



Half-Wed Moon

Mara Lee

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Chapter One

“You look great.” Thad Winston whistled.

“You’re a shitty liar.” Denison ‘Danny’ Lee wiped some blood off her chin and gave Thad a chilly look. She finished shoving her instruments into her black bag and snapped it shut.

“Whoa, in a bad mood are we?”

Danny didn’t bother to answer. She picked up her bag and started for the door.

Thad reached out and grabbed her arm.

“If you like your hand, I suggest you remove it from my arm, now.” Her words were cool, removed even, but her eyes glinted with evil promise.

“Lord, what the hell is the matter with you?”

She wasn’t in the mood for this. “Okay. I wouldn’t have actually cut off your hand.”

“Is that your shitty excuse for an apology?” Thad asked.

“I am *not* apologizing. Listen, I had a crappy morning. I didn’t have time to do laundry, so I’m stuck wearing the same smelly, bloodstained clothes I had on this morning. And, I have a headache larger than the fucking polar ice caps.”

“Apology not getting any better here, Danny.”

“I am *not* apologizing,” Danny said with a scowl.

He laughed then and motioned to her bag. “Okay, fine. You’re not apologizing. Mind telling me where you’re headed off to?”

“I do.” She picked up her bag and walked to the door.

“Hey, hey.” Thad rushed up and put himself between her and the exit. “You promised that the next time you went out you would take me,” he said plaintively. “You promised, Danny.”

“What? Are we twelve now? Listen, I’m breaking my promise, Thad boy. This isn’t a job I want to take you on.”

“You’re such a bitch,” Thad growled.

Danny shoved him out of the way, opened the door and walked out. “I know,” she called out over her shoulder.

* * * *

Danny studied the circle. They had done a piss-poor job at forming it. The lines were uneven and hadn’t been finished. And she couldn’t detect any salt. What idiot formed a circle and didn’t use salt? Oh, yeah, dumb ass coven witches with no sense of self-preservation.

She turned to the *Airok*—the head of the coven—and scowled at her. “Your girls couldn’t draw a circle?” she asked sarcastically.

Airok Elsa stiffened. “I don’t think I like the tone of your voice.”

“And I don’t think I like being lied to, *Airok*.” Danny’s voice was clipped and dry.

“We did not lie to you.”

Danny snapped open her bag and pulled out a small makeup case and began to rummage through it. When she located the chalk she was looking for she blew on it to

dislodge unwanted pieces of whatever from it.

“Oh?” She dropped to her haunches and studied the crappy circle. “You told me that your girls knew what they were doing. You also told me that you were not going to pay me the extra grand for prep, because it wasn’t necessary. Now I arrive to find that there is all sorts of prep necessary ... very necessary. Your girls don’t know diddly squat. This is the crappiest circle I’ve ever seen. And where the hell is the salt?”

Airok Elsa straightened her shoulders. “They were uncomfortable using ... salt.”

Danny easily brushed the half-ass circle away. She began to walk the route, using her chalk to form a perfect uninterrupted circle. When she was finished she retrieved a jar of sea salt from her bag. “Oh, ‘cause it can call the unholy? I get it. I know. Delicate sensibilities and all,” she sneered, “but you have nothing against calling me in to do it.”

“It is your job.” *Airok* Elsa looked down her patrician nose at her.

Stupid coven. Danny smiled but it was a twisted smile. “Sure, it’s my job. And you’re going to pay for it. You’re going to pay big.”

“We’ve already finalized the terms of agreement.”

Waving her hand, a stiff piece of parchment materialized before Danny. She motioned toward it. “Doesn’t work that way. Nothing is final until our names appear on the contract.” Danny loved the look of fury that settled on *Airok* Elsa’s face. “So, now, we renegotiate. I’m prepping, and since I wasn’t expecting to prep, I want an extra grand. Not to mention the time it takes to renegotiate these terms. Five thousand seems reasonable.”

“It’s outrageous,” *Airok* Elsa snapped.

Danny grinned. Outrageous. Yep, that was her, all right. “It’s not like you can’t afford it. You may be youngsters, but you take in an unholy fee for participation and initiation.” A fee that Danny thought was laughable, considering just how young and inept this particular coven was. Well, no matter. And since they would probably end up burning themselves up with some botched spell, better to get her payment now. “Five thousand, right now. Or I walk away.” Danny eyed her. “Well, what’s it going to be?”

“Do it, then.” *Airok* Elsa gritted her teeth.

Danny smiled knowingly. The contract floated over to the *Airok*. “You first.”

Airok Elsa growled, but she removed a small sharp pick from her waist. “Finger? Wrist?” Her eyes glittered angrily. “Something more vulnerable?”

“Your blood, your decision,” Danny said with a shrug.

Airok Elsa stiffened but nodded. She used the pick and stabbed her finger. When the wound was deep enough, she ran the pick through her blood and used the blood to sign the floating contract.

The contract floated back to Danny. She mimicked the *Airok*’s action, signing the contract in blood. Satisfied that all preliminaries were finished, she vanished the contract. “Now.” Danny grinned. “Let the games begin.”

* * * *

The circle took up half the room. Danny made certain to double ward it. It was a big circle. She used her sea salt generously, spreading it around the circle. When she was satisfied that the salt was thick enough she went onto the next step.

The coven was staring at her. She hated the coven staring at her. But, whatever, they wanted to watch. They would watch.

She slipped her dagger out of its sheath and turned to stare at the group of women who were huddled together. "It's gonna get messy, girls. If you are at all queasy, I would suggest that you..."

"My girls do not get queasy," *Airok* Elsa interjected coldly.

Lord, she was really beginning to dislike the tight-assed *Airok*. "Fine, it's your funeral." Danny made the incision right below her elbow. There was a nice fat vein there. She watched as the blood began to flow steadily down her arm. After a moment she used her blood to create the inner circle.

She sat in the center of the blood circle and began the ceremonial words. They flowed easily from her. She had done this hundreds of times before.

Danny sniffed. The room was now filling with the acrid scent of sulfur. Oh, yeah, this was gonna be a big one.

She stepped out of the inner circle, made an opening in the outer circle and walked free of the now smoking demon nest.

It came quickly. And it was an ugly motherfucker.

Danny heard the gasps of horror from the members of the coven and she turned merry eyes onto the *Airok*.

"One low level demon, as promised." Danny smiled. "Now, you just call me if you have trouble putting him back."

Airok Elsa's lips curled. "Will you accept a check?"

"As long as it's not a personal one." Danny watched *Airok* Elsa write out the check and couldn't help the bubble of pleasure that was building up within her. She had better clear a little time in her schedule. She was definitely going to be getting a call from the *Airok* soon.

Okay. Her shitty day was shaping up. There was nothing like a windfall to perk up a girl's day.

* * * *

She smelled like sulfur. It was disgusting. Danny wrinkled her nose, dropped her keys on the table and began to strip.

Thad tossed a package at her. "This came for you while you were out."

Danny caught it without turning around. She frowned. "You still here?"

Thad smiled, letting his eyes rake over her half naked form. "Yeah, and I'm mighty glad, too."

Men, they were all alike. "God, get a life, Thaddie boy." She unbuttoned her jeans and shimmied out of them. She snorted when she heard Thad's intake of breath.

Danny peeled the tape from the package and pried the box open. She went completely still.

"Danny? Danny? You okay?" Thad came up to her. He peered over her shoulder and swallowed. "Holy God ... what is that?"

She couldn't move. She couldn't move a muscle. Maybe if she didn't move, didn't so much as blink an eye it would disappear. It would be a horrible figment of her imagination. "A finger, it's a finger."

Thad recoiled. "I can see that. Who the hell would send you a finger, and why?"

With a swallow, Danny placed the box on the side table and began to walk to her bathroom. "The finger ... it belongs to my brother. As to who sent it," she said as she

walked into her bathroom and closed the door, "I have a pretty good idea."

* * * *

Pulling her beat-up Chevy into the parking lot of the Stop-and-Save, Danny cut off the engine. She sat for a moment pondering how very stupid she was. How very, very, stupid she was. She could still turn her car right around and drive away, right? She could. She could do it.

"Dennison girl, just gonna sit there all night?"

"The thought *had* crossed my mind, Billy." She opened the door, stepped out of the car and smiled. "Hey."

"It's good to see you, Dennison." Billy opened his arms and Danny threw herself into them.

It had been a long time since she had felt Billy's arms holding her, comforting her. And it was just as nice as she remembered.

"You look great, Billy," Danny said, still snuggled tightly against him.

"Yeah, I know," Billy said with a smile.

She laughed. "Still so modest, I see." Danny pulled back, all business now, and cold, very cold. "They sent me his finger, Billy."

"It's not what you think."

"Oh, what am I thinking, Billy?"

Looking toward the Stop-and-Save, Billy sighed. "Come on, they're waiting."

"By, they're waiting, you mean, he's waiting, right?" Danny clenched her hands into tight fists. "Thought so." She frowned. "Lead the way into hell, Billy boy, lead the way."

* * * *

He was, simply, a beautiful male specimen. Well over six feet tall, with rippling muscles, cobalt blue eyes and a mass of sun kissed hair ... he looked like the Vikings of old—or a really hot California surfer.

Alexander Randolph Holt, Alpha of the Striker Clan, and king of all that he surveyed, wore frayed jeans, a black Stones shirt that had seen better days, and was barefoot.

Oh yeah, it was just like old times. Danny thought about slitting her wrists and getting it over with right now.

"Dennison." Alexander said her name, and her skin prickled a thousand times over.

Fuck him. He could still do it. He could still do it.

She had to keep strong. Danny fortified herself. She would not, now or ever, kowtow to this man. She didn't care that he was Alpha (part of the problem, of course) and she would never just be another bitch in the pack. "Hey, Alex." Danny watched his face take on that hard, cold look she knew so well.

"That is not the appropriate way to greet your Alpha."

"Since you're not my Alpha, there is no way that I need to greet you."

Alex was at her side in a moment. His hand grabbed her shoulder in an iron like grip and his breath was warm against her ear when he spoke to her.

"You are now living by my grace. The only reason you are allowed to breathe is by my leave. You had better remember that, Dennison."

"I petitioned for my freedom four years ago, Alex. You granted me that freedom. You can't take it back now."

"I granted you your 'lone wolf' status. I did not grant you your freedom." Alex sniffed her hair and sighed.

Now Danny began to struggle. No way was the Alpha of the local wolf pack going to get his jollies off by sniffing her hair.

"My 'lone wolf' status *is* my freedom. Now let me the fuck go." Danny waited. She was tense. Perhaps she had gone a little far. She was a dominant female, yes, but she was not nearly the equal of the Alpha male. She sighed when Alex let her go, stepping away instantly, needing to put distance between them.

"No, Dennison, your 'lone wolf' status is your status. It does not mean that you are not part of the pack." Alex's bright eyes speared hers. "You will always be pack."

Facing demons daily did not put the fear of the unholy in her heart like hearing Alexander tell her that she would never be free.

Damn him. She had done everything, everything that he asked of her. She had done everything the pack had asked of her. Her life was a misery, and she had accepted it, because she knew that at the end, she would have that single treasure worth it all ... her freedom.

Four years ago she walked away from Striker Clan, and away from Alexander. She had won that right. "You signed the contract," Danny whispered, hating how fragile her voice suddenly sounded.

"Yes, and so did you. But that contract did not say you were not of the pack."

"My loner status, Alex, it's mine, you cannot take it back." Danny knew she was repeating herself. But she was desperate. God. He couldn't do this to her. He just couldn't do this to her.

Alex shrugged. "It matters little whether or not you accept the words that I say now for the contract expires in less than a year, and you would have to reapply for your status..." his eyes glittered, "...with me."

He was right. Danny swallowed—hard. She had been trying to push that thought away. The contract was for five years, and at the end of that time, she had to reapply for a new contract. And by the look in Alexander's eyes, he would make her pay hell for that new contract.

"I didn't come here to talk shop with you, Alex."

Alex snorted. "Yes, you came because of Daniel."

"No, I came because of Daniel's finger." Danny tried to keep her eye from twitching. She felt her fury rising and she wanted to bite something, or someone—hard. "You sonofabitch, you sent me Daniel's finger." She felt her beast trying to break free. "How could you do that, Alex? I know that we parted on poor terms ... but how could you?"

Alex let out a deep breath. His nostrils flared. "I did not send you Daniel's finger, Dennison."

Finally she let the rage pour forth. "His finger arrived at my apartment with your seal and, more telling, your scent, Alex."

"Lord above, do you think so little of me? You think I would mutilate your brother to bring you back? The finger was delivered to *me*, Dennison. I thought you had the right to have it..." Alex ran a hand through his hair haphazardly.

"Who sent it?" Danny stormed at him. "Who sent you my brother's finger?"

Alex smiled a slow and knowing smile then. "We will renegotiate your contract, Dennison."

Danny's mouth dropped open. "You want to talk about my contract now? You cold, evil bastard."

"Careful, Danny, careful." Alex's words were cold and sharp. He was warning her.

She backed down. He could snap her neck if he so chose. He could. "I won't be talking contract."

Alex laughed coldly. "You will if you want my help, if you want the help of the pack."

"Who says I need the pack?" Danny said with more bravado than she felt.

He began to circle her. "You are a *magi*, Dennison, and a wolf. This in itself is extraordinary. The fact, too, that you are dominant makes you a formidable and desirable acquisition. But do not think you can put on airs just because you are a rare commodity. You live in *my* city. And you breathe by my law and mine alone." He leaned into her face and snarled. "And you will never find your brother without me."

Instinct took over. Danny lunged at him. He was ready for her, because he easily flipped her over. She landed with a horrible thud on the ground.

Straddling her body, Alex growled. One of his hands grabbed her throat, the other pressed down on her shoulder blade to keep her immobile.

She felt her oxygen supply being cut off and still she struggled. She flailed her legs and kicked her feet. All she managed to do was exhaust herself.

Alex sighed, applying more pressure to her windpipe. "It is one of the things that I find most desirable about you, Dennison, and one of the things I find to be the most tedious. You are a fighter, through and through. There is nothing passive about your nature."

Danny mouthed, "fuck you." The words were lost however, since she was finding it exceedingly difficult to breathe.

"Yes, yes, you would like to claw my face off, I know."

Actually, she was thinking more on the lines of castrating the domineering sonofabitch.

"Now, we will talk reasonably." Alex leaned in closer. His eyes were hot and hard as they took her in. "We are going to renegotiate your contract, dear one. It will include, of course, utilizing your abilities to the best advantage of the pack. There are one or two other matters that need to be addressed in this contract that were left out of the last one. In return, the pack will give you sanctuary and protection. And ... we will help you with Daniel." Alex's eyes glittered. "It is not an overly long contract ... I did meet you halfway."

She was trying to manage even breaths. Little dots were flashing before her eyes and she felt like she was going to be sick. Just when she thought she was going to hurl, she felt the pressure removed from her throat.

Alex was still sitting atop her, but at least now she could breathe.

"What say you, dear one?"

"I'm not your fucking dear one," Danny growled.

"Now is not the time to be difficult," Alex said, but there was a small smile on his handsome face.

"Don't you know," Danny said sarcastically, "difficult is my middle name."

Alex grinned. "I was always under the impression that Tamara was your middle name, dear one."

Fuck him. She didn't bother to answer.

"So, we see eye to eye now, Dennison? We will renegotiate the terms of your new contract." Alex waited.

Trying to keep her heart from screaming and her beast from leaping out and eating the Alpha whole, Danny took a couple of deep breaths. "It doesn't seem like I have much of a choice, do I?"

When Alex spoke his expression was somber and cool. "No, love, you don't."

* * * *

Danny scowled fiercely at the paper that lay in front of her. She had just signed the damned thing and she wanted to tear something or someone apart. She was raging. How had this happened? How had her precious freedom disappeared just like that?

Alex whipped the paper away and, unlocking his desk drawer, he placed it gently inside.

The drawer closed with a snap.

Turning to her with a predatory smile on his handsome face, Alex was almost glowing. "It is so good to have you back, Dennison, my love."

Straightening her shoulders she reined in her temper. "I signed your damn paper, Alex. You have my fighting arm, you have my *magi* abilities, but don't think you have *me*." She snorted. "You'll *never* have me."

He sighed deeply. He came around the desk and sat on it, facing Danny who sat in the overstuffed chair in front of him. "You won't give an inch, will you, darling?"

"No, and you'd better not forget it." Danny narrowed her eyes. "I'm going to make your life a fucking misery."

"I don't doubt it," Alex said with a hearty laugh.

She couldn't take it anymore. Danny leaned forward in the chair. "I want to know about Daniel."

"Yes, of course you do. The finger was delivered to me yesterday."

"Who sent it to you?"

"The package came from Draco's territory."

Danny couldn't help the small gasp that tore from her throat.

Alex nodded grimly.

Swallowing, Danny forced her beast to remain calm. "How could you allow Daniel to leave, Alex? How could you?"

"He's an adult. I could not force him to stay in my territory if he did not wish to. He has always been a wanderer, and you know that." Alex seemed almost noncommittal when he spoke.

"No, he's always been a foolish idiot." Danny swore. "God, Alex, he's not capable of dealing with pack politics, how could you allow..."

"His contract expired, Dennison. And I could not force him to remain with me if he did not wish to." Alex snorted. "He was never going to rise within the pack. He knew that. I knew that. He felt it was time to move on."

Danny rubbed her hand across her burning eyes. Damn Daniel. How could he do this? And damn Alex for letting him do it. It was true. Daniel would never have risen

within the pack. She knew that it bothered him. But she hadn't realized it would make him do something this foolish. She had never expected him to leave Alexander's territory. God. How stupid could one wolf be?

And she hurt. Lord knows that she had hardly been a sister to him these many years. Yes, the choice had been Daniel's. He had been hurt and angry with her when she had decided to cut ties with the Striker Clan. He had railed at her. She had always thought in some part of her that most of the anger came from jealousy.

Danny had the power. She was dominant. *And* she had inherited their mother's magical abilities. There had been little left over for Daniel. He had been left with the furry nature and little else.

When she had decided to leave the Striker Clan, Daniel had threatened her. He told her that he could not be associated with a wolf who thought so little of her nature that she would refuse the sanctuary, protection, and love of the pack. His words had torn through her like a knife.

Daniel had gone his way and hadn't looked back.

But no matter, he was still her blood. He was still her brother. And she loved him. And the pain that they had inflicted on him she would visit upon their heads threefold.

"How long has he been there?" she asked finally.

"My best estimation, less than three months."

"Why? And who did this?"

"Who knows, Dennison? As to who visited this pain upon your brother's head, I'm not certain. I know only that the package arrived from Draco's territory. And, as I'm certain you have already figured out, it reeks."

"Yes, it does. But I haven't been able to place it. And that is strange. I can place anything," Danny said.

"Yes, you can. The scent's not dead, neither is it alive."

She took a deep breath. "I'll need to venture into Draco's territory as soon as possible."

"I don't think so."

She shot out of her seat. "I'm not asking, Alex."

He narrowed his eyes. "You are mine. I have just had you returned, I'm not about to lose you now."

"You told me about Daniel, you told me about Draco. What did you expect me to do? You knew that I would take action. I'm not about to abandon my brother."

He reached out to caress her cheek. "You had to know. You deserved to know, he's your brother. But you cannot go to Draco's territory, just like that. And you know that."

"So tell me, how is it going to be? Because I know you have put something together."

Alex inclined his head. "Indeed. I will negotiate with Draco. And then, and only then will you be able to enter his territory. You will also take my delegates."

"Who?" Danny asked coldly.

"I've spoken to Gregor and Victor. They have both agreed to accompany you, if I can negotiate your entrance."

"Billy?"

"Billy will stay here," Alex said coolly.

"Why?"

“Because it is my wish.” His voice brooked no argument.

Clenching her hands into fists, Danny took a deep breath. “Billy and I get along, Alex. We have worked well together in the past, if I must have someone at my back, I would like it to be Billy.”

“Gregor and Victor will accompany you.” Alex repeated.

Danny growled. But it was obvious that Alex was not going to change his mind. “Fine, Victor and Gregor. But I barely know them and you know I don’t work well with others.”

Alex laughed. “Yes, I’m aware of that. They are good wolves, and…” Alex sighed, “...they will be accepted by Draco.”

Now she understood, but it didn’t make her any happier knowing. Danny clenched her jaw. That was what it was about—whether or not Draco would accept them. Draco was Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan. He had a reputation of being brutal—fair, but brutal. No one would dare go against Draco, not in his territory. It was the predominant reason that Alex would never be allowed to accompany Danny into Draco’s territory. Two Alphas meant bloodshed—or worse.

“You’ll speak to him tonight?” Danny asked.

“I’ll speak with him tomorrow.”

“Tonight,” Danny insisted.

Alex came to stand in front of her. When he was nearly touching her stiff body he asked, “And what do I get if I do this for you?”

Danny snarled.

Alex laughed. “If I call Draco, what do I get for my troubles?”

“Don’t push me, Alex.”

“No, Dennison, don’t *you* push me. I want a kiss.”

“What?” Danny gave him a disgusted look.

“That is the price for my phoning Draco and negotiating with him tonight, Dennison. I want a kiss.”

“You’re being ridiculous.”

“That may be, but that is the price.” Alex smiled. “What will it be?”

Danny leaned forward and placed a chaste kiss on his lips.

Alex threw back his head and laughed. “You must be joking.” He grabbed the back of Danny’s head and pulled her forward, crushing her lips with his own. His tongue caressed her silken lips, and when he had tasted his fill, he began to suckle the plump flesh. His teeth nipped and then his tongue soothed.

He demanded entrance, his tongue seeking hers. He growled low in his throat when she began to duel with him. Her hands dug into his back and she met him stroke for stroke, voraciously devouring all that he gave.

Alex’s hands cupped her ass and he yanked her against his straining erection. The evidence of his desire helped to snap Danny out of her stupor. She began to struggle in earnest. When his mouth continued to savage hers, and his hands only dug in further, she had no choice. She extended her claws and raked them cruelly down his back.

Alex snarled and released her so quickly that she stumbled.

“Bitch.”

Danny sighed. She had been getting that a lot lately. Well, hey, it could be worse.

“You were taking advantage of the situation, Alex.”

“You were kissing back, Dennison.”

“Yeah, I was. But enough is enough. And you have never taken no well.”

Alex’s look said it all. He didn’t have to. He didn’t have to take no, so why should he?

“Oh yes, Dennison. It is so very good to have you back.”

Counting, she had to count. Danny took a deep breath. God. This was what hell had to feel like.

