded, and hers and Jessie's lungs.

She wondered if there would be any ramifications from biting Jessie's lip. His blood had gotten into her mouth, but Merl said it was too early to tell if ingesting the fluids would affect her the way blood to blood did. She guessed she would discover soon enough if she happened to turn into a shadow.

Like she didn't feel invisible most of the time anyhow.

An even bigger issue, one Trinity prayed they could overcome, was Newton Price.

Myron Gray had brought a doctor to help with the physical wounds, but unfortunately, the psychological wounds were taking a lot longer to heal, if they ever would.

Trinity had her doubts. Gray said Newton had post-traumatic stress disorder. Until he could come to grips with what had happened to him -- think about it without reliving the trauma -- he might never get better.

They'd all slept in the same room, but Newton refused to be touched by either Trinity or Merl. He had remained silent, both verbally and with his mind, even though Trinity had given him permission to enter any time he wanted. She'd basically given him free rein in hopes of getting through to him. She couldn't even fathom the nightmarish hell Newton had endured those three long weeks in Jessie's basement.

Gray had urged her to continue trying to get through to Newton. Something inside her lover had broken, and only the three of them together stood any chance of healing him. So tonight, like every night since his wounds had scabbed over, Trinity stood next to the bed, naked, pale, beautiful, her short red hair framing the curves of her neck and shoulders.

She expected to see nothing, only the blank expression he'd worn since returning home. Instead, recognition flickered in his eyes.

"Newt?" He didn't answer, but a glimmer of hope lit within her. "Come back to me." She turned her gaze to Merl and held out her hand to him. "Come back to us."

"Trini."

She fought the overwhelming feeling of joy that pulsed and excited her body. It would cause her to shift, and she wanted to stay present for Newton. But he'd said her name. He said her name!

"My Newton, my beautiful, magnificent Newton," she said in a hushed voice as she lay next to him, careful not to touch. Not yet. She didn't want him to regress from this moment.

"Am I dead?"

"No, you are very much alive. You're safe now."

Trinity tugged Merl's hand, urging him to lie with them.

Merl resisted. "Maybe I should go. This is a breakthrough, Trini, and I don't want to mess it up by being here."

Trinity gripped his hand. "You should stay."

"No," Newton said, his gaze traveling to Merl. "I mean, yes."

"Newt." Merl's voice caught as he said Newton's name. "You've suffered so much. I don't want to add to your pain."

"Stay," Newton said.

"Stay," Trinity echoed.

Merl smiled and slipped into bed behind Trinity. "I guess I'll stay."

Moving aside, Trinity made room for Merl by scooting closer to Newton, her body pressing to his. Her slender fingers met Newton's and intertwined.

"I need..." Newton pressed his hips against her, his thick cock bulging against her thigh. "Fuck." He groaned, his eyes pleading. "I don't feel real. Make me feel real again."

Wrapping a hand around Newton's neck, Trinity pulled him into a kiss. "We will." She tilted her head to Merl and kissed him as well. "Together."

"Together then." Merl stroked Trinity's stomach, his index finger tracing her belly button.

Trinity scooted up on the bed. She placed both of her hands, palms down, one on Newton's chest, the other on Merl's. An impulsive thought took her over. "Turn over, both of you."

Merl complied, flipping onto his stomach. Newton on the other hand went rigid under her touch and Trinity worried she'd pushed too hard. "It's okay. You don't have to." Though her body and mind told her it was important. Something that needed to happen.

Newton closed his amber eyes, his dark eyelashes interlaced as he slowly turned over.

Trinity got on her knees between them. She stared at their violet marks, Newton's on his right shoulder -- a circle with a line slanting from right to left -- Merl's identical and opposite on his left shoulder. An oddity none of them had ever explored as significant. It was a sign, only a mark. But Merl had explained how if Newton had died, Trinity would have lost the right leg of the "V" on her lower back. So it had to be more. Right?

She reached out, simultaneously touching both men's marks. They flared with light beneath her fingertips.

"What are you doing?" Newton asked.

"Does it hurt?"

"No," both Newton and Merl said immediately.

"It feels... good," Merl said. "I don't know how to describe the sensation."

Trinity took it as a cue to continue. She traced the circles then drew her fingers along the slashes toward her body.

Her body felt electrified and the room buzzed and shimmered. Her mind retraced Newton's memories, his insecurity about his relationship with Trinity. How he felt she could never love him, not the way she loved Merl. He would always be the third wheel in the relationship.

The memories grew dark, more painful, as she relived in a flash the moment he had been taken captive, the torture, the humiliation, and she wept for him. Wept for all he had lost.

She also saw Merlin, desperate to be her defender, her hero. He'd put stuff in his body *for* Trinity -- to be what he thought she needed. He could understand how she loved Newton. The man was strong, could fight, plus he had a talent Trinity found useful. As long as he was just Mr. Science Guy, Trinity would never find him anything more than a caricature.