* * * *

Home sweet home. Danny felt like shit on a stick when she walked through the door to her apartment. Her life was going down the drain—fast. She saw the check from the *Airok* on her hallway table and scowled. What the hell good was money if you were dead and couldn’t spend it?

“Thad, get your head out of my fridge,” she called out.

Thad rushed around the corner. In one hand he was holding a drumstick. “Hey, you’re back. Was getting a little worried. You were gone a long time.”

“God, don’t you ever go home?” Danny said, scowling.

“Not if I don’t have to.” Thad shrugged. “And, why would I want to when there is food at your place.” He bit into the drumstick. “Good food.”

Danny’s scowl deepened. “Yeah, *my* food, you leech.”

“Now that hurts, Danny.”

“I doubt it.” Danny walked over to her couch and then flopped down. She was exhausted. Her body was screaming at her. And she was quite afraid that she had just signed her death warrant.

Thad came to sit down next to her. “Hey, what’s wrong? You have that, ‘my life is going to end’ look on your face.”

“Yeah, ‘cause my life *is* probably going to end real soon.”

“What the heck are you talking about?”

Danny swallowed. “I had to sign a new contract with the Alpha of the Striker Clan.”

“Holy shit!” Thad dropped the drumstick. “Why the hell did you go and do something stupid like that for?”

“Oh, let’s see, maybe to keep some psycho from cutting off any more parts of my brother’s body.”

“So, it was your brother.”

Danny nodded. “Even if they hadn’t sent me the finger with my brother’s ring on it, I still would have recognized his scent.”

“Why are they doing this?”

“I don’t know. But I’m not about to let them do anything more. I’ve got to go and get him.”

“Of course you do. So, when do we go in?” Thad asked, looking positively gleeful.

“I’m probably heading out tomorrow or the day after. You’re not going anywhere.”

“No, no way. You are not about to leave me behind. You keep fucking doing this. Why the hell did you take me on as an apprentice if you just plan on chucking me at every turn?” Thad continued to swear and growl.

“Hmm, could it be because you just wouldn’t leave me alone?” Danny said sarcastically.

“Not nice, Danny,” Thad said, giving her the puppy dog eyes.

“Those stupid eyes don’t work on me anymore, Thad. Listen you’re not ready for this. Not to mention that the Alpha won’t allow you to come. The negotiations are fierce, and there is no way they are going to negotiate for your passage.”

“Oh, come on,” Thad whined plaintively.

“No.”

“But...”

“No.” Danny smiled slightly. “You’ll hold down the fort here, okay? I need someone to take messages and water my plants.”

“I’m not a fucking personal assistant.”

“You’re my apprentice, so, yeah, you’re my assistant.” She stood up and started toward her bathroom. “All right, I’m going to shower.” She glared at him over her shoulder saying, “Stop eating my chicken.”

Thad picked the chicken off the floor and took a huge bite. “If you’re not taking me along, I sure as hell deserve the stupid fried chicken,” he called after her.

* * * *

She packed light. Danny surveyed her luggage, aware that she was probably scowling fiercely. She never really needed anything save her supply bag but she recognized that even with that fact firmly entrenched, she still packed light.

It was ten a.m. the following morning when she received Alex’s call. She’d been anticipating it and answered with the cursory, “Speak.”

“Again, a disrespectful way of answering to your Alpha.” Alex’s voice was smooth as cream, and more sinful than whipped chocolate.

Danny declined to answer.

“I’ve set terms, Dennison, love. Draco will allow you entrance. However, you will meet with him when you arrive to pay proper homage.”

That sounded about right. Danny had never met the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan. But it was proper and respectful to pay homage when you were entering a foreign clan’s territory. After all that she had heard about Draco Montifore, she was not looking forward to meeting him.

“All right.”

“You will take Gregor and Victor.”

She was a little surprised that the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan had allowed both of Alex’s wolves to accompany Danny.

As if reading her mind, Alex said, “It only cost us a small job.”

She was instantly on the alert. “What job?”

“It seems that Draco has a small matter that he wishes you to resolve for him. I gave him the use of your talents for said job, and he gave me Gregor and Victor.”

“So kind of you to hand out my services,” Danny said, sarcasm dripping from her voice.

Alex laughed. “I thought so. They are, of course, mine to give.”

One day ... one ... day ... he was going to get what was coming to him. And God wouldn’t she love to be the one to give it to him.

“So, when do I leave?” Her voice was clipped.

“Today, if you’d like.” Alex’s voice turned seductive. “Of course, you could always

spend the night over here, with me, and leave tomorrow morning.”

“Tell Gregor and Victor to meet me at my place in an hour.” Danny hung up the phone.

God her life totally sucked.

* * * *

Gregor Beck was a handsome wolf. His mahogany-colored hair was cut short, military style and his body was short and stocky. He had amber-colored eyes and a mouth that would give Angelina Jolie a run for her money. Victor Patron was Gregor’s opposite in every way. He was tall, well over six feet, and lanky and sinewy. His hair was a streaked, sandy blond and his eyes a piercing green. His features were harsh and angular. There was nothing soft about Victor, but his beauty was singular in its fierceness.

One hour from the time Danny had received Alex’s call; the two wolves came knocking on her door.

Danny sighed when she saw their expressions. She was used to this reaction to her appearance. But that didn’t mean she liked it.

“I saw you once, briefly, before you left.” It was Victor who spoke. His voice was gruff, as if he did not have the chance to use it often.

Okay, weird awkward moment. “Oh, that’s nice.” Danny picked up her bag, closed the door to her apartment and locked it. “Are we ready to roll?”

Both men seemed surprised. “You are ready?” Gregor asked.

“Uh, yeah, the bag in my hand would sort of indicate that.”

Gregor nodded. “Then yes, we are ready to go.”

Danny stepped into her elevator, the two men crowded in after her. It was a small elevator and their presence was very nearly overwhelming.

She could scent them. Just as she knew that they could scent her. The beast was rising again. It wanted ... well ... it wanted something that had not been fed in a long while. A need that she had long denied it.

Danny’s jaw clenched. She was more than her animal. She was not some bitch in heat and she refused to jump some guy’s bones just because she needed to sate the appetite of her wolf.

Oh, but her wolf was angry. It roared at her. It railed. And when that produced no action, it whispered and caressed. It spoke to her, told her how good it would be. And how desperate her body was for the touch, the taste of her kind. It wanted to be fed.

She pulled herself together. She hugged her bag to her chest and tried to block out the delicious aroma of wolf ... male wolf.

It was oh-so-difficult, though. She could feel their eyes on her, boring a hole through the side of her head. For if she could scent them, they could certainly scent her. And they knew. They knew that she was in need. And her need drove their own. She would have to count on their loyalty to Alexander, and the pack. They would never take advantage of the situation. Not when she was certain that Alex had put a harsh penalty on such action.

They would keep their hands, their mouths ... and all their other parts, away from her.

She stopped in front of the large SUV, and whistled. “Nice car,” she said, eyeing the black hulking contraption that thought it could pass for a motor vehicle.

Gregor grinned. It made him appear years younger. “Thanks.”

Danny slid into the backseat of the car and sank into the soft interior. It was heavenly. Now she wondered if it could sing and dance, too.

"You were kicking Vivica's ass," this came from Victor.

"Excuse me?" Danny frowned.

Victor didn't turn around, kept his eyes staring straight ahead, but continued to speak. "The last time I saw you, the only time I saw you, you were kicking Vivica's ass."

Danny blinked. Oh yeah, that was right. The tight-ass she-bitch had tried to kill her. She had been going on and on about how Alexander was hers, and that no demonic *magi* wolf was going to steal him from her. Danny hadn't wanted to trounce her, but it seemed the only way to get it through Vivica's hard head.

"She still pissed?" Danny asked.

"If by pissed, you mean, would she still like to kill you, the answer would be yes."

"Thought as much." Danny spoke without inflection.

"You're skinnier than you were before," Victor said.

What sort of shitty compliment was that? Was it even a compliment? Danny scowled fiercely.

"Have you been sick?"

"This isn't twenty fucking questions," Danny snapped.

"You are right. I am sorry. It is just that you were..." Victor stopped.

Her heart was beating fiercely. Danny swallowed. It was better not to know what he was going to say.

"Whoa, it's getting tense in here." Gregor spoke up from the driver's seat. "So, I'm starving, how does Arby's sound to everyone?"

"Arby's sounds great," Danny said with a smile.

* * * *

Danny sat across from Gregor and Victor and couldn't stop grinning.

"What, what's so funny?" Victor asked, taking another huge bite of his roast beef sandwich.

She pointed to the mountain of food on their table. "This, this is what's funny. Do you realize we're like the start of a joke?"

"Huh?" Gregor stuffed a handful of fries into his mouth.

"Three wolves pull up to fast food restaurant..." Danny's voice trailed off. She wiggled her eyebrows. "I mean, look at this." She laughed. "People are staring."

Victor finished his sandwich and started to unwrap his second foiled delicacy. "They are staring at you."

"Excuse me?" Danny stopped eating to toss him an annoyed look.

"You are thin as a reed, and yet you are eating enough food to feed three people..." Victor shrugged, "...so, they are staring at you."

"Thanks a lot," Danny grumbled. "You sure have a way with words."

"I believe you took my words the wrong way," Victor said, frowning.

"Don't think so," Danny said through gritted teeth.

"You are uncommonly lovely. Too thin, yes, but uncommonly lovely all the same."

"I don't think this is getting much better. Perhaps now would be a good time to let it go."

Victor opened his mouth to speak but Gregor beat him to the punch. "I think she's

right. Let's finish eating, shall we? We still have a long way to go."

Victor continued to frown. But Danny and Gregor ignored him, choosing instead to finish eating their mountain of food.

Unease crawled through her, and Danny was having a hard time biting it back. She could feel Victor's eyes on her. And it was not a comforting feeling. She had the distinct feeling that he was trying to see through her.

And there was nothing, nothing that she wanted this strange wolf to see.

* * * *

It was fast approaching four in the morning when Danny, Victor and Gregor found the K-mart parking lot in which they were to meet Draco's representatives.

Danny scented the wolves immediately. Her nostrils flared and she could feel her toffee-colored eyes burning, she knew they would be a deep yellow by now.

"I smell them too," Victor said quietly.

She went for the car handle, but Gregor quickly reached back and placed his hand on her arm.

"Don't. Let them come for us."

Of course. That had been stupid of her. They were in foreign territory. And she had almost opened the damn car door. Way too presumptuous of her.

"Out." The word was growled, followed by a slam to the window.

They had come. Danny stiffened.

Gregor unlocked the door. Danny didn't wait any longer. They had been issued an order. She got out of the car, and came face-to-face with a very imposing wolf. He was well over six-foot-four, with black hair and equally dark eyes. There was a jagged scar on his right side, running from eyebrow to chin and his mouth was set in a firm and unyielding line. Standing to his left was a smaller wolf, with an equally grim expression on his face.

"You were expected earlier," the wolf with the scar said.

"Yeah, well, do you know how long it takes to drive up here to the boondocks?"

Danny said before she could stop herself.

The scarred wolf's head snapped toward her. "So you're the *magi* wolf."

"And you are?" Danny said. Her eyes had narrowed considerably. The wolf was staring at her as if she was dinner.

"Sampson." The scarred wolf smiled widely. "You may call me Sampson. And now, I believe we should be going. Draco is waiting."

Frowning, Danny settled herself. She knew that she had to meet with the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan first thing. But it was four in morning, and somehow she had sort of thought that they would let them pass until later.

"You are not reneging, are you?" Sampson asked quietly.

"No, not reneging. It's just damn early."

"Indeed, which is why we had better be going." Sampson motioned for Danny and her companions to follow him.

They did, it wasn't as if they had much choice.

* * * *

Danny had refused to take wolf form. Sampson growled at her. It didn't make a difference. She reminded the big bad wolf that his Alpha wanted her to use her abilities. And for her to do so would require her bag. She wasn't about to strip nude, leave her supplies in the SUV and go off on a trot.

It pissed off Sampson and his companion. But she won. She got to keep her human form, her bag, and her clothes.

Sampson stopped. "We're here."

Danny looked around. They had been tramping through the forest for quite a bit now. She knew that Victor and Gregor were annoyed with her decision to remain in human form as well. It would be much easier to run through the forest as a wolf than to walk through it as a human.

They had stopped in a surprising clearing, surprising because it seemed to come out of nowhere. In the center of the clearing was a log cabin, but no ordinary log cabin was this. At least four stories, it was massive, with a huge wraparound porch that encompassed the entire front part of the cabin.

Nice digs, Danny thought. She stiffened when she felt pack all around her. They were everywhere. She felt them in the woods, she felt them in the trees, she felt them staring out from inside of the house. And at the center of the storm, there was the Alpha.

Oh yes, the Alpha was here. Danny felt the Alpha like a million shards of blunt glass. It was a pleasurable pain. His power radiated strongly, unmistakably, and she swallowed down her fear. He was strong, very strong. Oh, Danny could always feel Alex. But the power that Alex radiated was very different from this foreign Alpha. Alex was known, he was almost a comfortable weight—sometimes—and she often disregarded the power that he wielded. But there was no disregarding *this* power. It shook her to the bone and she had to fight the urge to drop to her knees and shift, shift now, in spite of herself.

"Come on." Sampson led them up to the house and the door opened to them. "You will go in now," he said to Danny. He turned to Victor and Gregor, "You two will remain out here for the time being."

Straightening her shoulders, Danny walked into the house. She could not show fear. If she showed fear now, she would always be showing fear. And that was unacceptable.

Danny gritted her teeth. There was a wolf standing in the center of the large room. His back was to her. He had long black hair, midnight black. And his body was lean, save for his shoulders, which were impressively broad. When he turned, his equally impressive face was revealed. Chiseled cheekbones, full lips, and arresting silver eyes dominated a strong and shockingly handsome face.

"We have waited a long time to meet you, Dennison Lee, *magi* wolf." The voice was deep, gruff and grating, and Alpha, very Alpha.

She bowed her head respectfully. It irked her. She was no one's submissive. But she didn't feel like having to defend herself from a pissed off Alpha two minutes through the door. "Greetings, Draco, Alpha to the Stone Claw Clan. The Alpha of the Striker Clan sends his solicitations."

Draco smiled a cool smile. "I'm sure he does." He took several steps toward her. "Dennison Lee..."

She felt her eyes widen. The way he said her name was ... frightening. She could feel the weight of her name tangibly. As if it were a living thing upon her body.

Lord, this was a powerful wolf.

Draco took another two steps toward Dennison. He was now but a foot away from her stiff form.

"You are a surprising thing, Dennison Lee."

"Oh." Danny tried not to swallow her tongue.

"You've been ill, very ill," Draco said. His eyes had narrowed into small slits.

"What?" Oh, God. How had he known that? Yes, Victor had made comments about her weight. But not even Alex, Alex who had sniffed her, knew about her illness. "I don't know what you are..."

"You cannot lie to me," Draco said, quietly. "Do not even try. You've been very ill, Dennison Lee. But you've survived ... and your body is healing."

She felt a shake rock her body. Oh God. Oh God. She couldn't do this right now.

"Not a simple illness, your wolf form would have healed such a thing. Something deeper ... something harder and more frightening," Draco continued, his eyes glued to her.

"Please..." Danny couldn't believe the small voice was hers.

A touch of something—kindness, understanding perhaps—flashed through Draco's eyes, and he nodded.

"Indeed, now is not the time, Dennison Lee. But later ... later we will need to speak on this."

Danny closed her eyes. She jumped when she felt a large hand touch her cheek. Her eyes snapped open. Draco was a mere inch away from her face. His silver eyes were probing her whiskey-shot ones, and his breath was caressing her skin.

"Now, there is a matter of payment ... payment for my help, payment for your entrance into my holdings."

Oh, no way! Danny let her feelings tear through her. There was no way that she was going to—

"What did you expect me to say, Dennison Lee? My, my, what a filthy mind you have." Draco chuckled.

Danny's eyes widened, and her mouth dropped open.

Draco's chuckles deepened into full-blown laughter. "But, we will not rule it out for the future, of course." Draco's laughter stopped quite suddenly. And just like that, his eyes went flat and cold.

It was unnerving. It was unnerving to see someone change so quickly. "No, there is a little matter I need you to look into for me."

This was not like her. Danny struggled to find her tongue. Why the hell was she behaving like a simple-minded fool?

"And deal with. Once you have completed the task I ask of you ... we will speak of your brother."

"I want to know of my brother, now."

"Ah, but that is not how it works. You came to me, Dennison Lee. And you owe me. Nothing will be given unless you give to me, first."

Fucking pack politics. "How do I know you didn't have something to do with Daniel's disappearance?"

Draco's face was unreadable. "You don't. But, the contract has already been signed and the pieces are already moved into place. You cannot change the game now, Dennison Lee. You are in my territory, and I have the right to ask for homage. I also have the right

to take my payment for the entry of Holt's wolves, in full."

He was right. Danny knew that Draco was right. If she disobeyed, or reneged, she forfeited her life. And she forfeited Victor and Gregor's lives as well. Danny had no problem playing with her life. She did it all the time. But she would not play with Victor and Gregor's lives.

"Fine. What is the homage? And what is this job you have for me?"

Draco was at her back instantly, having moved so fast that Danny hadn't seen him. Draco toyed with the ends of Danny's long hair, and moving the lush locks away from her neck, he sniffed her.

Danny remained absolutely still. He had her at a vulnerable point, having begun to lick the pulse point at her neck.

"That is better, Dennison Lee. I like when you cooperate."

Yeah, and she would like it if he'd drop dead.

"You will come hunting with my pack. And your required kill will be forfeited to me, that is the homage."

It was a reasonable entry gift. Danny could live with it.

"As to the other matter ... we will talk further on it when we return from the hunt." Draco nipped the soft skin of her neck. "You smell delicious, Dennison Lee, unlike any other wolf ... unlike anything else. You smell incredible..."

"Draco?" Danny swallowed.

"Yes?"

She couldn't stand it anymore. Danny threw her elbow back, catching him squarely in his gut. He grunted, surprised by the attack and Danny took that moment to jump free of his embrace.

"Stay the fuck away from me." Danny was across the room in a flash.

Draco growled a low and deadly growl. "That ... was very stupid of you."

"Yeah, well, I've done stupid before." Danny kept her eyes trained on his face. She wasn't comforted by what she saw. His silver eyes had gone sharp and had begun to lighten even further. They were now almost opaque. His growl deepened and she knew that his beast had been enraged.

Yeah, stupid, she had gone and enraged an Alpha's beast.

"I could eat you alive, little girl." Any trace of humanity was stripped from Draco's voice. He walked toward her, his steps measured and predatory. He was now more animal than anything else.

"You could try." Think, Danny, think. She was desperately thinking of ways to keep herself from getting ripped apart. The Alpha was pissed, and he was out for blood—her blood.

And still ... she didn't feel at all sorry for what she had said, or done. He had no right to maul her, no right at all.

Draco lunged so suddenly, and was upon her so quickly, she didn't have the chance to defend herself.

She felt the floor, hard and solid beneath her back, and grunted when the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan dug his claws into her shoulder. He had her pinned. And he was already shifting. His face had elongated along with his teeth, and they gleamed under the dim lamplight. His body was still human. And it was strange to see the wolf head on the human body.

Danny knew that the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan didn't want to kill her. But she also knew that as he was now, he might not have a choice. For it was obvious that his beast was trying to take over. She had goaded him and driven him beyond that edge. She had tossed him into the abyss and now ... now she was feeling her punishment. Yep, her sharp tongue might have just earned her a ticket to the beyond.

Well, she didn't plan on going anywhere just yet. Danny brought up her forearm just in time to stop Draco's teeth. Instead of hitting anything vulnerable, he caught the flesh of her arm instead. She smelled her blood, metallic, fill the air, and she knew she could use this.

Wriggling to try to get a little freedom from Draco's hulking, very heavy body, Danny groaned. She hissed in pain when his claws dug into her skin deeper. But it was worth it. She managed to get enough freedom to shift her own hand, using her claw to swipe at him. She caught him high and wide, and when she felt his blood coating her claws, she didn't hesitate.

She had his blood. She could do this.

Danny began to chant the spell. A thick fog engulfed the two of them. Danny felt Draco's weight being lifted off her, and when the fog cleared, his body was contained within a field. It wasn't the best field she had ever constructed. And it certainly wasn't the prettiest. But it would do. Yes, in a pinch it would do.

Once contained in the field, Draco's beast began to subside. The field seemed to be drawing some of his power off him. Danny saw his eyes begin to clear, and his face morph back into its human handsomeness.

"Impressive," Draco said. His voice was back to being low and sensual. "Now, you will let me go."

Danny picked herself up off the floor. She looked at her shoulder and her arm. The wounds were already beginning to heal. However, her arm was itching. He had sunk into her good and deep. The flesh on her forearm was shredded.

"Nah, I think I'll keep you in there for a little longer..." She frowned at her wounds. "Just a little longer."

Draco snarled and it was ominous. "I would not suggest that, Dennison Lee. I will let this transgression slide ... for some of it was my fault. I should have reined in the beast." His face turned thoughtful. "For some reason you make it difficult to control ... there is something about you." He sighed. "Yes, I will let the fact that you fielded me slide. But I will not allow you to keep me in this thing. If you do ... the punishment will be great."

Danny didn't want to let the field go. But the look in the Alpha's eyes was not promising.

She dropped the field.

Draco remained where he was, making no move toward her. Although Danny was certain he was dying to rip some skin off her hide for her audacity.

"You are a strong little thing, aren't you, Dennison Lee?"

Did he expect her to answer? When she saw the look on his face, she guessed that he did.

"I'm hardly little," Danny bit out. It was true. She was five-foot-nine, hardly little by any means.

"Still little," Draco said with a small smile.

Well, Danny thought, next to these giants, I probably am.

“Why haven’t we had the pleasure of your company before now?” Draco murmured. Danny thought it seemed like he was talking more to himself than anything else.

“Why is that, Dennison Lee?”

Oh, he *had* been asking her a question. “Uh, you never asked me before.”

His smile widened. “Yes, that would be true. We never did bid for your company before this.” Draco cocked his head to one side. “However, I would have thought you would have ventured out of Holt’s territory long before this. He never did properly make use of you.”

“Properly make use of me? Do I look like an appliance to you, Draco Montifore?”

“You have a sharp and unheeding tongue, Dennison Lee. You had better mind it.”

The expression on Draco’s face was now pinched.