Trinity grabbed their pain and insecurities and held them like a fist in her mind, swallowing them down, burying them in the deepest pit within. In turn, she replaced

the bad with her own feelings for her lovers. She let it pour into them freely like an untamed waterfall.

She loved them both equally, even if for very different reasons, and whether it was science or karma or whatever anyone wanted to call it, it didn't make the feelings any less real. They were both important. She wanted and needed them -- not to worship or save her -- but to be there. Be present.

Always. She sent the message loud and clear, and the expressions on Newton's and Merl's faces spoke volumes about the fact it was well received.

"Do you get it now? Do you?"

She cried because she hadn't. She cried because she couldn't stop it. She cried because up until now neither of them knew how much they truly meant to her, and somehow, it was her fault.

Newton sat up and slipped his arms around her. Merl did the same from the other side. Their naked bodies pressed together and fit. Perfectly. Uniquely.

The mark on her back began to throb. Other parts began to throb as well. Newton licked the skin behind her ear, his mouth following with nibbles on the lobe. Merlin held her breast in his hand, tweaking her nipple with his thumb and forefinger.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered. "Amazing."

Trinity wanted to give them both as much leeway as they needed. In a way, they'd all been traumatized, even though Newton by far had gotten the raw end of things.

She cupped her dark-haired lover's jaw. "I'm open to you, Newton. My mind is open to you, now and always. I'll never shut you down again. I promise. Tell me what you need from me. I'll do it."

He slowly rolled his neck to one side and closed his eyes. "Don't pity me."

Trinity kissed the puncture wounds above his collarbone, one for each day he was tortured, and eased him to his back. "I won't."

His rigid cock lay across his lower abdomen. Trinity twined her fingers in the curls at the base. "I want to touch you."

"Touch me."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"Hurt me."

She realized pleasure and pain had become one for Newton. She'd seen what the blond man had done to him. It made her wish she'd had the chance to kill him when he'd brought Newton down to the basement. No, she wouldn't think about that now. She wouldn't make her anger over what happened to him taint this moment.

"I never want to hurt you, my love." She glanced over her shoulder at Merlin, who patiently waited to join in. "I never want to hurt either of you."

"Touch me," Newton repeated.

Using her knee, Trinity parted Newton's thighs and knelt between them. She grasped his cock and held it up to meet her mouth. Her lips slipped over the bulbous head, the silken shaft moving past teeth and tongue. Working steadily, Trinity slipped him in and out of her mouth, tasting every bit of the firm flesh over her tongue, dipping down occasionally to lick his testicles to the base of his sac.

His breathing increased and he groaned, a sound of bliss and mourning all rolled into one audible sound. He put his hand on her head. "Stop. I can't..."

Trinity looked up at him, her eyes meeting his in a moment of clarity.

"Your eyes are so beautiful," he told her. "I could get lost in those eyes."

"Let me help you to forget. Let me bring you some true joy. Trust me to help."

She hadn't noticed that Merlin had moved up to the head of the bed. He was stroking Newton's hair, staring at Trinity, all the while murmuring softly in a gesture of comfort.

Newt blinked. "Okay."

Trinity took his shaft back into her mouth, bobbing her head up and down, gently and consistently.

Fingers traced her bangs, brushing her hair out of her face. She looked up. It was Merl's fingers. He'd moved her hair to get a better view. She wondered if he enjoyed watching her give head to another man.

Newton said, "Yes. He enjoys watching you suck me."

Merl's eyes widened, but he didn't deny it. Trinity decided to let Newton really play.

What else does Merl enjoy? She swallowed hard on Newton's shaft to emphasize the question.

His voice dripping with sex, Newton said, "He would enjoy watching me lick your pussy while you suck my cock."

A dark chuckle rumbled from Merl's chest. Guilty as charged.

Then we'll just have to oblige him.

She moved over the top of Newton, her head over his cock, her hot, swollen pussy over his face.

Trinity arched her hips to meet his mouth and she closed her lips over his length once again. Newton latched onto her clit, working the engorged mound between his teeth and lips, his tongue flickering around it.

Trinity moaned her pleasure. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched Merlin stroke his own cock as he gazed, mesmerized by the scene.

Does he want to join in?

This time Merlin answered. "Yes. I really do." His fingers found her slick hot sex, moving in and out with the same rhythm she used to suck and lick Newton's cock. The same rhythm Newton used to devour her clit. He pulled his fingers out and licked them. "God, you taste so good."

Merl dipped his head and dragged his tongue over her pussy, letting his tongue dart in and out. He moved up and over the sensitive skin between her cunt and ass, teasingly lapping and tapping the tip against her anus.

"Holy shit," she said, coming off Newton's shaft. "Fuck..." And in a really good way. Newton stimulated her pussy while Merlin played with her ass, turning her into one big horny nerve ending threatening to explode in one big bang. She wanted them inside her; one of them, both of them, it didn't matter.

Newton's lips broke contact. "Merl wants to fuck your ass."