Danny felt like shouting out, “Or what?” but she had a feeling that the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan wouldn’t stand for a challenge like that. And she sort of liked her limbs where they lay. Of course, you wouldn’t know that by the way she mouthed off. She just couldn’t seem to help herself. She had always been precocious and rather unruly. Her mother, Celia, had been preoccupied with her spells and her ambitions and never had much time for her two children. She had chosen instead to turn the care of her kids over to someone else. Daniel had been more or less raised by an influential member of the Tan Clan in Rhode Island. And Danny, because of the peculiar talents inherited through her mother, had been given over to the Grand Dame Roberta Wick. Roberta Wick was a strange woman. She was the *magi* inherent for the Sapriens, the noble family that ruled the Belle Ville Clan. She had been a demanding woman, a woman who had punished infractions unmercifully. But she had also honed Danny’s talents and lavished praise. And in the end, she had no use nor will to break Danny’s spirit. Danny learned how to balance the demands of being both *magi* and wolf. It was a hard and perilous road. For both sides of her nature were dominant and required energy and power. She was constantly battling herself ... and sometimes she lost. Sometimes one side overruled the other ... and caused pain ... and sickness.

“You think very hard, Dennison Lee.”

Danny blinked. She had almost forgotten that the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan was standing in front of her—almost.

“There are hard thoughts ahead, Draco Montifore, of the Stone Claw Clan.”

“Indeed.” Draco took a step toward her. “Please, call me Draco, the formality makes me uncomfortable.”

Somehow she didn’t believe that, but whatever. “Draco,” she said simply.

“Now, it is late.” Draco smiled. “Early... I am certain you would like to take some rest?”

Yes, lord knows she could use some rest. Danny nodded curtly. She was tired ... very tired.

The front door opened and suddenly the room was full of wolves. Victor, Gregor, Sampson and his companion and several other unfamiliar faces and scents flooded over her.

“Sampson will show you to your rooms.” Draco sniffed, a hard glint entered his eyes and his mouth curved in a tight smile. “And tomorrow ... we hunt.”

Chapter Two

What was it that woke her? Danny wasn't exactly sure. It could have been the delicious aroma of coffee and frying bacon, or the strands of greasy hair that were rubbing her face and making her fully aware that she desperately needed a shower.

Danny got out of bed and trekked to the bathroom. She stared at her reflection in the mirror.

Wow, saying that she looked like a dog would be a compliment.

She peered closely. She knew that she had lost weight, but she hadn't quite been aware of just how much until now. Her cheeks appeared rather hollow, and there were faint blue sleep deprivation bruises under her eyes. Her collarbone was prominent and her shoulders could certainly use a little bit more mass. On the upside, her breasts appeared huge. They had always been weighty. But the weight loss magnified their presence considerably.

She grinned. Not bad, and they didn't sag, either.

Danny turned on the shower and stepped in. Her stomach gave a very unladylike growl reminded her just how starving she was. She hadn't eaten in over eight hours. The body of a wolf demanded food on a continual basis, and her body was screaming at her that she was starving it.

But it was difficult. She was just beginning to get her appetite back. And between the hectic hours and craziness of her job she just fell back into old habits such as forgetting to eat regularly. She knew it had to change, though, especially if she wanted to get healthy again. And she needed the energy and strength to track her brother down.

Finishing her shower, she patted herself dry and smiled slightly. That had helped a little. She felt a bit more refreshed now. She opened her travel bag and hurriedly dressed in a pair of black jeans, and a white wife-beater. She slid into her favorite pair of sneakers and trotted downstairs.

* * * *

The kitchen had been easy to locate. She had just followed her nose. Gregor, Victor, and several unfamiliar wolves, were seated at a large scarred wooden table devouring mounds of bacon, eggs, and pancakes.

They turned to her when she entered the room.

"Hey," Gregor called out. "Grab a plate."

Danny picked up a plate and eyed the buffet-style setting. She took some eggs, several strips of bacon and sausage, and added a pancake, and made her way over to the table.

Gregor slid over and made room for her. He scowled when he saw her plate. "You don't have enough food there to feed a bird." He began to shovel food off his plate onto hers.

"Do you mind?" Danny snapped.

"Nope," Gregor said with a smile.

It was no use, Danny thought, sighing. He was just too cheerful and easy going. She

wasn't going to be able to get to him.

She frowned at her plate. How in the world was she going to eat all of this? She began with the eggs, and within moments had polished off the eggs, bacon and sausage.

Looking up, she found Gregor and Victor were staring at her with knowing eyes.

"All right, so perhaps I was hungrier than I thought."

"You're too skinny," Victor muttered under his breath.

Danny glared at him. "Mind your own business."

Victor said nothing more, but his eyes were flinty.

Danny finished her breakfast and chased it all down with two large glasses of orange juice.

"She doesn't look like much." This came from a petite wolf at the end of the table.

Swinging her eyes in the direction of the voice, Danny dismissed the wolf with one glance. The she-wolf that had spoken was indeed petite, but built. She was several inches shorter than Danny, but her muscles bulged impressively. She had shoulder length auburn hair and bright green eyes—eyes that were glaring at Danny. Yes. She wasn't impressed.

"Too scrawny..." the girl continued, "hardly an impressive acquisition for our Alpha."

Okay, now she really felt like kicking this girl's ass. And was surprised by her self-control, she didn't lunge at the she-bitch across the table.

She continued to ignore her.

The girl obviously didn't want to be ignored. She stood from her seat and made her way over to Danny. She looked at her disdainfully, raking her eyes over Danny's still damp hair and reed-like body.

It was enough of an insult. And Danny's wolf would not tolerate such insolence from a lesser. In one fluid, too fast for the eye to see, motion, Danny had her hand wrapped around the other wolf's neck.

"Show some respect for your elders," Danny hissed, applying a little bit more pressure. The girl couldn't be much younger than Danny, but her behavior was appalling and made Danny think of a six-year-old.

"You ... you can't do this," the girl choked out. "You're a guest in ... in ... our Alpha's territory."

"A guest I may be, but no wolf need calmly accept such rude or insolent behavior ... no *dominant* wolf." Danny snorted. "You are nothing, girl." She released her hold and the girl jumped back.

"Tara!" Sampson strode into the kitchen. "Heel."

Danny grinned.

The girl named Tara began to growl.

"Have you been upsetting our guests?" Sampson glared down at Tara. He towered over her petite frame.

Tara held her ground. She pointed a finger at Danny. "*She* doesn't need to be here."

"I don't think that is for you to decide. I won't have you stirring up trouble."

Tara narrowed her eyes and her hands clenched into tight fists. "She's puny, Sampson, and ... and ... we don't need her."

"Get out, Tara." Sampson narrowed his eyes.

"No, I won't be..."

"Get ... out!" Sampson's face was feral.

Tara stiffened, but obeyed. But not before she tossed Danny another murderous look.

"I apologize for Tara. She can be ... difficult," Sampson said.

"Whatever..." Danny shrugged.

Sampson walked over to the kitchen island and popped two sausage links into his mouth.

"She believes she has prior claim to our Alpha," Sampson continued, snagging a couple of pieces of bacon.

Danny chortled.

"What is so amusing?" Sampson asked.

"She's not nearly powerful enough for your Alpha. And ... I think he'd probably eat her alive." Danny grinned a little at that thought.

"Probably, but she doesn't see it that way. She's pretty, she's able, and our Alpha has yet to choose a mate. She believes that is all that counts."

Danny didn't feel like talking about the twisted love connection in the Stone Claw Clan. Sampson must have seen the annoyance on her face, because he smiled and changed the subject.

"Would you like to see a little of the town, today?"

"I'd like to learn more about my brother Daniel," she snarled.

Sampson's smile didn't shift. "Would you like to see a little of the town?" he repeated.

"Fine, fine, let's check out this town of yours." She wasn't about to get more out of him.

"There is a nice new age shop in Center Square, you may like it." Sampson popped another two pieces of sausage into his mouth and reached for some pancakes.

Suddenly Danny felt a twinge of interest. Most new age stores were crap, selling nothing of particular value or usefulness. However, every once in a while she found one that had an interesting item or two. She always liked to take a look.

"Yeah, okay. What time is the hunt?"

At the mention of the hunt, all the wolves in the room ears perked up.

Sampson's eyes seemed to glow. "Ten. Our Alpha has some business to finish before we can proceed."

Danny nodded. It had been a long while since she had hunted. And the sparkle of excitement and anticipation moved steadily throughout her body. She had put off any hunts, for to do so would be infringing on Alex's rights and the rights of the pack. If she wanted to hunt, she would have had to do so with Alex, and with his blessing, which she knew he never would have given her unless she came back to the pack, and to him. Every day she denied the needs of her wolf, she died a little. But Danny always maintained that she was more than her beast. She firmly believed that all wolves had to rise above their animal nature. Human, and beast, the two could not be separated. They had to live together. Of course, she had perhaps not been maintaining the best harmony between her two natures of late. It had been difficult for her, especially difficult having Alex so close by. For Alex had always made it known that he was merely biding his time. He fully intended to have Danny.

And Danny, being as she was, fully intended to resist. She was no one's bitch. And it didn't matter how tempting Alex was. That was all she would ever be to him, his bitch. For in the end, he was Alpha. And his nature would demand nothing less than her

compliance, her obedience. The only way to free herself was to keep herself away from him ... far away.

Her beast raged. Every moment away from a dominant male, every moment that she did not sate her lust and her need for blood, was a moment that she felt ripping through her soul.

But tonight ... tonight she would hunt. And her beast would be satisfied—if only for a moment.

* * * *

It was obvious from the moment she entered *Great Expectations* that it was on the up and up. Danny could scent it in the air. And she felt the power that shimmied throughout the store.

“You’re Daniel’s sister, aren’t you, Dennison?”

Danny spun around. She found herself staring into the eyes of a willowy blonde, a willowy blonde who reeked of power.

“You look like him...”

“Who are you?”

The woman smiled. “How rude of me,” she stuck out her hand, “I’m Eloise Templeton, owner of this fine establishment.”

“Uh-huh.” Danny narrowed her eyes. “And what are you?”

Eloise laughed. “You *are* as brash as Daniel told me you would be. I’m not much, dear.”

Somehow Danny sincerely doubted that. “My brother, what do you know about Daniel?”

Eloise’s smile vanished. “He disappeared over a week ago. I haven’t heard from him since.”

“And are you used to hearing from my brother?” Danny asked, curious about this young woman.

“Your brother and I found that we got along admirably. We shared one another’s company from time to time.” That strange enigmatic smile was back on Eloise’s face.

“You are fascinating. You are a strange mixture ... wolf and *magi*.”

“Please, tell me about Daniel. What do you know about him?”

“Your brother is a complicated case. He wears his anger and all his emotions on his sleeve. When he arrived in town he was full of bravado. He felt quite untouchable. I think he had airs, coming from a clan such as the one he came from.” Eloise narrowed her eyes. “Airs do not serve you well here. There are too many players ... too many unknown factors.”

It was difficult to hear. Eloise knew her brother well. Sadly, probably better than Danny, herself.

Eloise continued. “But he is a tender soul, your brother. He’s been hurt, and he feels ... at times, less than those around him. He strives to better himself and he wants more for his life ... for the people in his life. He just hasn’t figured out how to achieve that goal.”

“Do you know what happened to him?” Danny wasn’t about to cry. She couldn’t.

“No, but whatever it is, it’s bad. I ... fear for him.”

“I fear for him, too,” Danny whispered.

"Please, take what you need from my shop. Anything I have ... it's yours if it'll help you."

"Thank you." Danny closed her eyes, hoping to shut out some of the pain and fear that was eating her raw.

"He's alive," Eloise said.

Danny's eyes snapped open. She nodded. "Yes, yes I know. I would know if it were otherwise. But ... I don't know what condition I'll find him in. And the more time passes..." Her words drifted off.

"Yes, I understand." Eloise paused and then spoke quietly. "You may wish to take a night off and visit *Blood Noir*."

"*Blood Noir*?" Danny asked with a frown.

Suddenly, Eloise looked ill at ease, swallowed and nodded. She began to twist the fabric of her sleeve around and around.

"Please, if you know anything, anything at all ... please ... tell me."

"*Blood Noir* is a nightclub run by Savior Knight, the master vampire of this region," Eloise said finally.

Face draining of blood, Danny gulped. Holy God. A master vampire? What had her brother gotten himself into?

As if reading her thoughts, Eloise nodded. "Yes, yes I fear it is bad. Daniel told me he had business with ... Knight. I tried to convince him not to go. But he insisted. He is very stubborn, your brother."

Danny sighed. Didn't she just know it.

"He returned from his first meeting unscathed. He was even happy. It seemed that his business went well. But now he is gone, and I cannot think of anyone more suspicious of that disappearance than the master vampire," Eloise finished.

Danny agreed. Her brother went to conduct "business" with a master vampire and then he disappeared. Yeah, that was certainly suspicious in her book, too. She was definitely going to have to pay this Savior Knight a call.

Damn it all. If there was one thing she hated more than pack politics ... it was Vamp politics.

* * * *

It was a good night for a hunt. The moon was a crystalline orb hanging high in the sky and there was not a cloud in sight. It was cool, and breezy, a lovely change from the stifling heat of day.

Danny stood in the grand foyer of Draco's lodge and waited. Flanked on either side by Victor and Gregor, the three of them were staring down a large group of Draco's wolves, including Tara, the she-bitch who had bothered Danny at breakfast.

She knew the moment Draco entered, scenting him before she actually saw him. When he appeared, her wolf roared to life. Being so close to an Alpha made her heart beat faster and her breath catch in her throat.

Draco was splendid, and naked. His body gleamed in the low lamplight. His skin was bronze and his long hair lay around his face, highlighting his angular and masculine features.

Tara rushed to his side and ran her hands down his chest.

Danny tried not to curl her lip in disgust. It's not like she cared. She really didn't. If

he wanted the she-bitch, he could have her. Her eyes widened when Draco pushed Tara away from him so forcefully that she stumbled back. The look on her face was one of hurt. But Draco only growled at her. Tara bowed her head submissively and was effectively dismissed.

“We are ready,” he said. His voice was but a deep growl.

Danny watched as each wolf in attendance began to strip. When Victor and Gregor were naked as the day they were born, Danny unsnapped her jeans, pulled off her wife-beater and kicked off her shoes.

Draco’s eyes were hot and hard as they perused her naked body. He spoke to the room, but his eyes remained fixed on Danny.

“We hunt.”

* * * *

Danny sniffed and let out a howl. She had picked up a scent ... a delicious scent. And it would be hers.

She rushed through the trees, mindless of the brush and bramble and continued to stalk her prey.

There. She saw it. The doe was standing, stilted, as if aware that something was watching it, but unaware of what to do.

Danny felt the tingle that ran through her entire body in anticipation of the kill. She crept through the trees, aware that her eyes had sharpened and that her feet padded without a sound. The doe was no match for her. Oh yes, the kill. It was hers.

She heard it then. Howls, dozens of keening cries, and she knew that the pack was close. They were onto her scent, and onto the scent of her prey. No, she wouldn’t let them have her kill. It belonged to her. She had found it. She would have it. Danny watched as the doe’s ears perked, and suddenly it bolted.

She sprinted after her quarry. Her strong legs pumped and her heart beat faster, rhythmically.

The doe took one moment to look back, and it was all Danny needed. She was on it in a second. Her teeth found the sensitive flesh of the doe’s neck, and she ripped its throat out in one precise move. It was quick, and painless.

Danny snapped her jaw shut. Her body was raging. Everything in her was screaming to take the kill, to devour the meat and to drink the blood ... take it ... take it ... take it all. Her large head lopped down and she sniffed the doe. Her nose furrowed into a pool of blood and she growled. It smelled so good. She wanted it.

Power ran over her, chilling her fur and freezing her bones. Danny snapped her head back. He had come. Draco burst through the trees, followed closely by several members of his pack. He was a beautiful man, but he was a stunning wolf. Like her, his fur was jet black. His eyes, however, were silver, a probing silver. He stared at her, just stared.

Automatically, Danny knew what was expected of her. She bowed her head. And she moved away from the carcass.

Draco came to her side. He studied the doe and then his eyes dove to Danny’s face. He growled.

Whining, Danny remained submissive because to do anything less was to earn a harsher punishment. She had indeed killed the doe, as was her homage price. But she had dared to put her mouth and her nose into the cooling blood before the Alpha. It was a

little thing. But with Alphas ... there was no such thing as little.

Danny waited. She didn't have to wait long. Draco latched his giant mouth onto Danny's neck and applied slight pressure. It was a telling gesture, he could kill her if he so desired.

She was properly chastised.

Draco released her neck and his eyes roved over the carcass of the doe. He nodded at her. He approved. It was a good kill. A kill that was worthy of an Alpha and his pack.

Danny moved back as the pack came forward. It didn't matter that she was starving, or that her beast roared disapproval. This was the homage price. And she was paying it.

She made the kill. But she wouldn't partake of the spoils. Oh yeah. She hated pack politics.

* * * *

Danny found a quiet spot to shift back into her human form. The wolves of the Stone Claw Clan were enjoying their feast ... her kill. She didn't need to watch. She was on edge as it was.

Her change came easily. She felt her muscles, tissue and bone morph. It was the rippling of liquid throughout her body moving in perfect harmony. She shook out her hair, it tickled her ass and she sighed. Perhaps it was time she got a haircut. It was getting a little unmanageable.

"You are unbelievably lovely." Draco's voice slid over her skin like a caress.

Danny stiffened. She had no problem with nudity, wolves rarely did. But there was something unsettling about the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan, and standing bare-assed as the day she was born in front of him creeped her out.

Of course, it could be her damn hormones raging out of control.

"Finished already?" Danny asked bitingly.

"Indeed." Draco smiled. "It was a good kill, Dennison Lee."

"Yeah, I know."

Draco moved forward. His steps were light, measured and full of predatory grace. Danny felt his eyes move over her and she fought against shivering, refusing to let him see how he was affecting her.

The Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan was splendidly nude and he was beautiful, absolutely stunning. He was lean and narrow at the hips but impressively broad through the shoulders. His dark hair fell free and his silver eyes were flashing brilliantly. And it was impossible to ignore how ... well graced he was.

"Tell me, Dennison Lee." Draco stopped in front of her. "Tell me about this illness."

"No." She shook her head. "No."

Draco's eyes snapped angrily. "You will tell me."

"It's none of your business. You're not my Alpha."

"No, I'm not." Draco reached out, and ran his fingers lightly down her cheek. "But you still owe me the use of your talents, Dennison Lee. I would know if this illness will affect your performance."

Danny had a feeling it was more than that. She could see the burning curiosity in his eyes. No. She didn't have to tell him, not if it was curiosity that drove him. But he did have the right to know if she would be able to give him her best.

She pushed some of her heavy hair back. She met his silver eyes with her own

toffee-colored ones.

"I'm healing, Draco. And my ... my talents will not be affected in any way." Danny sighed. "I *have* been ill."

"It was serious," Draco whispered, statement, not question.

"Yes," Danny cleared her throat. "Several months ago, I went on a routine demon summoning." Danny almost laughed at the expression on his face. When put that way it did sound a little ridiculous. Only Danny would think a demon summoning was routine. But hey, she had to make a living. For some reason, people really liked summoning demons and Danny wasn't going to argue as long as her gravy train kept rolling in. "It was pretty cut and dry. But the *Airok* of the coven seemed to have an agenda that she didn't feel she had to share with the rest of the coven ... or me." Danny stiffened. The memory assailed her and made her wish she had been able to do something worse to the evil woman. "She was a woman scorned." Danny laughed bitterly. "Seems that the cliché is the same for anyone ... be they *magi* or not. She wanted the demon for revenge. She wanted to kill the current girlfriend of her ex-lover." Danny had no problem summoning for cash, but regardless of what people thought, or what her reputation would claim, she did have some morals. She wasn't about to summon a demon for a woman hell-bent on revenge. Talk about going straight to Hell.

"I take it you tried to bow out of the contract."

"I tried to bow out of *certain* aspects of the contract. Unfortunately, the demon had already been summoned."

Draco's eyes widened ever so slightly.

"Yeah, shit on a stick, I know. She tried to control it, but she couldn't." God, Danny hated remembering this part. "It marked me." Danny swallowed. There was nothing, no reaction from Draco. She took a deep breath. This was why she didn't talk about it. This was why she kept it to herself. No one could understand the hell she had gone through. A wolf couldn't contract common diseases. They could heal almost any wound and their lifespan was unnaturally long. But wounds and sickness of the magical sort ... that was a whole different realm—a realm that, unfortunately, Danny knew all too well.

"Tell me." Draco's voice was soft, soothing and without judgment.

God this was difficult. Danny blinked. She fought back tears. "I found a way to rid myself of the mark." She wasn't about to tell him what that cost her. "But ... the way back has been difficult."

Draco let his eyes peruse her slender form. "I can see."

"Thanks," she said bitterly.

He grinned slightly. "You are incredibly bristly. I said it earlier, you are incredibly beautiful."

"Actually, I think you said incredibly lovely."

Draco snorted. "You are exotic and delicate, yet there is a formidable strength lying in wait. But I can see ... scent ... feel ... that you have gone through something trying, something that has taxed your soul and body." Draco moved so close to her that she could feel his body lightly touching hers, and feel his breath caressing her skin.

"Please don't," Danny breathed out.

"Don't what? What am I doing?"

Taking a deep breath, Danny moved back. She could hear the braying in the wind. Thank goodness. "The hunt is over."

A slow, knowing smile broke over Draco's handsome face. "Indeed, but *we* aren't, Dennison Lee, we aren't."

* * * *

Pulling her long hair into two long braids, Danny studied her reflection in the mirror. She wasn't a vain person by any means but the conversation she'd had with Draco last night in the glow of moonlight had made her a little self-conscious. She hadn't been aware that her recent illness was so ... noticeable.

There was a little bit more color in her cheeks, and for that she was grateful. Her slashing cheekbones were just that, slashing. They didn't look quite so hollow. Danny had inherited her mother's striking features; her high cheekbones, full mouth and slightly up-tilted eyes. Her mother, Celia, had been a quarter Japanese, the rest was all ... bitch. Celia had never maintained much faith in her heritage. She had never bothered to look into the family tree or tell her children about their relatives or their family history. Whenever Danny had asked her mother about their family, Celia had turned cold eyes onto her daughter and said, "The pack is the only family you need to know." Yes, the only thing Celia cared about was her power, and her place in the pack. She had passed on nothing of any value to her daughter, save her power and looks, and both of those were in question these days. Danny was being sucked back into Alex's pack because of her power and people tended not to take her seriously because of her looks. So yeah, good ole mom hadn't really left her a great legacy.

Danny sighed. At least she was healthier. She could feel her body getting better and better every day. And her soul felt less ... tainted. That counted for something—no, counted for a lot.

Okay. It was time. Danny refused to feel guilty. Draco had business to attend to and had postponed their "talk" until tomorrow. With Draco out of the house, Victor and Gregor sniffing after some "prime ass" (their words, not hers) and the pack occupied with whatever the pack was occupied with, Danny had the perfect opportunity to do a little exploring. And yes, her exploring was going to take her to *Blood Noir*. No, she wasn't going to feel guilty. She wasn't a child. She didn't need Draco's permission to go clubbing.

She slipped into a short black skirt and found her boned black corset. Thank goodness for breasts.

Danny smiled then. Her large breasts were the only thing keeping her corset up ... okay, that and the ties and intricate eyehooks. It was a little warm, however, for her black knee-high boots, but she didn't have much choice. She pulled them on and struck a pose in front of the mirror.

Not bad, Danny thought. *Not bad at all*.

It was time to face the demons of the night...

* * * *

Blood Noir was located right outside the city limits. It didn't look like much from the outside. An old brick building with a neon sign that flashed, *Blood Noir*. The minute that Danny pulled the black SUV into the parking lot, her skin began to prickle.

Oh lord. She could smell the power, feel it washing her skin. The scents were mixed,

but familiar ... pack, death, and the comforting feel of age-old magic.

Danny cut the engine, and stepped out of the SUV. She studied the building for a minute before making her way up to the door. She kept her back straight and her eyes steady as the two burly bouncers at the door sized her up.

"Sex in a skirt," the larger of the two bouncers said.

Danny gave him a look that conveyed *exactly* what she thought of his statement.

He laughed and held the door open. "Go ahead, little girl, go ahead ... wait till he gets a load of you."

She ignored him and walked through the door into the club. Danny was instantly assailed by smoke, ear-shattering music and sex ... oh yes ... lots of sex.

She righted herself. She had to shift her equilibrium. Her senses were being overwhelmed and it was unsettling to say the least. It had been a long time ... a very long time since she had done the entire clubbing thing. Now she remembered why it had been such a long time.

"What's your poison?" the handsome bartender shouted out to her. He had short spiky blonde hair and dark eyes. When he smiled he revealed sharp fangs.

Danny started. She hadn't even realized she had made her way over to the bar. She thought for a minute. "Bailey's on the rocks?"

The bartender looked like he was going to laugh, but he nodded. "Sure thing."

Taking another moment to study the inside of the club, Danny was surprised that she was indeed impressed. The inside of the club was certainly more impressive than the outside. It was dimly lit and there were muted colors that sparkled everywhere. Comfortable red and black couches banked the walls and there was a large dance floor in the back of the club. The club was full of a very interesting array of people—dead, alive, and other. It was the dead and the other that held Danny's attention.

As a wolf, Danny didn't hold much stock in vampires. In fact, she stayed as far away from them as she could. Wolves and vampires didn't often get along. And the best wolf/vampire, relationship was the non-relationship.

Alexander had a tentative pact with Tavius, the master vampire of New Jersey. And the two of them existed by staying out of one another's way. Both were too dominant and too ferocious. But they also realized the importance of having peace between the werewolf pack and vampire nest. It was an uneasy peace, but peace all the same.

Danny scowled when she saw a vampire chewing on some girl's neck in the corner of the dimly lit room. It made her skin crawl. She understood that vampires had to feed, just as she understood that wolves had to hunt. But she couldn't help the unease that crawled through her when she saw a vampire feeding. It was just icky.

"Would you like another?" The bartender leaned over the bar and smiled seductively at Danny.

He was posing for her. Danny snorted. Too bad he was wasting his time. He wasn't her type. He was a vampire—definitely not her type.

"Okay," Danny said.

The bartender was gone for a minute, returning with a large glass of Bailey's.

"Big shot."

The bartender smiled widely. "The extra's on me."

Danny placed some bills on the bar and nodded. "Thanks." Taking the glass, she went back to watching the sea of people and their antics. Her eyes narrowed in on the

back of the bar, where a roped off area held her attention. Sitting on a large wraparound couch was a man—no—her nose told her different—a vampire. He was singularly the handsomest thing she had ever seen, even better looking than Draco and Alexander, and that was saying a lot. Perhaps he was using glamour. Yes, that had to be it. There could be no other reason for his unnatural beauty. He had hair so blond that it appeared almost white in the light. And his face was a study of perfection, absolute perfection.

She couldn't look away. Her eyes were transfixed. He was just so beautiful. And then ... then she felt it ... and saw it.

He was looking at her. He *saw* her.

Oh boy. Danny gasped and dropped her gaze. Power flowed over her skin, terrible, beautiful power. And she knew that it was from *him*.

"Come," the voice commanded.

Danny looked up. There was a vampire standing in front of her. "Excuse me?" She took another sip of her drink.

The vampire smiled. Her ghostly pale face lit up. "My master bids you to come."

"That's nice," Danny snapped. "Your master can tell me himself."

The vampire looked startled. "You truly refuse his call?"

"I'm no one's toy. You don't fetch me. If he wants my company, then he can come and ask me nice and civil like."

"Indeed, then I shall ask..." And just like that he was standing in front of her. The stunningly handsome vampire was there.

Danny stiffened.

"I am Savior Knight. I would be delighted if you would join me for a drink..."

"Come on, that *can't* be your real name," Danny scoffed. "Savior Knight? Lord, you poor man, you must have been picked on something awful as a child."

Savior Knight's face remained stiff and expressionless but his eyes sparkled. He seemed almost amused.

"And who might you be? Your scent indicates ... wolf?"

Danny licked her lips. She had to remember. She had to remember Daniel.

"Dennison, Dennison Lee."

Savior tilted his head to one side and his expression turned thoughtful. "You are Daniel's sister?"

She fought to breathe. Daniel. Oh God. Daniel. "Yes. I want to know why Daniel came to you. What business did he have with you?"

Savior laughed then. It was a strange laugh, slightly musical, but all consuming. "Oh no, Dennison Lee."

"Danny," Danny said curtly. "I prefer Danny."

"Danny then. This is not how I conduct business. You wish information? Then you will pay for it."

Fuck. Danny felt a monster headache coming on. Vamp politics, oh yeah, she hated them. Why did everything have to be so fucking complicated? Vampires, werewolves, all the species of the *Otherside* made things so difficult. Humans, okay, they were soft and stupid, and rather base ... but at least they were simple. Why in the heavens hadn't she been born human?

"You ... disapprove?" Savior asked lightly.

She narrowed her eyes. She wasn't about to give him an excuse. If she said she

disapproved, she was certain he would find some way to make her pay. "I have no right to disapprove or approve of anything, Mr. Knight."

"Ah, very smooth, Danny." Savior's mouth curved up in a smile, a smile that was truly breathtaking. "Now, we will speak."

Danny nodded slowly. Yes, she had come to talk. Why then did she dread speaking now?

* * * *

Breathing ... breathing would be a good thing. Danny sat in a large chair facing the master vampire, Savior Knight. She was sitting in an office, a very nicely decorated office. And she was amazed at how calm and collected she was, all things considered.

Danny couldn't hold it in anymore. "What happened to Daniel? What happened to my brother?"

Savior leaned back in his chair. His eyes, a brilliant blue, speared Danny. "This is why you came tonight?"

"Yes. I ... I heard that you had seen Daniel. I need to find him."

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why? He's my brother. I love him."

Savior slid out of his seat, and just like that he was at her side. Danny didn't move, didn't so much as blink. She allowed the master vampire to study her, take her in. She was on his turf, she recognized that. And she (as much as she hated to admit it) needed him. She needed him a hell of a lot more than he needed her.

Savior picked up one of Danny's braids. He deftly undid it, running his hand through the thick, silken threads.

"You have beautiful hair, Danny. Soft, thick, like the finest of silk ... you should always wear it down."

She said nothing. But she was certain she had to look ridiculous, one braid done, and the other undone.

As if reading her mind, he quickly undid her second braid. He combed his fingers through the mass and then his hand cupped her neck gently.

"What are you doing?" Danny asked. She would allow only so much manhandling. Even her own wouldn't be allowed such liberties.

His face was suddenly but an inch away from her. His breath tickled her skin. And his incredible light blue eyes were on the same level as her own eyes. They sparkled, and his mouth was curved in a sexy grin.

"I am ... speaking with you, Danny."

"This..." Danny cleared her throat, "... isn't speaking with me."

"But it is, I must get a feel for you. It is not every night that I meet such an intriguing wolf."

"I'm nothing special," Danny snapped.

"Oh, but somehow I greatly doubt that. No ... you are fascinating. You smell ... intoxicating, and you reek of power, Danny ... strong, old, and true power. What exactly are you?"

"Nothing much." Danny frowned. "Though, didn't my brother talk of me?"

Savior tightened his grip. "Your brother said little..."

Danny felt hurt worm a hole through her belly.

“He mentioned a sister, said she was...” Savior’s eyes flattened, “...of little importance. I do not like being lied to.”

She stiffened.

“Your brother did not mention your power. He did not mention how ... appealing you are.”

“Appealing? Yeah, thanks. You have a thing for skinny, scrawny wolves?” Danny almost snorted.

That seductive smile was back on Savior’s face. “It would seem that I do. You are beautiful, Danny Lee. But apart from your physical attributes you are a powerful thing ... very powerful.”

Danny felt her heart trip. She could feel Savior’s power crawling all over her, and it was a welcome weight. It felt ... delicious. She wanted more. He was so very beautiful. She just had to lean in a little and she could feel those lips on hers. Were they as velvety soft as they looked? She just had to...

Gasping, Danny pulled back. She struggled against his hold on her neck. What in the world was she doing? Oh lord. This was a vampire. Why in the name of God was she wondering how a vampire tasted?

Savior released her neck. He seemed amused when she scooted her chair back.

“Tell me, Danny, tell me what you are.”

“I’m a wolf. You know that already.”

“Do not play games with me, little wolf. *What* are you? Your scent is ... different. Your power is different, you are more than just wolf. If you do not tell me now, I will find out later. And I will be ... displeased, if I have to seek that information out.”

She hated him. “I’m Danny Lee of the Striker Clan, wolf, and *magi*.”

Savior hissed. “You’re a *magi* wolf?”

“That’s what I said.”

“Fascinating.”

“So glad that you think so,” Danny glowered.

Leaning on his desk, Savior was now looking at her, *really* looking at her. “Now it becomes very clear why you were hidden from me.”

“Hidden from you? Don’t be ridiculous. I’ve only been here two days. No one hid me from you.”

Savior laughed, but it was a dry laugh. “Oh, but they did. First your brother, he neglected to tell me of your ... nature. And now, the Alpha, the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan could have, should have, told me the minute that you entered my territory. But he chose not to. That tells me much.”

“I’m wolf, not vampire. The Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan does not have to announce the presence of a new wolf to you. He is under no such obligation.” At least she didn’t think so. She wasn’t exactly sure how it worked upstate. But she didn’t know of any such law that made new wolves open to vampire prying. The wolf packs and vampire nests did not have to share information on the comings and goings of their members.

“Under usual circumstances that would be true, but these are not usual circumstances. The Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan and I have an arrangement. Not to mention, as my nest is larger and stronger than his pack, he must rely upon my good will and continued good nature.” Savior’s eyes glittered dangerously. “He was under every obligation to tell me of your arrival in my territory. A *magi* wolf ... incredible ... and too

powerful to be left to her own devices.”

“I can take care of myself,” she bit out.

“Of that I have no doubt. So, Danny Lee, what will you give me for the sought information of your brother.”

She blinked. What? Why did this keep happening to her? Damn Alex and his plots to get her back to the clan. If it hadn’t been for Alex and her subsequent rejoining of the Striker Clan she would be happily going about her day-to-day business. She wouldn’t have to keep trading her talents against information. And for that matter, damn Daniel and his stubborn foolish ways.

“What do you want?” Danny thought that was a safe place to start.

Savior cocked his head to one side. “How far do these powers of yours reach?”

“What do you mean?”

“How strong of a *magi* are you?”

Danny didn’t have to think. “Strong.”

“Could you summon a portal, Danny Lee?” Savior asked. He began to circle her chair.

Digging her fingernails into the exposed flesh of her legs, Danny thought for a moment. “What sort of portal?”

“A dimensional one.”

A dimensional portal? What in the world did a master vampire need with a dimensional portal? She could lie. She could just open up her mouth and—

“Yes,” Danny said curtly. She couldn’t lie. She was *magi*. She couldn’t lie. “Yes, I can. But ... it’s limited by size and diameter etcetera.”

“Good, good.” Savior nodded curtly. He stopped in front of Danny’s chair and smiled.

“That is what you want from me?” Danny asked a little hesitantly.

“I wished to know if you were capable of such a feat, Danny Lee. Now that I know you are...”

“Now that you know I am ... what?”

“Now I know. I had your brother handle a little situation for me. A situation that I would have you deal with ... now that he has gone missing.”

“What happened? What happened to my brother, Mr. Knight?”

“Savior, please,” Savior spoke with an enigmatic smile.

Danny clenched her jaw.

“I had your brother do a little undercover work for me, Danny. You see, the Fae have been moving into our territory and...”

“Pardon, did you just say the *Fae*?”

He nodded, a lock of his silvery-blond hair fell forward. Danny’s fingers itched to touch his silken locks. Lord. Where had that thought just come from? She dug her nails in further. She had to get a hold of herself. She had never been attracted to one of the dead before. Why now ... why this bloodsucker?

Danny gasped as she was suddenly pulled from her chair and pressed tightly against the length of Savior’s hard, muscular body.

Oh God. Oh God.

“What ... what are you doing?” Danny breathed out.

He leaned forward and gently brushed his lips to hers. “Giving you what you want,

little wolf, giving us what we both want..." Savior crushed his lips to hers. His tongue probed and begged entrance.

Danny groaned and opened her mouth. It was crazy. She shouldn't be doing this. But her beast had been denied for too long, and it was desperate. She felt longing flood her soul and she grew wet. She dug her hands into Savior's back and pressed herself even tighter against his body. She felt his tongue soft and insistent and met each one of his strokes with one of her own. The fire within her was building and when she felt the smooth planes of his fangs, she quivered.

This wasn't right. But lord, it felt wonderfully wicked.

Savior moved his mouth to her neck. His tongue began to tickle the soft skin right below her ear. He licked and suckled the soft flesh, rolling it delicately between his teeth, soothing it with his tongue.

Moaning, Danny felt incredible need spread through her. Her nipples were tight, hard buds, and she could feel them pressing into the hard swell of his chest. She wanted to feel him. She wanted to feel his muscular body, naked on hers. She wanted to run her hands and her mouth over his hard cock and feel that delicious flesh within her body.

Her beast roared its approval. And she grew wetter still.

"Oh yes, little wolf," Savior murmured against her skin.

Danny felt the prick of his fangs and it was enough to yank her out of her sex-induced stupor.

She jumped back so fast she nearly tripped over the chair. Danny felt her breath coming out short and stilted and knew her eyes had to be wild from fear and desire.

God. What had she almost done? Danny reached up to her neck, she felt her skin, still unmarked and unblemished. He hadn't pierced her skin.

Savior's clear blue eyes were so light they appeared white. His skin was porcelain, and fine blue veins were apparent right underneath the surface. There was a slight flush to his cheeks and his mouth was parted slightly. He was staring at her as if there was nothing else, nothing else in the world but her.

"I can give you so much..." he murmured, his voice honey smooth and so very seductive.

Danny shook her head. "That ... that was very stupid of us."

"You are extraordinary, Danny Lee."

She frowned. Did he think some stupid compliment was going to separate her from her panties?

"Yeah, whatever." Danny brushed back some stray hair from her face. "About my brother, Savior." She fought to get her breath under control. She was more than her beast, she could never forget that. Just because her wolf craved ... no ... demanded sex, did not mean that she had to give into her primal desires. She was also a woman, a *magi*, and she was stronger than the mere desires of her animal.

"You will have to feed that need, Danny Lee."

"God," Danny spat out. "Are you psychic?"

Savior chuckled. "No, but I know your kind and I can see the need written plainly on your face. If you deny it for too long it will devour you whole. You will have no control over who you take when your beast is riding you."

Danny wanted to deny what he said was true. For what did a vampire know about a wolf? But it was obvious that the master vampire had done his homework, because he

was right. The longer she waited to sate the physical demands of her body, the more power her beast gained over her. Eventually, if she did not copulate, did not feed that need, she would be washed away. She would take someone, or let someone take her, with no regard to anything else but the fuck. Danny found that thought entirely distasteful.

Wolves were very sexual beings. And most packs slept and kept close, choosing to feel the warm press of their bodies against one another. Sex was a very casual thing amongst most wolves, until they found their mate. And once they were mated ... well ... that was an entirely different matter all together. You lived and died for your mate.

But Danny being both wolf and *magi* had never felt comfortable with casual sex. Sex, well yes, she needed it, craved it and would feed that need. But it was never casual. She chose her partners with care, and she always felt something for them, be it love, friendship or devotion, she always put her heart into it. Another reason that most of the pack had always thought her a little "off".

"I'll deal with my beast, Savior. I would like to know the rest. Tell me the rest."

Savior eyed her for a moment. The hunger was still there on his face. "The Fae have kept their distance in the past. But recently they have decided to venture from the *Otherlands* and join us in our realm. You understand that the Fae and vampire have very little use for one another?"

Danny nodded. It was true. The Fae had always considered themselves beyond this realm ... well, and they were. And they had little use for the dead, finding vampires to be abominable creatures. Vampires in turn, found the Fae to be bothersome, outdated creatures with a sense of superiority that was insufferable.

Savior brushed back a strand of his hair and Danny's eyes followed his graceful movements avidly. God. It had to be glamour. It had to be. It was the only explanation for her rapture. Danny had better self-control than this. And she was lusting after one of the undead. Lord, she was losing her mind.

"Please ... go on," Danny urged, clearing her throat and reining in her hormones.

"The Fae have started invading my territory. They pay no homage, they do not come with gifts, nor apologies for their actions. In this, they also disrespect the local Alpha. There has been some strange activity in the south side. I believed the activity to be Fae related. I hired your brother to go undercover and to learn a little more of the activities of these bothersome Fae."

"Why my brother?"

"I had received some information that the head of this rather motley group of Fae, is a Lady Theraline of the high court. It seems that she has a ... thing for wolves." Savior chuckled. "And as your brother is rather pleasing of face and form, I thought him the perfect candidate for such a job."

"Plus you couldn't ask Draco or any of his wolves," Danny said dryly.

"You are correct, of course. I could not ask the local Alpha for the use of any of his wolves." Savior shrugged his broad shoulders. "But it was an agreeable arrangement for the both of us. I paid your brother handsomely for his initial visit to the south side. He brought back some useful information. It was he who told me this is but a rather..." Savior cleared his throat, "...rag-tag group of Fae who, bored at court, have decided to venture out past the *Otherlands*."

Fear clenched her stomach low and hard. Danny was frightened, frightened for her brother. "And then he disappeared."

“He reported to me, and then he vanished,” Savior spoke with a nod.

Damn them all to the hell they came from. This vampire had used her brother. He hadn’t cared for his welfare or thought on his protection.

She narrowed her eyes and tried to maintain her composure. Her power was flooding over her and she felt it rising steadily.

“If he dies ... I blame you,” Danny bit out. “I blame you.”

Savior’s face betrayed nothing.

“You are the reason he got involved in this business. If anything happens it is your fault.”

The beautiful vampire lifted one eyebrow. “Indeed? And your brother is not held accountable for any of his actions? He is an adult. He could have said no. The lure of such a large sum of money overrode anything else. But I offered him a solution to some of his financial woes. He need not have taken it if he did not think himself capable.”

“You should never have approached him.”

“Perhaps, perhaps not, Danny Lee. But you see, he approached me. I put out feelers. I made it known that I needed a certain special job done. And your brother, he came to me. He needed the money, and he felt that he could accomplish the job.”

Idiot, idiot, goddamn idiot. Danny cursed her brother. Lord. Why did he have to be so stupid? He never thought things through. He had always been impetuous and brash, so eager to jump out there and the hell with the consequences.

God. And look where it had gotten him.

“I take it you will want to go after him?” Savior watched her face very closely.

Rubbing her aching temples, she tried not to scream out her fury and fear. “I’m here to get my brother. So yes, I will go after him.” Danny just wished she knew where to go, where to start. She knew so little of the Fae and she was just getting back into pack politics.

“It is as I said before, the south side is the best place to start. The Fae have taken up residence there.” Savior floated over to her. He reached out and touched her cheek.

“Now, about payment...”

She narrowed her eyes until they were nothing but small icy slits. “Payment? It’s your fault that my brother is in this mess.”

Savior cupped her cheek, the hold was tight and Danny could feel the pressure hot and hard ... it hurt.

“Do not try my patience, Danny Lee. I have given you more than your fair share of information this eve. You, in turn, owe me a favor.”

Danny counted to ten. She was doing a lot of counting lately. She had to remember to breathe. “What do you want?” Her voice was cold.

Savior released her abruptly. His eyes were blue shards of ice. “When the time is right, I will collect.”

Danny let her eyes roam over his stunningly handsome face. There was nothing, absolutely nothing there. His face was devoid of any emotion. And a great chill wracked her body. She had a feeling that the master vampire was going to collect ... going to collect in full.

Chapter Three

It was as sure as the rising sun. Danny knew that Draco was waiting for her. The moment she pushed through the brush she saw his large form sitting on the front steps of the lodge—staring at her.

She had scented him well back. And had mentally prepared herself for the confrontation.

“Draco.” Danny was suddenly very conscious of her garb.

Draco stood. “Dennison, it’s late,” he whispered in that whiskey voice of his, “and you are dressed...” His eyes narrowed. “Tell me, what have you been up to?”

“You said nothing about being under house arrest,” Danny bit out.

“Modify that tone of yours, Dennison.”

She bit her lip. Yes, now would probably be a good time to shut up.

“Where have you been?” Draco sniffed. “Better question ... who have you been with? I smell ... death,” he growled.

She wasn’t going to tell him.

“Speak, Dennison, speak. Tell me.”

Okay, he sounded pissed. That cool voice of his said it all. She was going to tell him. “I went to *Blood Noir*.” She waited for his reaction.

Draco hissed and jerked back.

Yep. That was about the reaction she had expected.

“You went to *Blood Noir* and you didn’t tell me?” Draco’s growl deepened. “Did you see the master vampire?”

This would not be the time to lie. Danny nodded. “Yes, Draco, I did. He had some very interesting things to tell me about my brother.”