Trinity pulled up off his cock. "Really?"

"Yes," Merl answered, then dipped his tongue past the tightly ringed muscle just to punctuate his desire. Trinity's lower body shuddered in response.

"What about you, Newt?"

"Well, darling, I just want to fuck. I need to feel something. It needs to be real."

Trinity didn't question his motives or desires, she simply accepted. "Where do you want me?"

Merl sat back as Newton guided Trinity around until she was facing him and straddling his thighs. She leaned forward and placed his cock at the precipice of her slick channel. The thick head of his shaft brushed her sensitive nub and she thought she would come before they even got started.

"Not yet," Merl said. She wasn't sure whether he was talking about her sliding onto Newton, or coming. Either way, she waited.

Merl got up, his erection jutting from his body, and grabbed a tube of lubricant from the bedside table. He crawled behind Trinity, making room for himself between Newton's thighs. She felt him slide his long thick length along the crack of her ass.

"Now," she breathed, barely able to speak as excitement raced through her system. Her hands and arms had disappeared, taking on the appearance of Newton and the bed sheets. She couldn't stop the shifting, not and let go to her desires, so she didn't fight it.

Cold lubricant warmed as Merl applied it to her anus. She breathed and relaxed, trying hard to relax the muscle, to allow him room for penetration. Newton's cock somehow found her warm, slick center and entered. Trinity could feel every inch of him and she moved her hips down and back.

Merlin's fingertip moved past the first ring of muscle. She could literally feel it nearly pop and give. The sensation was odd, but boy howdy, it felt incredible. She continued to move over Newton as Merl finger fucked her ass. First one digit, then two, then three, stretching and turning until she was fully prepared. Or at least she thought she was.

When his cock rested between her splayed cheeks, and his body leaned over hers, she felt a small searing pain as he entered. Newton pinched her nipples hard, the pain distracting her from the thick cock entering her ass.

Merl kissed the back of her neck, hugging her to him with an arm around her waist as inch by slow inch he pushed himself inside completely. The sensation of her ass and pussy being filled simultaneously made her feel a major pleasure overload.

Newton slipped in and out, his hips moving back into the mattress then thrusting forward. Her natural lubricants made the process easy. Merl finally took a stroke out slightly then back in. She could feel her vaginal muscles along with her anus contracting around their cocks as the pressure became immediate.

Trinity cried out, her orgasm crashing through her as she fell forward onto Newton's chest. Other than following her down, Merl had held still when she came. After, they didn't give her a chance to rest. Newton's arms wrapped around Merl's back, while Merl gripped his shoulders. Together they rocked Trinity between them.

Newton rocked his hips forward and back, thrusting in earnest. His breathing grew shallow and panting. Merl slid in and out of her, matching Newton's rhythm, neither of them giving an inch, and oh wow was it working. Trinity could feel another orgasm building, intensely, considering her sex had become majorly sensitive the first time she came.

"Oh, God!" she cried out. "Don't stop. Feels so good."

"You're so beautiful," Newton mumbled. "Mine."

"Mine," Merl echoed.

Then they paused. "Ours." "Ours."

"Love you, love you, love you," Trinity repeated as flames of rapture stole her mind and will. Bright colors burst before her eyes and she was swept away in the ecstasy.

Newton bellowed as he shuddered beneath her, pumping his seed into her. Merl groaned as he ground his hips against her ass, coming harder than she'd ever felt him come.

When Trinity's vision cleared, she patted Merl's shoulder. "Okay. Can't. Breathe."

He laughed and slowly withdrew his softening cock from her. "I can definitely see how the *hypothesis of the primeval atom* got started."

Newton shook his head. "Huh?"

Trinity slipped off Newton's lap and lay down between them. "He's talking about the Big Bang theory."

When Newton laughed, Trinity joined in. Tonight was a good night. They hadn't had many of them and not in a while. There was still the matter of her crazy bio-dad trying to kill her. And who knows what else the future held in store. She was certain of one thing -- a night of passion would not heal all their wounds.

But it was a start.

The rest they could deal with as it came. As long as they dealt with it together.

* * *

Newton could hear soft snores coming from Trinity and Merl. He half smiled. Trinity never failed to astonish him with her beauty and passion, but still a part of him felt empty, dead. He wondered if he would ever feel completely alive again.

He stared at his cellmate in the corner of the room. The wild man, naked, gaunt, and filthy. The only things that had changed were the surroundings and the mantra. For the past two weeks the insane creature kept repeating, "They're coming for you. They're coming back."

Hannah Beckham

Hannah Beckham is ready to be fitted for her own straightjacket and a magical stay in the rubber room. After a stint in the Army, Hannah found writing a great way to escape the insanity that is her life. She likes tough heroines with a sense of humor, and heroes who are hunkishly supernatural and a little damaged. She's always up for email. Readers can write her at hannah@hannahbeckham.com or visit her website at www.hannahbeckham.com.