Before Danny could react or defend herself, Draco backhanded her across her face. The force of the blow rocked her head back. She touched her nose ... it came away bloodied.

Her beast was rising. She banked it down. It came quickly, but it wasn’t a surprise. He was Alpha and showing her who was boss. She just wished that these little demonstrations didn’t hurt so damn much.

“Now, Dennison, you will tell me what the master vampire had to say,” Draco turned on his heel and began to walk toward the lodge.

Danny glared murderously at his back.

* * * *

Another night, another meeting, another blasted headache. Danny sat in Draco’s study. Her eyes roamed over the rich mahogany. The many shelves were lined with books and the furniture was expertly crafted and meticulously detailed. It was a lovely study. One, that if she had the time, she would have put together and chosen for herself.

Draco hadn’t given her a chance to change. So she sat, bustier, short skirt and all in Draco’s impressive study.

His cotton t-shirt fit him like a second skin and his muscular body showed it off to

perfection. His jeans were faded, with several holes worked into the knees. And on his feet he wore a scuffed-up pair of sandals. Danny had always called them Jesus-the-carpenter shoes.

"I heartily approve of your corset, Dennison," Draco drawled.

Danny smiled tightly. "This old thing?"

Draco sighed, leaned against his desk and speared her with his brilliantly clear eyes. "I would like to know why you felt the need to go to *Blood Noir*. And why you did so without my permission."

"I had a ... feeling that the vampires had something to do with my brother's disappearance. The best way to get to the bottom of their involvement with Daniel was to go right to the source. *Blood Noir* belongs to the master vampire, Savior Knight..."

"Do not mention that creature's name to me," Draco spat out.

Well, it seemed that the rift between the vampires and werewolves of this region went deeper than she thought.

"He was helpful."

"Yes, I'm sure he was," Draco snorted.

She ignored him and continued. "He told me about the recent Fae activity."

"Did he? And what did he have to say about the Fae?"

"Just that they have decided to take up residence in your neighborhood." Danny watched his face carefully for any signs of ... well ... anything. But it was blank. There was no betrayal of any emotion on that handsome face of his.

"Indeed. And he spoke to you of your brother's involvement?"

"Just that he had hired Daniel to do a little undercover work for him. He didn't want to approach you or yours."

"Yes..." Draco suddenly smiled, "...that would have been a bad idea."

Uh, yeah, Danny was sure of that. "You don't have any right to be upset with me. I'm not one of your wolves. And I didn't break any laws. I had a night off and I decided to do a little clubbing." Danny grinned knowingly. "A girl's got a right to dance, doesn't she?"

Draco was at her side in a blink of an eye. He yanked Danny out of her seat. "Dance? You wished to dance, Dennison?" His hand went to the small of her back and he pulled her close. "Then, let us dance." Expertly, he began to dance, partnering her flawlessly around the room.

She could feel the heat of Draco's body and she fought against the desires of her body. It had been a long time. And he felt good, better than good.

"There's no music," she murmured.

Draco leaned close to her, his breath caressed her flushed skin. "We need no music to dance." He pressed a kiss to her forehead. "No ... we can dance admirably ... just you and I."

Danny opened her mouth to speak, but was silenced when Draco took her mouth in a bruising kiss. His mouth was incredible, absolutely incredible. His lips were firm and unyielding against hers and his tongue ... lord above, his tongue was divine. She felt Draco's hand on the back of her neck, and she just couldn't help herself, she curled herself into his body. She dug her hands into his back and arched against him, desperate for more ... she needed more.

She had denied her beast for too long.

Draco deftly untied the laces to her corset and then his hand was cupping her full breast.

Danny moaned.

He rolled her stiff nipple between his fingers and smiled. "Oh, you like that, don't you, Dennison..."

Lord, she couldn't find her voice. She was lost in a haze of pleasure. Her body was hot and achy and she was wet, lord, was she wet.

"God, you are beautiful..." He pushed her down and Danny had one moment to register that her back was now flat against Draco's large desk. "I have been dreaming of this..." Draco latched his mouth onto her breast. He began to suckle, pulling her nipple sharply between his teeth, rolling the bud around in his mouth and laving it with his tongue.

Danny gasped, reaching for him. Her glassy eyes took in the fact that he was making his way down her body. And then, her skirt was gone, along with her panties. She was lying, naked save for her boots, on the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan's desk ... and she loved it.

He parted her legs and pressed two of his thick fingers into her aching pussy.

Danny arched off the desk. "Oh lord, oh my..." her words trailed off when Draco began to scissor his fingers in and out of her. The slow rhythmic movements were driving her further and further toward the edge. She wanted, no, she needed more.

"Please..." she groaned when he inserted a third finger.

"Oh yes, Dennison, I plan on pleasing you, pleasing you so well." Draco pulled off his t-shirt and stepped out of his jeans. He was gloriously hard, and so beautiful. His cock was long and perfectly proportioned and he stood in the dim light of the study, watching Danny's eyes take him in.

"Please..." Danny murmured again.

Draco smiled, and his smile encompassed his entire face. He drew her hips to the edge of the desk and wrapped her legs around his waist. He teased her, caressing her pussy with just the head of his cock.

Danny squirmed and reached for him. He eluded her grasp. Placing his hands on her hips, he stilled her.

"Oh no ... not yet," he said. He leaned over and captured one of her ripe nipples in his mouth and began to pull and bite. When she cried out, he moved his mouth to the side of her breast and applied more pressure, sinking his teeth into the soft pillow of her breast.

Oh yes, that was sure to leave a mark. Danny dug her heels into his back and arched her hips forward, trying to sink him into her body.

"Beg me, girl ... beg me for what you need."

Danny shook her head frantically. No, Danny Lee didn't beg anyone for anything.

Oh lord. But she was on fire.

Draco pressed his cock just an inch into her waiting and wanting depths and stilled completely.

"Draco..." Danny gasped.

"Beg me," he repeated. "Ah, you waited too long ... your beast demands it all."

He was right. Damn him, he was right. She had denied the lust of the beast for too long, and now it was demanding payment. She couldn't back away now. And hell, she

didn't want to. No, she wanted him in her body. She needed to be fucked now.

"Please, fuck me," Danny ground out.

Draco withdrew his cock from her body. His long hair was tickling her shoulders and his eyes were sparkling like a million diamonds.

"Beg me."

Danny threw her head back and groaned. She was on fire. She would die if he didn't take her.

"Please, Draco, fuck me, fuck me now. I beg you ... take me." Danny screamed when she felt him sink the entire length of his hard cock into her wet pussy. He was so hard, and it had been so long.

Draco took her unmercifully. His hips began to piston back and forth. His hands were a bruising force on her hips, holding her arching body in place. He groaned and took her further, took her until there was no place left to go.

Danny felt him bump her cervix and she roared. It was amazing—the pain, the pleasure, the indescribable feeling of it all. She felt Draco's teeth against her breast and she stiffened. Through the haze of pleasure, she still retained enough of herself to know that she could not, would not have him there.

"Fuck me," she groaned, and yanked his head away from her breast. "Fuck me, Draco..." her voice deepened, "...but if you bite me, I'll fucking kill you."

Draco snarled, but slammed into her. His punishing thrust elicited a delicious moan of pleasure from her.

She felt it building. Her heart was pounding and she swore she could hear it as it threatened to burst through her body. Her pussy was clenching, and spasms were overtaking her. She was close. Lord above, she was so very close.

"Yes, yessss..." Draco hissed.

Danny arched, lifting herself, her nails raked violently across Draco's back. The abyss was closing in on her and lights ... there were lights all around. She screamed and let herself go over, allowing the inky depths of pleasure to sweep over her.

Draco roared. The hold on her hips became painful. He thrust two more times and poured himself into her waiting depths. His body went limp, and he cushioned himself again Danny's depleted form.

God above, and the devil below, what the fuck had she just done?

Danny pushed stringy hair out of her face and tried to gather her thoughts around her. She had just fucked the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan in his study, on his desk, with the rest of the pack just outside the damn door. Of course, it's not like this was abnormal. Wolves were highly sexual and often engaged in sex and sexual play in the midst of their pack members. There was no shame in the naked form, or the pleasure that you received from one another's bodies. Often the pack would sleep in a pile, sharing the warmth of their bodies. It was normal ... natural ... the way of the wolf.

She scowled. But she was *magi* and wolf. And she didn't do this. She didn't just fuck some stranger on a desk. She liked her privacy ... her freedom, and she had worked hard to get both.

"You are incredible," Draco drawled. He stared at her intently. He was still naked, not having bothered to cover up. "And the beast hasn't been sated..." Draco smiled. "We could..."

"No!" Danny shook her head. "No, I'm fine ... it's fine." It was fine—for now.

Draco had taken the edge off her need for the time being. But she had pushed her lust back for so long that it would take more than one great fuck to bring her back to where she needed to be. Draco was right, the beast hadn't been completely sated. It was just waiting ... watching for the opportunity to rise again. But she would be damned if she let him have another go at her so soon. She had stopped him before he had sunk his teeth into the flesh above her heart. She had stopped him before he could bind her to him at all. But she knew her body, and she knew herself. If she allowed him to take her again, now, so soon after her first release, she could possibly do something stupid ... like be carried away. And God knows she didn't want to end up bound to some Alpha male like Draco for half an eternity.

"Why do you deny your beast?" Draco smiled indulgently. "It is a part of you, Dennison, a beautiful part of you."

Clenching her hands into tight fists, Danny tried to reign in her temper. She wasn't denying her beast. She was denying him.

She stepped into her skirt and zipped it up. She pulled on her corset, not bothering with the many laces, opting instead to keep it closed with the small eyehook at the top.

"Was there anything else you needed from me, Draco?" she asked tightly.

"You have told me all that you spoke of with the master vampire." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes."

"You will not see him again," he said coldly.

"I can't promise you that."

Draco growled, baring his teeth. "You will promise me that. You will not meet with that creature again."

"I am not your wolf. You have no call over me. If you have a problem, take it up with Alexander. The contract is already settled and signed. You petitioned for my talent ... not for me. If I would see the master vampire again, then I would see him. It is my life."

Draco narrowed his eyes. "You are a stubborn, unmanageable, impertinent..."

"Uh-huh, I know. I've been told before." Danny sighed. "I don't want to make this more complicated than it needs to be, but I will find my brother, with or without your help. And if you will not tell me what I need to know, then I will find someone who will tell me ... help me."

"That creature will not help you."

"Maybe, maybe not. But it is like I said, I will use any means necessary to find him." God. She owed him that much. She had been a shitty sister to Daniel. Oh, he hadn't been in the running for "brother of the year" but she had been the older one, it had been her responsibility ... and she had failed, failed him miserably.

"The box was delivered to us," Draco said. His voice was flat, devoid of any emotion.

Danny exhaled slowly.

"I, in turn, believed that Alexander would want it."

Danny felt a familiar pain hit her. So simple, just like that. Alex had sent the box to her. Draco had sent the box to Alex. Daniel, his life meant nothing to Alex or to Draco, save leverage to make Danny bend to their will.

"Who sent the box to you?"

"I need you to look at one of my wolves for me, Dennison," Draco said finally.

What? Danny blinked.

"That is the favor I bartered with Alexander for."

Confusion set in. Damn, Danny was confused. And she hated feeling confused. "You need me to look at one of your wolves?"

He nodded. "I need you to look at Bianca for me, Dennison."

"And, if I look at Bianca for you, then, then you'll consider the contract complete, and you'll tell me about Daniel?"

"I will," Draco agreed.

"Swear it."

"Don't trust me?"

"Not even for a second," Danny snapped.

"I could take offense to that, Dennison."

"Yeah," she said, "you could." Danny waited.

"Yes, I swear. If you will take a look at Bianca, and *if* you can help her, I will tell you what I know of your brother."

Danny took a deep breath. Well, here went nothing. More negotiating, and more getting herself into hot water. Sometimes she wished that she had been born a flea. Her life certainly would be easier ... shorter, and easier.

* * * *

Bianca was a pretty wolf—pretty and young. She was fresh-faced and innocent, with delicate features and auburn hair. Danny could feel her power. It was there, just beneath the surface. It was also very low. This was not a strong wolf, and she never would be a strong wolf. Danny felt a trickle of pity run through her. This girl would never rise within the pack. She would be lucky to find someone to mate with. Few males would mate with a female of such little power. If she was lucky, she would find a low rung male, a male of little importance, but still stronger than her, someone in the Alpha's good graces, and bind herself to him. When one had so little power, it was better to find a male to protect you.

Danny scowled. The thought baited her. Actually, it just pissed her off. She hated the thought. She hated that Bianca had no options. That she would be systematically wiped out, or forced to find a male to bind with. Such was the lot of a submissive, low rung female wolf.

Suddenly, Danny stiffened. She caught something ... the scent of something ... foul. It was coming from Bianca. How had she not sensed it before?

"Yes, Dennison," Draco nodded. "This is why I needed your help."

Danny looked down at the sleeping wolf. "She's been..." Danny sniffed, "...cursed?"

"That is what I thought," Draco said. "There could be no other explanation for her behavior of late."

"Tell me."

Draco sighed.

"What are you doing here?"

Danny and Draco turned. Tara stood in the doorway. Her eyes were flashing angrily and she bared her teeth at Danny.

“Get away from her,” Tara screeched, rushing for Danny.

Draco grabbed Tara and easily held her at bay. “Stop, you will stop this disgraceful display.”

Tara growled, but stopped struggling and flailing.

“I brought her here, Tara. I brought her to help Bianca.”

“The bitch can’t help her ... look at her, she’s nothing,” Tara snapped.

Danny rolled her eyes.

Draco wrapped his hand around Tara’s shoulder length hair and pulled her head back. “You are being disrespectful.”

Tara cowered. “I ... I am sorry ... it is just that she’s my...” her words trailed off pitifully.

Draco nodded, his face softened ever so slightly. “I know, Tara. Open your eyes ... open them truly and see Dennison Lee for what she is. Do not let your anger override your judgment. She is *magi*. If there is anyone who can help your daughter, it is she.”

Wow, that was surprising. Daughter? The catty, bitchy she-wolf, had a daughter? Danny looked back at the bed, at the young girl lying so still and she finally saw it, the resemblance.

“She is *magi*?” Tara still didn’t look convinced. “I have never heard of such a thing, a *magi* wolf.”

“Yeah, I’m just lucky, I guess,” Danny quipped. She cleared her throat. “I am *magi*, Tara. And I will do everything that I can to help your daughter. I promise you that.”

Her face was still obstinate, but Tara nodded then.

Draco released his hold on Tara.

“She ... she’s my child, my only child,” Tara said quietly. Her mouth was still hard and tight, but her eyes had softened.

“I will do all that I can.” Danny walked over to Bianca’s bed. She looked back at Tara. “May I touch her?”

Tara nodded again.

Danny smoothed her hand over Bianca’s hair and then touched her cheek. It was cold, very cold. When she moved her hand back, she could feel the heavy weight of the curse as it clung to her flesh like molasses. “Can you tell me more about this?” Danny asked. It wasn’t a particularly strong curse, but it was effectively corrosive. She could feel the spell as it fed off this poor girl. It was gaining strength from her, and in turn it was sucking her life out.

“If you’re such a strong *magi*, then you should be able to know everything, right?” Tara snapped.

Bitch, Danny thought. She took a deep breath. She had to remember that Tara was suffering. She was a mother whose child was cursed. Okay. She had to remember that—because she really wanted to slap her upside the head.

“One more remark like that, Tara, and the punishment will be severe,” Draco said quietly, menacingly.

Tara swallowed, and dropped her head submissively.

“Bianca had the misfortune of stepping on the toes of the wrong person,” Draco said dryly.

Danny found the spell and began to unravel the strands. It was, as she had thought, not the strongest spell. But whoever had put it together had fortified the threads, and there

were a lot of them.

"Go on," Danny said as she continued to unweave the spell.

"Tara was seeing a local boy. She didn't realize that the boy she was seeing was also seeing someone else..."

"Yes?" Danny wrinkled her nose as she came to a knot in the weave. It was going to take her a bit to pull the knot apart. She hated knots. "What does this have to do with Bianca?"

"Bianca's boyfriend's other girlfriend belonged to the local coven."

"Shit," Danny muttered.

Draco nodded. "Yes, that was my initial thought. Bianca went to the girl and told her that she was to stay away from her boyfriend. She was quite insistent and vocal..."

"I just bet she was," Danny murmured, thinking of Tara. It seemed that mother and daughter shared more than just looks, they shared the same temperament.

"That fucking witch hexed my daughter!" Tara screamed.

God, magic wielded by teenagers—magic wielded by jealous, irate teenagers. Just what the world needed.

"The spell is feeding off your daughter," Danny sighed. "You're lucky that the spell was cast by a young one, she hasn't harnessed all her power yet."

"Lucky?" Tara's voice was getting that squeaky quality again.

"Yes, you bitch," Danny spun her head around and speared Tara with a vicious look. "You're fucking lucky. The spell isn't that powerful ... but it's clever. This witch, the one your daughter pissed off, when she reaches her maturity, and if she's taught well, she'll be a force to be reckoned with. It's deceptively simple." Danny started to yank one of the more stubborn threads. "To the untrained eye, it looks like a nothing spell ... nothing to concern yourself with." Danny jumped when a shock of power hit her. Oh yeah, this kid had been clever. "But she added a feeding spell. Like I said before, it's feeding off your daughter, making her weak. That's why Bianca has been so ill. It's draining her. Left for too long..."

"It would kill her," Draco finished quietly.

"The spell itself wasn't intended to kill her," Danny said. "But if it drains too much of Bianca's resources she'll have nothing to fall back on. She could either lose herself in her beast, forever, or her human body will shut itself down, and yes, eventually she could die."

Tara choked back a cry.

Danny came to the core of the spell—its center. She tested it, keeping an eye on Bianca.

Yes. She could do this. She could neutralize the spell from its center, and save herself the time of having to unravel each and every thread.

She pushed some of her power into the core. She felt it give. "Come on," Danny muttered, "just a little bit more, yeah, you know you don't have a chance. I'm stronger, a bigger force than you are." She felt the core splinter. The spell began to dissolve like so much dust dispersing in the wind.

"You did it," Draco said. There was a look of satisfaction on his face. "I felt it."

"Yeah, she's going to have what feels like the god of all hangovers, but it's done."

"I didn't feel anything," Tara spat.

"No, you probably wouldn't. You're not strong enough."

Tara looked ready to lunge. But one look from Draco stopped her in her tracks.

"You owe your daughter's life to Dennison," Draco said quietly, meaningfully.

Tara clenched her hands into tight fists.

"She won't thank me, Draco. And, I don't need her thanks. I didn't do it for her gratitude." Danny pushed past Tara and walked into the hall. She leaned against the wall and took a deep breath.

"She will not thank you, but I will," Draco said, coming to stand before her.

Danny held up a hand. "Don't bother, it was contracted."

Draco put his hand below her chin and forced her face up, to meet his. "You do not fool me, Dennison Lee. Perhaps it was contracted ... but you would have done it regardless. You would have healed her, contract or no contract."

Yeah. She would have. She couldn't have left that poor girl to perhaps die a slow, painful death ... not if she could do something about it.

"You are an exceptional wolf, exceptional." Draco nuzzled her neck.

She bit her lip. He smelled wonderful. She remembered the feel of him naked, on her body. She remembered how incredible his beast felt pressed against her own. She wanted him. She wanted to feel him—

No. Danny pulled away. "It's your turn, Draco," she murmured. "I want to know about Daniel. I want to know everything."

Draco's eyes flashed angrily. "Yes. You have fulfilled your part of the contract," he smiled then, "and more. I will tell you what you want to know, Dennison Lee. But, do not blame me if it is not to your liking."

* * * *

Danny buried her head in her pillow. If she buried it deep enough perhaps she could bury out all the unwanted thoughts.

Yeah. Wishful thinking.

She flopped over to her back and stared at the dark ceiling. Draco had told her. He had told her everything. How the box containing Daniel's finger had been sent to him. How he had his suspicions that the Fae had kidnapped Daniel. Draco had sent the box, as protocol demanded, to Alexander, Daniel's former Alpha and pack leader. Danny was certain that there was more to it than that. Draco knew about Danny's abilities and he had seen an opportunity to press his advantage. He knew when he sent Alex Daniel's finger what the outcome would be. He knew that Danny would be forced to come to his territory.

And here she was.

She fought back her dismay. Draco *had* told her things she hadn't wanted to hear. He told her about Daniel and his arrogant ways. How Daniel had come to Draco's territory and tried to move himself up in the pack. Daniel had not been satisfied with the earnings of the pack, nor the money that was allotted to him as a pack member. He wanted more.

Bitterness ate at her. Oh yes, it was just like her brother. He had never been satisfied, never happy. He had always wanted more. And he had always blamed and harbored resentment toward Danny, the figurehead in the way of his happiness and success. Daniel could have gotten a standard job. He could have worked at the local gas station or flipped burgers. But no demeaning job would do for Daniel. He would not lower himself to something so common. Daniel had sought out Savior Knight, master vampire of the

region, and he had taken the vampire's money.

"God, why did you have to be so stupid," Danny muttered into the darkness.

And Draco had said other things. He had told her how Daniel had played down her abilities. He told her about the many times he had questioned Daniel about her, and how many times Daniel had told him his sister was an inconsequential little nobody.

It shouldn't hurt. Danny closed her eyes. It shouldn't hurt. She knew how Daniel felt about her. She knew.

But damn. It did hurt. It hurt so badly.

Theraline.

The name had been given to her by Draco. It was the information that she had been waiting for. The box had come with a card. The card had been stamped with the seal of *Theraline*, and it had come from the south side. There was no doubt about it, not now. Savior had told her, and so had Draco. The Fae had her brother.

Danny didn't know exactly how the pieces of the puzzle tied together, not yet. But at least she now had a lead. She had to venture into the south side and she had to locate this *Theraline*.

God. She only prayed that it wasn't too late.

* * * *

"How are my plants?" Danny asked. She could hear Thad chuckle on the other end of the phone.

"Your plants are fine, Danny."

"Did you give them the plant food? Because the last time I was gone you forgot to put that..."

"Enough, yes, I gave them the damn plant food."

"Good." Danny loved her plants. She didn't have much of a green thumb but had grown her two baby ferns from seedlings. She was quite attached.

"Uh, so how is it going?" Thad asked.

She had fucked the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan. She had nearly fucked the master vampire of the region. She had a she-bitch out for blood and had broken a spell placed on a werewolf who had pissed off a coven witch. And her brother was still missing, possibly dead.

"Decent."

"You're so full of shit."

"Am not," she muttered.

"Decent? If I know you, and I do know you, Danny, you've trudged into a pile of shit the size of fucking Montana."

"Nice, Thad, real nice," Danny bit out.

"Listen, really, how is it going out there?"

Danny rubbed her aching temple. "I've got it under control. I haven't found him yet, Thad. But I will. I'm onto a good lead."

"Okay ... think you'll be back in time for Storm's party?"

She thought for a minute. Storm Trent was one of Thad and Danny's friends. She was also a strong psychic and low grade telekinetic. She was having one of her infamous parties—infamous because all kinds of weird shit happened at Storm's parties. Not to mention Danny always ended up dancing with trolls—literally. Storm worked at *Black*

Light, a bar that catered to all the creatures of the *Otherside*. And the coat check and bus staff all happened to be trolls. Trolls were friendly enough if you got them liquored up well and good, but they weren't exactly Danny's cup of tea.

"I'm not sure ... if I don't make it, tell Storm I'm sorry. I'll make it up to her."

"She'll be disappointed."

"Yeah, I know. But I really don't know how much longer I'll be here."

"You gonna stay at Stone Claw now that the contract has been completed?" Thad asked quietly.

Biting her lip, Danny thought for a moment. Good question. Now that both parties had fulfilled their ends of the contract, Danny technically didn't have to stay at Stone Claw Clan. She was afforded entrance into Draco's territory, and she had lived up to her end of the deal. She could leave.

"Uh, you still there?"

"Yes, I'm here. I'm just thinking. It may not be such a bad idea ... getting out of Stone Claw."

"Oh no..." Thad's voice rose, "...come on, Danny, tell me you didn't?"

"Didn't what?"

"Tell me you didn't fuck the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan."

How the hell had he known that? Danny sucked in a breath. "Have you gone psychic while I've been up here?" she snapped.

"Oh lord, Danny. Yeah, that's just what you need. Two Alphas fighting over you."

"First off, answer my damn question. Second, there will be no fighting over me. I'm not a bone."

"I'm not psychic, I just know you. It was pretty evident by your choice of words, *and* the inflection in your voice, that something was going on. Now, cause I know you, I know you wouldn't just sleep with anyone. Who has enough raw power and dominance to attract and hold you? Simple enough, the Alpha. If you slept with anyone, it would be the Alpha. And you're completely deluded if you think that there isn't going to be a dog fight." Thad chuckled. "A big nasty, furry dog fight. Alex is going to go ballistic when he finds out."

"Alex isn't going to find out. Not for nothing. If he did find out, it wouldn't matter. This isn't any of his business."

"Oh-ho, you keep telling yourself that." Thad clucked his tongue. "Yeah, you keep on telling yourself that."

"Listen, anything else you have to tell me ... anything that is pertinent to my life and what's happening to it?"

Thad laughed. "Nope, 'cept would you like me to fold your panties any particular way? I picked up your laundry and thought that I would..."

Danny snapped her cell phone shut. She was seriously going to have to rethink her position on taking in apprentices.

* * * *

They weren't happy with her. But she really didn't give a flying fuck. Danny ignored the two werewolves glaring at her from over the Formica tabletop. She focused her attention on her bison burger and waffle fries and tried to pretend she was eating alone.

"Alex is going to be pissed." Gregor stuffed a handful of fries into his mouth.

"You're not as safe at a hotel as you would be if you stayed at the..."

"Save the spiel for someone who cares," Danny snapped. "Listen. I completed the contract. Alex can't be pissed. I didn't renege or break protocol."

"No, but you're putting yourself in danger," Gregor said.

No, Danny thought. She was taking herself out of it. Her hormones would get the better of her if she stayed any longer in Draco's presence. She had to take herself out of the frying pan.

"Leave her be," Victor said quietly. His eyes probed hers. Danny wasn't sure she liked the knowledge that sparkled there.

"Victor, listen it's not..."

Victor cut Gregor off. "Don't you see ... she's fucked either way."

Danny gasped.

Victor plowed on. "She stays, and she and the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan continue to engage in ... whatever they are engaging in. You don't think that will piss off Alex? Or she leaves. That will make Alex more ... agreeable, but it going to piss off the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan. So ... like I said, she's fucked either way."

Danny knew that she didn't like Victor and his stupid all-too-knowing looks. Danny sighed. Gregor was staring at her, just staring. His mouth was open and he had a fry in his hand, halfway up to his gaping mouth.

Victor cuffed Gregor lightly to the head. Gregor came out of his stupor.

"You and the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan?" Gregor choked out.

"God, Gregor, you're an idiot," Victor muttered.

Danny had to agree with Victor's assessment. Gregor was a sweetie. But he was an idiot sweetie.

"Alex is going to blow a gasket." Gregor's face had paled considerably.

"Alex is not going to find out." Danny gave them both a hard look. "Right? Alex is not going to find out."

"He's our Alpha." Victor said, straightening his shoulders.

Gregor nodded his assent.

She had to convince them to help her in this. Danny took a deep breath. "Yes, he is. I'm not asking you to do anything against your Alpha. I'm asking you." Danny swallowed. "Please, I'm asking you not to tell him anything until I find my brother. Please, I'm asking you for a little time."

Victor and Gregor shared a look. It was Victor that spoke. "All right, Dennison. A little time, we can do that."

"Thank you, thank you both."

Gregor snagged a waffle fry from Danny's plate and smiled. "Hey, as long as I can eat your fries ... it's all good."

* * * *

Walking into *Great Expectations* Danny was surprised to find it quite packed. She was doubly surprised when she felt the great swell of magic that burst forth. It was a heady thing, so much power in one room.

"Dennison, hello." Eloise rushed forward with a welcoming smile.

Danny returned the smile. "Hey. I just came to pick up some supplies."

"Of course, of course. Help yourself."

"Thanks." Danny walked over to a case of crystals. It was a fine collection. She stopped suddenly when she felt a buzz of magic so strong it shook her normally composed center.

She spun around looking for the source, and found it in the form of a truly lovely woman.

"I'm Sabine." The woman held out her hand.

There was no hesitation. Danny shook the woman's hand. She was instantly enveloped in a warm glove of power and fine energy. It was comforting and soothing.

"Ah, that was lovely," Sabine said with a warm smile.

Danny swallowed.

"I'm the local *Airok*," Sabine said.

Well. That would explain it. "I'm Danny Lee."

Sabine's smile widened. "Well, that certainly explains it. Eloise told me about you. The *magi* wolf."

"You're strong," Danny said shortly.

Sabine laughed. "Yes, I am. So are you." Sabine cocked her head to one side.

"You've been staying with the local pack?"

"Yes. But I've moved to the Fenway hotel."

"I would know something, Danny Lee. And I believe that you will tell me the truth." Sabine's eyes had narrowed slightly.

Danny waited.

"I heard that one of the local wolves was ... cursed. Is that true?"

Danny thought for a minute. She didn't know this woman, the powerful *Airok* of the local coven. How safe was it to tell her anything? She looked down at their hands, still clutched together and warmed. The magic, the flow and energy that was shifting between the two of them could not be ignored, or denied. She could trust this woman.

"Yes," she finally said.

Sabine's face tightened. Her beautiful eyes chilled. Danny was suddenly very aware that this was not a woman you wanted to cross.

"I ... see..." Sabine sighed. "That is unfortunate. But I will make restitutions to the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan."

"If it helps any, the spell was not strong. The caster was young ... inexperienced."

"But it was effective and ... clever, was it not?" Sabine asked.

Danny nodded curtly.

"Yes..." Sabine's face was still a mask of coldly contained fury, "...it would be. It matters not if the caster was young, she must learn, the coven must learn that we do not use our powers indiscriminately."

Sabine was undoubtedly a strong *Airok*. Her coven was lucky to have her. And Danny had no doubt that Sabine would bring whoever had cursed Bianca to task.

"You are here looking for your brother?" Sabine asked suddenly.

Danny nodded.

"Would you like some help?"

"You would help me?" She was genuinely surprised. She knew she felt welcoming energy from Sabine, but an *Airok*, especially one as strong as Sabine, would not have to offer help to a wolf.

"I would. And I expect no payment, Danny Lee." Sabine's eyes were now twinkling.

“Why?” Danny was truly confused now. Everyone wanted something from her. Everyone expected something from her. You never received without giving. It was a lesson harshly learned on Danny’s part.

“Because I like you, Danny Lee.” Sabine smiled. “I like you.”

“You don’t know me. I could be a raving lunatic.”

“Yes, you could be, in fact you probably are ... most wolves do lack a certain ... intelligence,” Sabine said, laughing when she saw Danny’s fiercely annoyed expression. Her smile widened and she continued. “I have a feeling that we are going to get along very well. You see, *I* am most certainly a raving lunatic. Ask anyone around here, they’ll tell you the same. Sabine Fontenot is a mad, deluded, lunatic, who captures cats to eat in pies and mutters to herself incessantly.”

“Uh, what’s that about putting cats in pies?” Danny asked.

“Oh, it’s ridiculous.” Sabine waved her hand. “I like cats, they like me. I seem to attract them. The people in town find it amusing and more than a little disturbing.” Sabine frowned. “My own fault probably, I made several pies for the church bake sale, and they were good, uncommonly good. One of the members of the congregation asked me for the recipe and I told her that I couldn’t possibly give it away ... trade secret and all. Before you know it there was some ridiculous rumor spreading about how the secret ingredient in my pies was cat.”

She just couldn’t help herself, Danny started to laugh. When she saw the consternation on Sabine’s face she laughed harder.

“I’m sorry ... it’s just...” Danny tried to stifle back her choking laughter. “I mean ... cats?”

Sabine sighed. “It is as I said ... ridiculous.”

“Thank you for your offer of help, Sabine,” Danny said, the expression on her face somber.

“My pleasure, Danny.” Sabine grinned widely. “I believe we are to be good friends, you and I.”

* * * *

It was quite obvious that Gregor and Victor were unhappy about their current living situation. They made no attempt to hide the fact. And they were very vocal about their discomfort. Danny thought they were behaving like spoiled children. It was true. The Fenway wasn’t nearly as posh as Stone Claw Clan. Okay, it was totally basic. One step away from being seedy, but still, it was clean—moderately. And it was cheap and convenient to the town and Stone Claw Clan.

Danny zipped up her suit and gave herself a cursory once over. *Yeah, not bad.* Okay, she cleaned up pretty good. She never had put much stock in her appearance—beauty was such a subjective thing. And she totally hated how people judged one another on their looks alone. Her clients took one look at her willowy form and delicate features and completely blew her off. They couldn’t believe that someone who looked like she did could possibly be of any use ... or wield any amount of power. Sometimes it worked in her advantage. Usually it just pissed her off.

Opening the door to her hotel room, Danny found Gregor and Victor waiting for her.

“Holy shit, you look...” Gregor swallowed.

Victor said nothing. But the look in his eyes was feral and hot.

"You guys ready?"

Gregor nodded. "Uh-huh, we're ready."

"This is not a good idea," Victor said quietly.

Danny shrugged. "Yeah, you're probably right." She locked up her hotel room and began walking toward the SUV.

"But you are not going to listen to me, are you?" Victor said from behind her.

"Nope, not going to listen to you."

"Your recklessness is going to get you killed," Victor spat out.

"Yeah, you're probably right." Danny climbed into the driver's seat of the SUV.

"Hey, why do you get to drive?" Gregor whined.

"Boys, we're playing a whole new game now. And I'm *so* in charge." Danny's face was jubilant, so too was her voice.

* * * *

Blood Noir was packed. The music was pulsating and the lively crowd was having an extraordinarily good time.

Danny could feel Victor and Gregor at her back, and they were tense. She wasn't surprised, not with this many of the dead around them. Oh, there were other beings in the large club, but it was predominantly filled with the dead ... or undead as some would call them.

"You didn't have to come," Victor murmured, leaning into Danny.

"Yes, Victor, I did." Savior Knight had summoned her to the club this eve. When she had gotten back to her hotel room there was a message waiting for her. He had issued her an invitation. But Danny knew it for what it was, a summons. If she didn't go to the club there would be hell to pay.

"Wanna dance?" A girl clothed in spandex and leather sidled up close to Gregor. Her face held several layers of makeup and her clothes appeared painted on.

"Thank you, but no," Gregor spoke with a smile.

The girl pouted and flounced off.

"You could have danced if you wanted to," Danny said.

Gregor stiffened. "Don't be insulting. We're here to protect you."

She couldn't quite stop a smile. It was nice to know. So Alex had assigned them to protect her, so what. She still had someone at her back.

A vampire appeared in front of Danny. "My master would see you now."

Not this again. "Haven't we been through this before?" she said. "If he wants me, then he can come and get me himself."

"Oh, but I do want you, Danny." Savior Knight was in front of her, smiling his beautiful smile. She hadn't seen him arrive. He had just materialized in front of her. He had a nasty habit of doing that. He looked, if possible, even more stunning tonight than he had the first time she had seen him. His white blond hair was falling unhindered about his perfect face. He was clothed in black, and cliché or not, it looked good on him, very good. His shirt was nearly transparent, and Danny could see traces of his smooth, pale skin underneath that hauntingly teasing fabric. He was wearing black leather pants and black boots, and everything about him was beautiful.

"Mother of..." Gregor was swallowing convulsively, his eyes transfixed on Savior.

Danny looked between her two guards and frowned. They were being held. Savior's

beauty, his power, held them hostage.

Werewolves were not immune to vampire trickery. They just had several more natural defenses. One such defense was the fact that they, being *Othersiders*, had stronger mental and physical barriers. But no, they weren't immune. They had stared directly into his beautiful eyes, and they had been captured.

Danny never had a problem with staring into a vampire's eyes. She assumed it was because of her *magi* abilities. But even she knew the lure of Savior's gaze. For it mattered little that vampire tricks didn't work on her ... when she stared at Savior Knight she felt completely riveted. It was unnerving and very, very disturbing.

"Thanks for rendering my guards useless," Danny snapped.

Savior's smile widened. "I cannot help it that they find me utterly breathtaking."

"Oh, for Pete's sake," Danny muttered.

"Who is this Pete?" Savior asked.

She blinked. "Never mind. Listen, are you going to keep them like that?" She snapped her fingers in Victor's face and was very annoyed to see that her usually composed, oh-too-serious guard seemed glassy-eyed.

"We will talk now, Danny." Savior turned from her.

"Hey, hey, about my guards?"

Savior didn't stop moving, but he spoke as he glided effortlessly across the floor. "Carmen and Robert will see to them."

"I don't want anyone to 'see to them' I want you to snap them out of it," Danny spoke as she rushed after him.

"It says much about their character and their power, or lack thereof, that they were so influenced by my mere gaze. Do not worry, they will, as you say, 'come out of it' in due time." Savior pushed through a set of double doors.

She couldn't stop her snarl, but she continued to follow. "You're really starting to piss me off, you know that."

Savior said nothing. He stopped in front of a gilded gold door. "After you, Danny." He held the door for her.

Taking a deep breath, Danny walked through. She found herself in another impressive room, not an office this time ... but a bedroom?

"What the hell is this?" she demanded.

"I thought it would be the best place to talk, Danny."

"Uh-huh, you thought a bedroom would be the best place to talk? What are you up to?"

"Why would you think that I'm up to anything?" Savior took a seat in one of the large chairs by the massive bed.

She let her eyes take it all in. It was a huge room, and filled to capacity with costly furnishings and lavish decoration. The focal point of the room was certainly the massive, harem-like bed that graced its center. The bed was piled high with pillows, and the sheets and duvet appeared, from where she was standing, to be silk and satin. Danny had never needed much luxury, but she had always been a sucker for a nice bed. She loved the feel of satin and silk over bare skin.

Savior was lounging in a deceptively complacent pose. His light eyes were watching her intently and his mouth was curved up in a wickedly beautiful smile.

"So you're hot," Danny snapped. "So what?"

"You think me hot?" he asked, coyly.

What a load of horseshit. Danny made a disgusted sound from deep within her throat. "You know you're hot. I mean, come on, everything you do is to show off your beauty ... the strength of your glamour."

"I need no glamour," Savior said, his voice hard and cold.

Oh-ho, had she insulted the touchy master vampire? Danny cleared her throat. "I meant no offense. I was merely stating that this..." she waved her hand at him, "...is unnecessary. I'm fully aware of how powerful you are."

He slid fluidly out of the chair and glided over to her. His hand reached out and fingered the zipper to her bodysuit. "You are fully aware of my power." His voice came out like a purr. "Are you fully aware of other things?"

Danny felt her stomach clench, and she wished it was from fear, and not something else.

He was beautiful. But it was more than mere beauty that held her ... called to her. Alex was beautiful, so was Draco, but neither seemed to have this singular effect on her. She was disturbed to say the least.

This was disturbing. Danny's beast had wanted Draco. And she fought her beast on Alex all the time. But there was something other, something other than her beast that seemed to want to reach out and touch this beautiful man ... this beautiful dead man. And she *so* didn't want to go there. She was not comfortable with the need that was coursing through her, or what that need signified for her and her beast.

"Tell me, Danny." Savior pulled her zipper just a little bit down, revealing pearly white flesh. "Tell me ... are you aware of other things?"

Oh boy, she was in so much trouble. Danny swallowed. Her heart was pounding. She hadn't come here for this. Oh lord, she hadn't come here to be seduced by the vampire master.

But ... oh ... he was incredible.

"Tell me," Savior urged, pulling the zipper even further down. The leather now gaped open at her breasts.

"I..." Danny licked her lips, "...I am aware of it." To say anything else would be a lie.

Savior reached into the suit and cupped one of her full breasts. His face tensed with unmistakable need when he heard her breath hitch and saw her body move into his touch. He pinched one of her hard nipples and smiled knowingly when he heard her growl.

"Oh you like that, don't you, little wolf?" He pinched her harder.

Danny gasped and fought to keep her head above water. She felt like she was drowning. She was ... she was drowning in sensation. It was difficult to remember why she had come here in the first place. She wanted this man ... this vampire. Not just her beast, but her, she wanted him.

Savior yanked her zipper down and slid effortlessly out of his shirt. He pressed himself against her. They were now flesh to flesh. The sensation was nearly too much to bear.

She felt Savior's hands at her back, peeling away her bodysuit, she felt the suit dangling at her waist, and she knew ... somewhere she knew that she shouldn't be letting this happen. But it was happening.

Savior's hands dug into the bare flesh of her back. His mouth was at her neck,

suckling, licking and caressing teasingly. It wasn't enough. It was hardly enough.

Danny grabbed his head, forcing him to her lips. She felt his lips against hers, brutal and yet oddly tender. His tongue traced her soft skin, and when she parted her lips for him, he surged forward. He met each one of her strokes with one of his own. His hands were now wrapped within the thick confines of her hair, and his mouth was devouring her as if there was nobody, nothing left but this ... this moment ... this pleasure.

Her beast roared and began to struggle. It felt the need and understood when she gave over to her body's desires. It refused to be left alone. It refused not to be able to partake of this bounty.

The heat was consuming her and blood pounding viciously in her ears. She pulled back, her eyes felt unfocused. Her head was cloudy, but she knew that if she didn't have him she would die. The need was that great, and the beast had been unleashed.

Savior must have read the desperation on her face. He tore off the remainder of her clothing, discarding his own in the process, and then they were on the bed, pressed together so tightly one would not know where one stopped and the other began.

Danny hooked her leg around his waist and tried to draw closer still. She felt him so large and hard against her and she grew wetter still. She felt her own desire trickling down her leg and she squirmed against him.

"You are the most perfect of beings..." Savior murmured, moving down her body. He parted her legs, gave her a scorching look and then placed his mouth over her aching pussy. His lips caressed her tender flesh, licking and soothing delicately. When she cried out his name and thrashed against him, he used his hands to still her body and drove his tongue into her aching body. He found the hard bud of her desire. It had ripened and turned full. He wrapped his tongue around the kernel of flesh and began to suckle—hard.

Danny screamed out her pleasure. Her body, despite his hold, arched off the bed and she felt the fire rising and roaring within her.

Savior suckled her harder, his tongue began a torrid dance, in and out, in and out, the rhythm beautifully wicked.

It was upon her. Danny knew the storm was upon her. Her head dropped back, her body arched like a fine bow and she came, flooding his mouth with her juices.

Savior took it all. Swallowing her desire down and licking his lips slowly. He was upon her so quickly she didn't have time to recover from the hazy pleasure. He flipped her over. His hands were on her breasts, kneading, pinching and driving her mad. He brought her up to her hands and knees.

"Mine," he growled into her ear, before he plunged his cock into her dripping depths.

And then it happened. Danny felt the world shift—literally. It was as if time had stopped and she found herself trapped in the most delicious dark abyss. Savior was pounding into her body, and she was meeting him, giving him everything. She heard their bodies slap against one another and couldn't help the cries and screams of pleasure.

It was incredible. It was right, so very right.

Savior increased the speed of his strokes, his cock driving even deeper into her body. He wrapped his hand around her long hair and pulled her head back, holding her in place.

Her own hands were clenched in the bedcovers, twisting, pulling, desperate for a hold that she could not find. She was climbing again, this time higher, more brilliantly than before. She felt his cock so hard and forceful within her body and knew, as surely as she knew herself, that he was close. She could feel their energy, their desire, their need

racing against one another. Danny felt light, and then saw light, bright and beautiful. It was shimmering in front of her eyes and her heart, pounding furiously, wanted to match that shimmering beauty. She was coming, her pussy was clenching and her body was screaming its release.

Savior yanked her head back, and planted his lips upon the damp flesh of her neck.

She could stand it no longer, Danny screamed as her orgasm overtook her, and felt a splash of something strange, something unknown and unwanted, hit the back of her brain. She had a second to scream out, "No," before Savior's fangs pierced her skin and then all else was lost under a flood of pleasure the likes of which she had never known before.

* * * *

It was as if she had to fight her way up from the very dark, very warm, very soothing place of rest. She felt the weight of the dark like a particularly comforting hand. It caressed her and lulled her, made her want to forget that there was anything, anyone else. She could stay here forever. Stay lost within this wonderful blackness. It was quiet and beautiful and so very pleasurable here. There was nothing else ... no one else ... nothing for her to find ... to find ... to find ... Daniel. Oh, my God. Daniel!

Danny sat straight up. Her eyes took a moment to focus and she blinked rapidly. She looked down. She was buck naked and lying on a pool of red silk. Her body felt lethargic, deliciously so, and she could still feel the hum of pleasure racing through her otherwise sated body.

She frowned and then gasped. Savior Knight ... oh, God above and Satan below, she had slept with the vampire master. Correction, she had fucked the vampire master, and enjoyed every minute of it.

"I have never seen anything more beautiful..." Savior's voice floated over to her, cool and brisk like a soft spring breeze.

Her head snapped around. He was standing to her left, just a foot away from the bed. He was naked, and his usually pale face was flushed with a delicious hint of rose.

God. He was so totally beautiful. And she had *so* totally gotten herself into deep shit.

Fuck, if she had been in trouble before, she was now so very truly screwed. Danny swallowed. "Uh ... well..." She tried to find words. Damn it. She was coming up empty. Exactly what did one say after one fucked a master vampire?

"You are," Savior reached out and let his hands gently sift through her hair, "the most extraordinary creature I have ever beheld."

Well, that didn't sit well with her. "Don't know if I like being thought of as a creature." Trust an insult to get her up and going.

"It was not meant as such," he said quietly.

She blinked. "What?"

"Nothing, Danny. That was pleasure unlike I have ever known."

"I severely doubt that," Danny said dryly. She didn't know exactly how old Savior Knight was, but he was old, of that she was certain. And she was doubly certain that in his many, many years of existence he had fucked a great many women. Somehow she couldn't believe that she was the best piece of ass ever.

Suddenly he was in front of her. His hands were cupping her face. His magnificent eyes were probing hers.

"You will not doubt these words, Danny. I have never felt pleasure as I did with you.

I have never known anyone that has my body burning the way you do.”

Danny swallowed—hard. That was quite an admission. And not one she was sure she wanted, or knew what to do with. She had a master vampire telling her that she was the best sex he had ever had.

Yeah, okay. What did one *magi* wolf do with that sort of declaration? “I ... I didn’t come here to ... uh ... sleep with you, Savior,” she said lamely.

His eyes twinkled.

“I know, a little too late for that but ... I came because you summoned me. Why? Why did you summon me? And don’t tell me it was just so that you could find a way to fuck me.”

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you it was just that?”

“No way.”

Savior laughed a hearty laugh. He pressed a quick kiss to her surprised lips. “You are remarkable.” He pulled away and cocked his head to one side. “I have reason to believe that the Fae are moving against us, Danny.”

At that, Danny went completely still.

Savior slipped off the bed. He stood there in his naked glory. “Two of my nest have gone missing.”

Danny blinked like a stunned owl. “What?”

He turned to her then. His light eyes seemed to burn with an inner fire. His power was a tangible thing, a living breathing thing upon his body. “Yes. Two of my nest have gone missing. They were taken by the renegade Fae.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Danny muttered. “Why in the world would the Fae kidnap vampires?”

“I do not know. But it has happened nonetheless.” Savior brushed some of his hair off his face.

“Why do you suspect the Fae?” She began to subtly search for her clothes.

“Who else? They took your brother. It stands to reason they are the ones to take my nest members.”

“There’s more,” Danny said coolly. She knew there was more. Someone like Savior Knight wouldn’t jump to such conclusions without more proof to back up his claims.

“The scent left upon the scene was ... different ... not dead, but not alive. It is the same scent that clung upon the box that contained your brother’s finger.”

Danny stiffened. Still not concrete proof ... but it was damning nonetheless. This just got stranger and stranger. Why in the world would the Fae kidnap a wolf and two vampires? It was completely beyond her realm of understanding.

“Have they come to you with any demands?”

Savior shook his head. “No. But I know they have not been given true death.”

“How? How could you know something like that?” She was curious and bewildered by his statement.

Savior smiled, but it was cruel and tight smile, a smile that made his handsome face appear suddenly shockingly scary. “I am their sire. My eternal blood runs through their veins. If they had passed on, I would have felt it.”

That made sense. Danny nodded slowly. Yes, she should have known or at least figured that much out. The fountainhead would know the ebb and flow of energy, of “life” from all that descended from its giving waters. There was still so much that she

didn't know about the undead and she wasn't certain that she wanted to know. Her life was already complicated. She didn't need to add any more shit onto the rapidly growing pile.

"You will find Connor and Thoreau," Savior finally said.

What? Danny shot out of bed. "Oh no, no, no, no, this was not part of the agreement."

Savior's eyes darkened. "Agreement? I wasn't aware that we had any sort of agreement."

Danny found her discarded suit and began to zip herself into it. She shook her wild hair out of her eyes and tried to get a hold on her rapidly decaying emotional state.

"Use of my talents ... that was the agreement, we would trade information for talent." Danny stepped into her boots and tried not to look into Savior's mesmerizing eyes.

"Indeed. And that is what we're doing, Danny mine." Savior's voice slid over her like the silk of his sheets.

Ugh. She hated pet names. Danny frowned. She didn't like the endearment and she told him so. She didn't have any problem, in fact, telling him so.

Savior but laughed. "It's so appropriate, though."

"I don't think so," Danny muttered. "I'm not anyone's. I belong to myself."

He lifted a perfect brow, but said nothing.

Why did she have a feeling that he was laughing at her beneath that cool façade? "I'm not trained in retrieval, Savior."

"But you have many talents that will make you perfect for the job. And, have you forgotten so soon, you are already going after your brother."

Danny growled.

"What is a vampire or two on top of that?" Savior asked with a shrug.

She couldn't help but sigh a beleaguered sigh. "Why? Why are you having me do this? You can certainly find and bring your missing vampires back. You don't need me."

"But you are neutral, Danny mine. You do not belong to this region. You will be able to go in, explore and retrieve without all the annoying politics and perhaps the eventual war."

"I'm hardly neutral." She scowled. "I'm a werewolf, or have you forgotten that little fact."

He gave her a smoldering look. "I haven't forgotten anything, Danny mine, not anything. But you are much more than mere werewolf. No, if you are to find your brother, then you will also find Connor and Thoreau. It is price that I am owed and I am collecting."

Danny rubbed her hand against her weary eyes. He was right. She did owe him for the information and he had every right to collect as he wished. But this was not her field of expertise.

She stopped suddenly. What the hell. She *was* going after Daniel. And if Savior's vampires were caught in the crossfire... Not to mention, this was probably a better way to repay a master vampire. Who knows how he could have had to use her powers. This wouldn't be so bad.

Shit on a stick. How in the hell did she get herself into these messes?

Danny nodded finally. "Fine, fine, I'll do my best."

“Of that I have do doubt.” Savior held out a hand to her.

She didn’t want to take his hand. She frowned at him. “I’m making no guarantees, I cannot promise you anything,” she said as she accepted his hand.

Savior nodded, and began to lead her to the golden door. “We shall see one another very soon, Danny mine.”

“Stop calling me that,” she said through gritted teeth.

He laughed. “You will find your wolves unharmed. They are waiting for you at the entrance of the club.”

She was now engulfed in the familiar pulse and sound of music, sex and other strange things that lived in the night. She let go of Savior’s hand and began to head toward the front of the club, toward Victor and Gregor, and toward freedom.

Very soon, Danny mine, very soon.

Danny blinked and shook her head. She was imagining things. There was no way that Savior had just spoken to her. No ... it had been a long night, and she needed her rest. She was imagining things ... just imagining things...

Chapter Four

Gregor had raised hell. Danny's head was still splitting from the earful she'd had to listen to. Victor on the other hand had said nothing. But his cold and disapproving gaze was more than enough punishment for her.

Their anger and disapproval hurt a bit, but in the end it mattered little. She was stronger. She was a bigger force than either one of Alex's wolves. But none of that made her feel better when she was getting her hide torn off. And, of course, it didn't help that she felt rather guilty. They had entered *Blood Noir* thinking they were going to protect her, and they had ended up bespelled by the master vampire. To add insult to injury, they knew that something had happened. It was impossible not to. Savior's scent clung to her skin. Even Danny could smell him, the unmistakable cool and lovely aroma that could only belong to Savior. One might expect the smell of death, for he was a master vampire, but one would be wrong. Savior Knight did not smell of death. He smelled of ... power ... energy and all things cool and comforting.

Why? Why did he smell like this to her? Why did she still long for him? Danny clenched her jaw tight. Just thinking of him made her wet. She could feel herself grow damp and aroused.

You will long for me ... as I long for you. It can be no other way. No other way for us now.

Danny jerked. There it was again, the voice in her head. She really needed to get some rest. She was starting to freak herself out. She didn't want to think too hard on the voice. Because it was a familiar voice ... a longed for voice. And she didn't want to know what that implied. Better to believe that she was just tired. All would be cured with a little sleep.

She groaned when her cell phone started ringing. She picked it up and spoke curtly into the phone. It was too damn early for pleasantries.

"Yeah?" Danny snapped.

"Dennison..." Danny inwardly screamed. Great, just great, this was just what she needed. "Alex, how nice to hear your voice."

"Don't lie to me, Dennison." Alex's voice was deceptively cool. She knew he was pissed. He was always royally pissed when his voice came out so calm and controlled. It meant he was barely holding onto his temper.

"What, you'd rather me tell you that you shouldn't fucking call so damn early in the morning?"

"Careful, Dennison, careful."

She counted to ten.

"I've had a very disturbing report sent my way."

Fuck. She had known this was coming. She hadn't expected Gregor and Victor to hide their whereabouts this eve from their Alpha. It irked her that they hadn't been able to keep their mouths shut. But she didn't blame them. No, she didn't blame them. They were Alex's wolves. And if he had found out they had kept things from him ... lord, the punishment would be severe ... terribly severe.

"Oh?" Danny kept her voice level.

“You went to a vampire bar tonight.”

“No, I went to a bar that caters to *Othersiders*. It just happens to be run by a vampire.”

“A master vampire,” Alex snapped.

“Yes. A master vampire.”

“And what did you and the master vampire do, Dennison?” Alex asked, a definite edge to his voice now.

“That is none of your business, Alex.”

“It is very much my business. You belong to me. You are my wolf.”

Danny wanted to tear into something. Her fury was building like a wild uncontrollable storm.

“I run now with your pack, Alex. I, however, do not, and will never, belong to you. Contract or no contract, I am my own person. I signed papers and gave you my talents for a specified duration. In turn you gave me a pack. But do not think for a moment that our contract binds me to you in any way. My life is my own and I do *not* answer to you.”

Danny swallowed. She could hear his heavy breathing on the other end and knew that she had pushed his beast—perhaps too far. She had questioned his authority—questioned it? No, she had downright squashed his authority. She had told him that he was her Alpha but had given his Alpha status little to no sway over her life. It wasn’t all true. As her Alpha he played a huge part in her life but Danny knew that she could not let him forget that she was also *magi* and maker of her own destiny. She was born with dual natures and she could not let him think by controlling one part of her, he controlled all of her. It would never be that way. She would never let it be that way.

“You allowed the dead to touch you,” he growled.

Danny sighed. “Again, it’s none of your business, Alex.”

There was a pregnant pause. She was certain he was striving to get his wolf under control.

And then the other shoe dropped.

“Draco has petitioned for you,” Alex said.

What? That made no sense. Danny was astounded. Never in a million years had she actually imagined that Draco would petition for her. They had fucked, yes. But that was all. There was nothing binding them together. She was a dominant. That was for certain. But there were other dominants out there. And Draco would not have trouble finding someone to take as mate.

No. It was crazy. “There has to be some mistake,” Danny bit out. There just had to be.

“There is no mistake. The Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan and I had an enlightening conversation, Dennison.”

Danny felt her headache coming back. Sometimes it sucked that her *magi* side was so strong. It made her feel human. Mortal, normal aches and pains were so much sharper than they should be.

“He was momentarily struck dumb,” Danny said finally.

Alex laughed, but it was a dry laugh, one without any humor to it. “Yes, I believe he was struck dumb, but it was no momentary thing. Draco is a sly wolf. He has watched you all these years, I am certain of that. He waited for the perfect opportunity and then...” Alex’s words trailed off.

Alex was echoing Danny's earlier thoughts. She, too, believed the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan had manipulated the situation. But she never would have believed that he would go so far as to petition for her.

"I will not go to him," Danny said coolly.

"I know." There was something hidden in his voice now and Danny wasn't sure if she liked it. "I know you won't. But depending on how far Draco pushes this ... there may be a challenge."

Damn pack politics. "Don't be stupid, Alex. There is no need for a challenge."

"That is where you're very much mistaken, Dennison. If Draco challenges me for you, then I will have to oblige him. I will not lose you."

"You're not going to lose me," Danny muttered. *You never had me to begin with.* But she didn't say the words. It wouldn't help now.

"No, you are right, I won't lose you." Alex sighed. "I can only hope that Draco will come to his senses and realize that this is a no-win situation. You are mine. You are contracted to the Striker Clan and you cannot for any reason change clans now. He cannot have you..." Alex laughed bitterly, "...he cannot have more than your body."

Danny closed her eyes. He knew. It was obvious that Alex knew all. Draco had most certainly told him. Alex knew that she had slept with the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan.

"A momentary lapse of sanity," Danny muttered under her breath.

"Yes, it was," Alex murmured.

Danny wrinkled her nose. Of course he would have heard her. Wolves had extraordinary hearing.

"Some of the blame must be put on my shoulders," Alex said. And his words surprised Danny. Alex taking the blame for anything, it just didn't happen. "I should have taken you before you left. If I had planted my seed in your body, then your beast would not have raged as it did. You would not have been so tempted to have the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan."

Trust Alex and his monstrous ego. Danny sighed. God, he was so full of himself. And she hated the fact that he was partly correct. She had been on edge, and her beast needed to feed. It was only testimony to her great strength and sheer force of will that she hadn't taken a lesser wolf. That first day, when her lust was upon her like a clenching hand and she had seen Gregor and Victor, she had wanted to take them—hard. She had felt their call and it took great strength to keep from devouring them. Of course, it was that very need to eat, to gorge, to feast, that had kept Danny from either Gregor or Victor. They were not Alpha. They could not have controlled her beast or helped her control her beast, if she had fucked either one of them. And in the throes of her lust, she would have been tempted, very tempted to actually feed—to rip their flesh from their bones, and to devour them whole.

No. Draco had been the only Alpha in attendance. And as much as she hated her lack of control, allowing him to take her on his desk, she had needed it. Sex with Draco had taken the intensity out of her lust and calmed her raging beast. And because he was Alpha they were able to feed the lust only ... and keep their flesh attached firmly to their bodies.

"I would not have fucked you, Alex," Danny said. It was true. It didn't matter how bad the blood and lust roared, she would not have slept with Alex before she left Striker Clan. To fuck Alex, even to sate the need of her beast, was to add another bar to the prison.

Danny had learned the hard way what that meant. She would not go back to that confined space again.

"I would not have given you a choice," Alex said, voice hard.

She felt cold invade her body at his words. If he had kept her long enough, restrained her and sedated her, perhaps, and if she had not broken free from her struggles, then eventually her beast would have given in. She had denied the animal in her too long, that yes, she would have begged him to take her.

"Then it's a good thing I didn't give you the opportunity," Danny said.

"Will you think that when Draco comes to challenge? Will you think that when he tries to gut me in the ring? Tell me, Dennison ... is a life with me ... such a terrible fate? Would you rather have the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan? Do you believe he will give you more freedom?"

Danny swallowed—hard. Neither. She would have neither. Both would be a slow death to her freedom.

"Your stubbornness will be the death of me, Dennison," Alex said finally.

Yeah, yeah, she had heard it before. But if Alex wanted her to be the death of him, he'd better get in line.

"Was there anything else you wanted to tell me?" Danny felt her fatigue as a hard tangible thing.

"Only that you and I will have a talk when you return to Striker."

Well, that certainly wasn't a surprise. "All right, then. We'll have a talk. But I can't guarantee that it'll be a pleasant one, Alex."

"Oh, I guarantee it'll be wholly unpleasant, Dennison, my dear." And with those ominous words, he hung up.

* * * *

She couldn't stop the groan as she felt hands, strong and insistent upon her body. They were kneading, caressing, and driving her into a fine frenzy. She wanted more. And just like that, a mouth joined the hands. She felt lips on her breasts and a tongue, rough and yet deliciously languid and soft, against her flesh.

She grew wet.

Danny squirmed. Her heart was pounding and her legs parted on their own accord. She moaned when she felt that wonderful mouth on her thighs, nipping, taunting. It was too much ... and it wasn't enough.

"Oh yes," Danny cried out. She arched against that phantom mouth.

So fine ... so beautiful ... you taste incredible.

She closed her eyes tightly. That mouth was delving deeply into her pussy now. Her body was on fire.

The voice speaking to her was beautiful ... and familiar. She felt as if the voice was caressing every part of her body.

She needed more.

She needed to feel his lips on her neck. She needed to feel his fangs piercing her skin ... *his fangs piercing her skin?*

Danny sat straight up in bed. She pushed her damp hair away from her face and shook her head. Okay. Okay. That was a really weird dream, a really weird erotic dream.

Getting out of bed, Danny stumbled into the bathroom. Her head felt fuzzy. She

stared at her reflection in the mirror and squinted. She looked a little pale. Well, she was always pale, but she looked even paler than usual. Same arched brows, bow mouth and slanted cheekbones. Same toffee-colored eyes and long dark hair...

What the hell?

She cocked her head to one side and looked at her neck. The skin was completely unblemished except ... except for the bit of raised flesh right below her ear. It wasn't quite a wound, but it was definitely ... strange. The flesh appeared slightly puckered and was a dusky rose in color.

Danny narrowed her eyes and ran her hand over the puckered flesh. It didn't hurt. But it tingled under her touch.

"No," she whispered. "No, no..." She couldn't even begin to contemplate *that* idea. There was no way ... she would have remembered, right? She would have remembered something like that.

But the voice, and the dream, and the strange sensations that were flooding her body ... it didn't add up, unless...

"Oh God." She quickly splashed some cold water over her face. "It's going to be okay, Danny. It's fine. You're probably just imagining things. You don't know it is *that* yet. It could be anything ... it could be a mosquito bite." Danny knew how ridiculous that notion was the moment she uttered it. But she was desperately trying to explain the strange mark on her skin away. She had to find a rational explanation. She just had to.

She quickly slipped into a pair of jeans and a ratty old t-shirt. She had to get some breakfast. Things would be clearer after she ate. Yes, they would be clearer.

* * * *

Shoving a mouthful of oatmeal into her mouth, Danny stiffened when she saw who had just entered the diner, where she was trying to have an uninterrupted breakfast.

"Please tell me that you are having more than just gruel for breakfast," Draco drawled, collapsing his tall frame into the stool next to her. He hailed the waitress. "Coffee, black, and the breakfast special with a side of hash, thank you."

Danny took another spoon of oatmeal. "Well, doesn't look like you'll be starving," she snapped.

"You need to eat more, Dennison. You are still ... healing," Draco said.

"Don't..." she gritted her teeth, "...I mean it. We're not going there."

Draco regarded her with a thoughtful expression on his handsome face. "You hide it as if it is something to be ashamed of, Dennison. But it is a mark of valor, a true testimony to your strength and power. You ... you somehow found a way to rid yourself of the taint, and at great expense to your personal health. You should be proud."

"Woo-hoo," Dennison spat out, "let's break out the champagne and celebrate." Danny placed her spoon down. She had suddenly lost her appetite. "Draco, it is not something I wish to revisit. I've been there, done that ... I want to move on."

Draco's eyes were probing, filled with dark meaning. "But you aren't moving on, Dennison." He placed his hand over hers. "Do you not wish to truly move on? I can help you. I can help your future."

She pulled her hand out of his grasp, ignoring the tightening of his eyes and the stiffening of his shoulders. "You think you can help me move on by petitioning my Alpha for me?"

“Ah, you’ve spoken to Alex.”

“Yes, I’ve spoken to Alex. Tell me, Draco, is what he told me true? Did you really petition him for me?”

“I have followed all protocol,” Draco said coolly.

“That doesn’t answer my question.” Danny stared him down.

Draco met her gaze unflinchingly. His power rose to meet hers. It was tentative at first, and then more demanding. “What would you like to hear, Dennison?” he asked quietly.

“The truth, Draco, how about the truth?”

“The truth then.” Draco leaned toward her. “The truth is that you will not find a better mate for you than me. Our beasts meet one another. They recognize one another. You are strong and powerful, and you will need ... want a mate that will match that strength and power. I will give you all that and more.” His eyes seemed to burn with an inner fire. “All you have to do is...”

“Bind myself to you, forever,” Danny spat out. She squared her shoulders. “No, that is not the life I envision for myself, Draco.”

“The life you envision for yourself?” Draco hissed. “You are wolf. Do you understand that, Dennison? You are wolf. You need a mate. You will not survive without one.”

“I am also *magi*,” Danny said quietly. She would use her *magi* nature to suppress the wolf nature long enough for her to get her libido under control. She would not fall under the spell that so many of her sister wolves did; become a slave to the desires of the beast. She would not fall into a mindless rut. And she would not bind herself to someone just because her animal seemed to demand it.

She had never understood. And she would never would. She would never deem it acceptable ... the fact that a she-wolf had to mate or perish. A she-wolf was either too submissive to last without a male. Or she was too dominant. In such a case, her beast would override her humanity and she would lose herself in her animal nature forever.

No. It was unacceptable. And someday, Danny would find the answer. She would find the answer, and she would free herself and her sister wolves.

“Magic will not save you from this, Dennison. This is nature. This is the way of the wolf. You have fought it well, up to now. But do you truly believe that you can continue to fight it? Would you not rather have the choice the choice to have me ... have me and my pack? Do you truly want to risk the chance of rutting with some strange Alpha? Or, worse still, some lesser wolf? For that is the risk you run with your reckless nature and your disregard for your well being.”

Danny felt a tight fist take hold of her heart. This, this is what she had been fighting all these many years. This was the reason she had done all that she had done to free herself of Alex and the clan. She was nothing but a pawn to be used in Alex’s eyes, in Draco’s eyes. It didn’t matter that she was a dominant wolf. It didn’t matter that she was a power unto her own. She would always be *less* in their eyes. Pack politics ... she would never escape pack politics. First Alex, and now Draco. Both were vying for her body, for the status she would bring them. But neither one of them was vying for *her*. Neither one of them really knew who she was.

She did have some tender feelings for Alex. She had known him a long time and he was part of her childhood. After the Grand Dame Roberta had finished training her,

Danny had moved onto Alex's pack, she had joined the Striker Clan. It was instantaneous, the attraction ... the pull of power between Alex and herself. There was no denying that Danny and Alex's beasts recognized one another. But just as obvious as their mutual attraction, was the fact that Alex was too Alpha to ever let Danny be both *magi* and wolf. She knew that he would have eventually tried to crush that which made her unique. And she had to get out.

And now ... here she was ... back at the beginning. Oh, the players were different, but the game was the same.

Draco ... again, her beast felt his call. He was, just as he said, a truly powerful Alpha, an Alpha that any she-wolf would be proud to call mate. But Danny had been down this road before and she knew that Draco was too similar to Alex. He would never allow her the freedom that she desired ... no, needed, to survive.

She would rather take her chance with her beast's raging lust than to bind herself forever to a wolf who would squash her soul.

"I would urge you to drop this, Draco," Danny said quietly, firmly. "For it matters little, petition, or no petition ... challenge or no challenge. I will never come to you. You risk much ... for nothing."

Draco smiled a cool smile. "I don't consider you to be nothing, Dennison."

"You risk..."

"It's a risk I am willing to take." Draco's eyes were hot and his voice firm and resolute.

Danny prayed for patience and fortitude. God save her and give her the strength to deal with stubborn wolves.

"It won't happen, Draco, it won't happen." Danny allowed him to see the truth of her words in her eyes, and hear her conviction in the depths of her voice.

* * * *

She needed to find Daniel. And she needed to get the hell out of this place. Danny did not like the "hot seat" anymore. She checked her supply bag hurriedly. She needed a couple more charms, and it wouldn't hurt to have a few holy relics. She wasn't sure exactly what she was going to need ... or how much. But it was better to be safe than sorry.

Walking through the door of *Great Expectations*, Danny immediately went to the case that housed the charms. She nodded. Yeah, she could work with this.

"Dennison." Eloise, face flushed, came rushing over. Her hands were stained and her face smudged, but she was still lovely. "How nice to see you." Eloise took in Danny's appearance, and her hand clutched tightly around her supply bag, and her face went somber. "You are headed to the south side?"

Danny nodded. "It's time. I can't put it off. I'm not going to learn any more than I know now. I may as well give it the good ol' college try."

"I do not like it," Eloise said softly. "I have a bad feeling."

"Yeah, I do too, Eloise. But I don't have a choice. I have to find him. And the longer I wait..." She dropped her head. "He's not dead, but who knows what they have done to him?" Danny tried to bank down the guilt. She had already wasted so much time trying to get her own shit together.

"Visit Sabine," Eloise said finally.

Danny frowned.

Eloise nodded. "She ... she's very strong, Dennison. She knows things. I think she would be able to help you."

Danny took a deep breath. She was used to doing things alone. But perhaps it was time she accepted that she may need a little help. There were too many unknowns in this situation. And the job just kept getting bigger, what with Savior's vampires to locate and retrieve now. It couldn't hurt to contact the powerful *Airok*. "Do you know how I can get in touch with her?"

Eloise nodded. She quickly scrawled Sabine's name and number on a piece of paper and handed it to Danny. Her eyes were tremulous when she spoke. "You will need help before this is done, Dennison. That too, I feel."

* * * *

Sabine lived in a lovely Victorian house just three blocks off Main Street. Danny let her gaze roam over the hanging ferns and lovely blue shutters. When she reached the porch she was instantly besieged by a powerful ward.

Danny gritted her teeth and forced herself to move forward. She used the knocker to knock soundly on Sabine's door.

Sabine answered promptly. Her face was wreathed in a welcoming smile.

"Please, come in, Danny."

Danny walked into the house. Sabine's lovely floral scent wafted over to Danny.

"I am sorry about the ward. You just never know who is coming to visit. I always prefer to be prepared."

"Of course." Danny nodded, already feeling better. The moment she stepped into the house the attack had stopped. Her equilibrium was better and she didn't feel queasy any longer.

Sabine led her into a large sitting room. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Water is fine."

Sabine nodded and began to pour some ice water from a delicate floral print pitcher into a lovely glass. She handed the glass to Danny.

"You've come because you've decided to venture into the south side?" Sabine asked, taking a seat across from Danny.

"Yes. It's time. I have to find my brother."

"Of course, of course you do. I would like to share some spells with you, Danny."

She was surprised. *Airok's* rarely shared power. And spells were power. "Thank you." It was all she could think of to say.

"I have some that I believe may work on fairies. Of course I've never actually had the opportunity to test them on actual subjects, so..."

"So, if they totally go bust, don't blame you," Danny said with a small smile. "I won't. Don't worry. I just appreciate you giving them to me in the first place." Danny took a sip of water. "May I ask you something personal, Sabine?"

Sabine nodded.

"Have you ... uh ... seen something ... something that perhaps I haven't seen?" Danny rolled her eyes. "Okay, that came out awkward."

"Are you asking if I have seer abilities?"

"Yeah, I guess I am."

Sabine shook her head. "I'm no seer. Just a modest *Airok*."

Danny cleared her throat. Her eyes took Sabine in from perfect head to painted toes. "Somehow I really doubt that."

Sabine laughed, and then her expression turned somber. "I have been gathering some spells since learning that you planned to go to the south side. They are strong. But I have a feeling you will be able to handle them."

It was time to ask the hard questions. "Sabine ... what do you know about the Fae?"

Sabine shut down completely. She dampened her power. And her face went completely blank.

"Sabine?" Danny cursed her stupidity. She shouldn't have asked. Of course she never knew when to stop, did she? She just kept going and going. And eventually she ended up sticking her foot in her mouth.

"They are elemental creatures," Sabine said finally. She had clasped her hands together and lowered her eyes. Her voice was quiet and firm. "The Fae are creatures of myth and legend."

"So are werewolves, vampires and witches," Danny said with a small smile.

"Indeed. But the Fae are ... more."

Danny nodded. Yes, she was going to have to be prepared. She didn't know enough about the Fae. She was going to have to make sure her supplies were stocked and her spells were handy.

"Come." Sabine stood and motioned for Danny to follow her. She led Danny into a large atrium. It was cool and beautiful, filled with flowers, herbs and lovely trees.

"This is extraordinary," Danny murmured in awe.

"It is my favorite place in the house." Sabine sifted her hand through some soil and smiled.

"I can see why." Danny breathed in the cool air. It smelled alive in here.

Sabine handed her a small jar of what looked like tarragon. "I want you to have this, as well as the spells, *Esmereth* leaves. They burn—badly."

"I've never heard of *Esmereth* before." Danny was slightly annoyed, mainly at her ignorance. She prided herself on her knowledge of plants and herbs.

"It is not commonly known, but it is effective. It burns quite badly. And when mixed with other corrosives..." Sabine's smile turned cold, and sinfully evil, "...can be very damaging."

Danny swallowed hard. Wow. She really would not want to meet this suddenly very scary woman in a dark alley.

* * * *

The south side was on the fringe of town. Shrouded in a strange mist, it looked like a ghost town of old.

Danny felt the familiar pull of magic the moment she began to walk down the cobblestones. The scent was strange here. Goosebumps broke out upon her skin and she knew why the *Othersiders* did not want to enter the south side. She had been here barely five minutes and she was already getting the creeps. The stores and shops seemed deserted, the streetlights were dim and eerie, and the mist was growing steadily with each step that she took.

"Damn, but we're not in Kansas anymore," Danny muttered. She really wished that

she could take wolf form but she needed her *magi* abilities more. She also needed to keep a firm grip on her supplies.

"We do not see your kind here often." The voice came from Danny's left. She spun around ... there was nothing, no one there. "You are a pretty one, a very pretty one."

Narrowing her eyes, Danny held back a snarl. Okay. Now she was just getting pissed off. "Is there a *reason* you're trying to freak me out? And, just to let you know ... it's not working." Danny gasped as an icy chill blasted her skin. She blinked as the air in front of her seemed to bend and sway and then, amazingly, take form.

And, just like that, there was a woman standing in front of her. "Out for a jaunt?" the woman asked. There was a sly smile on her face.

"Thought I'd get some fresh air," Danny quipped. She let her gaze roam over the woman standing in front of her. She was lovely, in an ethereal way. Her face was overly delicate; each brow, slant of cheek, pursed lip was light and sweet and impressively pretty. Danny sniffed and frowned deeply. "What are you?"

"How rude, sniffing me already ... and we haven't even been properly introduced."

She snorted. "I think the proper introductions were busted the second you materialized in front of me."

The woman laughed, it was like a tinkling of silver bells. "Oh yes, we certainly do not see your kind here often." She glided forward, feet hardly touching the ground. "Name?"

"Yeah," Danny snapped.

The woman's face tightened. She obviously didn't possess a sense of humor. "I take it you have one?"

"Danny, Danny Lee."

"What a strange name. Is that truly a fitting name for a female these days?"

Danny gritted her teeth. "My birth name is Dennison."

The woman sniffed indelicately. "That is hardly better."

She was getting fed up with this.

"I am Etheara Taunein." The woman announced her name as if Danny ought to recognize it.

"And you're making fun of *my* name?" Danny hissed when the air turned colder still, and her skin began to freeze.

"Do not test my patience."

"No, I don't think you should test mine," Danny snapped. Her power poured forth and she could feel heat rising in her energy-ridden body.

Etheara's eyes widened and her mouth dropped open. She just stared at Danny.

Danny managed to look bored. "I have places to go ... people to see. Mind telling me why I should bother with you?"

Etheara's throat worked back and forth. Her pretty eyes seemed to bug out of her face. Danny thought she looked absolutely ridiculous—like a puppet when you pulled its strings, its features twisted in a funny manner.

"Have you no fear?"

"Not much." Okay. She had lots of fears. But none that she was willing to share with this wack job.

"Theraline will want to meet with you."

Oh yes, she definitely wanted to meet Theraline.

“You’ve intrigued me. You will certainly do the same for her.” Etheara said.

“Glad that I amuse you so. But like I said, I’m a busy girl. I don’t have time to go to tea parties thrown by psychopaths.”

Etheara’s pretty face whitened in anger. Her eyes, and then her entire body, began to glow brightly. There was a great shimmer of energy radiating from her slim frame, and then *whoosh*, power ... power everywhere.

“You. Will. Come!”

Danny gasped. She felt Etheara’s power score her skin like razor blades. It was shockingly painful. Her vision swam and her head suddenly felt murky and hazy. A pounding headache rocked her and she fought to stay standing.

She closed her eyes and focused, concentrating on evening out her own power and wrapping it around her like a comforting blanket. She imagined thick protective barriers that stood against attack, and sighed when the nausea subsided and her headache became less and less painful.

Her eyes snapped open. “Is that all you’ve got?” Danny thrust out her hand and watched with satisfaction as Etheara flew back. It irked her to see how quickly Etheara got up after she had attacked her. She prepared herself for another attack on Etheara’s part.

“Theraline will most certainly wish to see you now,” Etheara murmured thoughtfully. She wasn’t making a move toward Danny. Danny could see her power, like rippling waves around her, nice and contained.

Danny still felt defiant. “Oh, yeah, and I definitely want to follow the woman that just tried to kill me.”

“If I had wanted to kill you ... you would already be dead. Now, you will come with me and meet my mistress.” Etheara held up her hand when Danny would have argued. “Else you risk her ire, and you will never see the return of your errant wolf.”

Danny blanched.

“Ah, good, now I have your attention.” Etheara turned and began to walk slowly into the mist. She seemed to dissolve right before Danny’s stunned eyes. “Just come, follow me, the shroud will not hurt you.”

Danny swallowed. And she followed Etheara into the rising fog.

* * * *

It was green, lush and beautiful. Danny could see nothing but sweeping hills and soft rolling valleys. She could scent flowers everywhere, and heard the bubbling of water nearby. She felt as if she had just stepped onto some movie set.

“What is this place?”

“Home,” Etheara said simply, beckoning for Danny to follow her. Just beyond a grove of stately trees there was a house. Personally, Danny thought it looked like the house of candy and gingerbread that the witch lived in from Hansel and Gretel.

“Just exactly where are we?” Danny tried not to gag as the scent of roses became overwhelming. She liked roses, but this was ridiculous. It was like someone had just doused themselves in rose water from L’Occitane.

“We are still on your plane. In fact, we are still in the south side.” Etheara opened the door to the large gingerbread house and walked through.

“*Riiiiight...*” Danny frowned when she saw the inside of the house. It was just a

weird as the outside. It was like a Dali painting on a good day. Streams of mismatched colors streaked the walls and rugs, and furnishings from all periods were scattered about. And there were knick-knacks everywhere. Little dolls and porcelain figurines, music boxes, wind chimes and a ton of other such crap lined the walls and sat in cases or were propped up in chairs and couches.

It was the strangest thing that Danny had ever seen—okay, one of the strangest things she had ever seen.

Etheara led her into a large room. In the far corner of the room there sat a woman with long blonde hair. She was watching a TV with a very big screen. Danny thought it could be plasma. And it was tuned into the ... Home Shopping Network?

“Thea, be a dear and fetch my other credit card,” the woman called out over her shoulder.

Etheara rolled her eyes and just like that, she was off. Danny stood, stiff as a statue watching this woman watch TV.

“In five minutes comes my favorite part,” the woman said, still facing the television. “Dolls. I think they are having a sale on Madame Alexander dolls today. Or, at least that’s what is scheduled. Sometimes they make last minute changes. I don’t usually mind, except when it’s to sell luggage, or something useless like that. Oh, do come and have a seat ... do you like dolls?”

Danny wasn’t sure if this weirdo was talking to her. But since she was the only one in the room...

Walking over, she took a seat next to the woman in a large overstuffed chair. She had been right. The nut was watching the Home Shopping Network.

“Dolls. I asked you, do you like dolls?” The woman turned her head toward Danny, then. She was beautiful, easily one of the prettiest women that Danny had ever seen. She had a timeless face. You know, one of those faces where the person could be twenty-five or forty-five ... you’re not exactly certain. Her eyes were a light blue and her complexion was a perfect peaches and cream. She had a cupid bow mouth and finely arched brows. Her hair was sunflower yellow and fell in loose waves over her shoulders to rest at her tiny waist.

Danny shrugged. “Never really gave it much thought, to be honest.”

The woman gasped. “Never gave it much thought? Oh my, then you haven’t been watching enough HSN or QVC.”

“Nope, can’t say that I have.”

“Oh, well, we can remedy that. I used to watch a lot more QVC, but then they started featuring more jewelry...” the woman’s nose pinched, “...and I don’t have much use for store bought jewelry ... especially when I can always just conjure up my own. So I switched to HSN, and now I’m ever so happy. Oh...” her smile widened, “...Thea, do you have my card?”

Etheara appeared over the woman’s shoulder and handed her two pieces of plastic.

“Goodie.” The woman clapped her hands, she actually clapped her hands.

“Do you need anything else, mistress?”

The woman shook her head. “No, no, you can leave us, Thea. My guest and I need to have a little chat ... oh, and shop. I love how you can shop through the TV here. It was such a lovely, lovely, surprise.” Her eyes twinkled merrily. “I mean ... shopping through the TV, how wonderful...”

Etheara left the room.

"Now..." the woman turned those magnificent blue eyes onto Danny, "...before the really good dolls are featured, we should have our little chat." She smiled. "I'm Theraline."

Danny nodded slowly. "Sort of figured that one out already."

"Wonderful. It's always nice to have the introductions over with." Theraline's eyes flicked back to the TV, and, convinced she wasn't missing anything, she turned back to Danny. "I'd like to know why there seems to be an infestation of wolves lately."

"Excuse me?"

Theraline's eyes went hard and flat in a second and suddenly she no longer looked like a sprightly milkmaid. She looked like a really scary sorority chick—on crack—a sorority chick on crack who was ready to pounce on the competition for the attention of the star quarterback.

"Don't play dumb with me, you are obviously a wolf. I want to know why wolves are suddenly popping in and out of my territory."

Danny's eyes narrowed. "I was under the impression that this territory belonged to Alpha Draco and master vampire Savior Knight."

Theraline hissed. Her power surged forward and struck out. Danny could feel it like an icy cold hand that was trying to squeeze her heart and burst it.

"And I am to acknowledge those creatures as master?" Theraline spat out. She was still surrounded by an eerie glow that seemed to pulsate with each angry word she spoke.

"No," Danny murmured, "you're obviously not wolf, and you're not one of the undead. So you are not following either the Alpha or the master vampire's colors. But they are still Alpha and master of this territory. Who are you to say otherwise?" Danny knew she was getting herself deeper and deeper into trouble. She watched the swirling colors that entered Theraline's eyes.

"You consider my nature to be on the same level with those creatures of death?" Theraline hissed.

Danny assumed she was speaking of vampires. "Creature of death" was sort of a dead giveaway.

"You are Fae," Danny said simply.

Theraline narrowed her eyes. "I am. I am Fae, creature of light, of air, of elemental power. *We* move the realm as we wish. We are the essence of power."

Boy and was she obscenely arrogant. "You are an *other* creature, a creature with an *other* nature. What makes you so much better than the wolves or the vampire?"

Theraline gasped in outrage.

Danny thought on her next words. She didn't want there to be any misunderstanding about her position. "I didn't come here today to discuss the nature of the creatures of the *Otherside*. I also didn't come here to trade insults. Your..." Danny frowned, what exactly was Etheara's position in this household? "Your, uh, assistant approached me when I came to the south side. She spoke of an errant wolf. I'm assuming that you're speaking of a wolf that resembles myself?"

Theraline smiled then. "Indeed. A relation is he?"

"My brother." Danny swallowed. "I would like him back."

Theraline turned back to the TV, her eyes wide as saucers as she took in the parade of dolls.

“Oh, Donovan’s summer collection of dolls is remarkable. Just look at the workmanship ... look at the detail.” She picked up a phone and began to dial furiously. “Yes, I want item number 343598776Z. Yes, credit, my number is...”

Danny shook her head and tried to drone out Theraline’s voice. What was wrong with her? A fairy who was obsessed with QVC and dolls?

“And if I don’t want to give him back?”

Danny blinked. “Oh, are you back to talking to me?”

Theraline raised one of her eyebrows.

“I want to know why you felt the need to cut off his finger.” Danny tried to bank her fear down. “And I’d like to know if he’s ... if he’s ... okay. You haven’t taken anything else from him, have you?” Danny fingered the charm in her pocket and tried to resist the urge to throw it at Theraline and see if it worked.

“Your brother came into my territory to spy on me and mine,” Theraline drawled. “He received only what he deserved.”

It was awful. Danny fought down the nausea that rose at the image of Daniel’s finger lying amongst tissue paper in the pristine box. “And you felt that it was acceptable to take his finger?” She couldn’t help it, her voice rose steadily in anger. “He’s a wolf. You knew that. He can’t regenerate that finger. Not as it was done. You...” Danny clenched her hands into fists, “...you knew all of that, and you took it anyway. You’re nothing but a butcher.”

Theraline shrieked and jumped off the couch. “You know nothing ... nothing!”

Danny tried not to pull out any of her charms, or spells. It was difficult. She knew that Theraline was readying herself. She could see the evil intent on her face.

“Then tell me,” Danny said tightly. “Tell me.”

“And why should I?” That cruel smile was back on her beautiful face.

Danny cast her spell quickly. It settled upon Theraline like a heavy blanket. It was a spell of compulsion and Danny could see the change on her face. Theraline’s eyes seemed to soften along with the tightness of her mouth. She seemed confused, and suddenly a bit lost. It was difficult, but Danny continued to word the spell under her breath, keeping a tight rein on the threads. She couldn’t lose control, not even for one second. Theraline was strong, very strong, and she was fighting the compulsion spell with a fury that Danny had rarely seen.

“You *do* want to tell me,” Danny urged. She transferred the spell to her hands, and continued to weave the intricate threads.

“I...” Theraline frowned.

“Tell me about the wolf, tell me about Daniel.”

“He came under pretense,” Theraline murmured. Her eyes were glassy and she was twisting her hands. “Such a pretty wolf, too. Those lovely eyes and that amazing body.” Theraline smiled now.

Eeww. Danny did not need to hear that.

“But he was spying on me ... spying on my people. How dare he ... how dare he...” her voice dropped off and she blinked. The fog seemed to lift from her eyes and she began to struggle fiercely against the pull of the spell.

Danny felt it give. She wasn’t going to be able to hold it any longer. She quickly banked the spell. She didn’t want to add any more pressure, else the spell could implode and do a lot more damage than anticipated.

Theraline slashed her hand in the air and screamed, “Enough!” She threw some power forth and the air rippled with her fury.

Danny stumbled back and took a deep breath. All right. The Fae was probably pissed. Okay. She was probably really, really, pissed.

She blinked in surprise when Theraline began to laugh, laugh heartily. Okay. Now it was Danny’s turn to be confused. Hadn’t she just bespelled the temperamental Fae? Shouldn’t she be trying to kill her right about now?

“You are a surprising thing.” Theraline began to glow brilliantly, and like water over a sandbar, her glamour was stripped away, piece by bountiful piece. She stood, a shimmering being of light and beauty so deep that Danny had trouble staring at her directly.

This was the true Theraline, the Fae, the creature of elemental power and beauty. And she was extraordinary.

“You look like a neon light,” Danny snapped, holding one hand up to her eyes to shield herself from the painful glow.

The glow dissipated a little. “Is that better?”

“Yeah, a little.” Theraline was still a burning, brilliant thing, but now her glow wasn’t quite so agonizing.

“Not even Etheara would dare a spell on me.” Theraline regarded Danny quizzically. “But you ... you did, and with relish. It was good, too, very complete.”

“Thanks,” Danny said dryly.

“You’re *magi*.” Theraline narrowed her eyes. “But wolf.”

“Uh-huh, what keyed you in?”

“And you’re impertinent.”

“So I’ve been told.” Actually, Danny had heard worse, a lot worse.

“A *magi* wolf ... fascinating.” Theraline tossed her glittering mane of hair. It *was* quite literally glittering like a million stars tossed with moonshine. “I was unaware that this mundane plane could house such a unique creature.”

Was that a compliment? Danny didn’t think so—maybe a half compliment.

“It would be a shame to destroy one such as yourself.”

Destroy? Danny cleared her throat. Destroy? Oh fine, if the opportunity had presented itself Danny probably would have tried to destroy the nasty little fairy. So, she really couldn’t blame Theraline if she was thinking on the lines of destroying her.

Fuck that.

“Your brother is not *magi*,” Theraline murmured. “I would have known if he was.”

“No. He’s not *magi*.”

“He is not dead,” Theraline said bluntly.

Danny nodded. “I know.”

“I do not wish to destroy you, as I said, that would be a shame. You are quite unique. However ... your brother is another matter all together.”

Danny swallowed.

“You may see him if you’d like,” Theraline said finally.

She didn’t hesitate, but nodded. God. She was going to see Daniel. And if she saw him ... she could always come up with a plan to break him out. She just needed a little more time ... just a little more time to figure something out.

* * * *

Theraline opened a portal with ease. Danny couldn't help the bite of jealousy that surged through her. Opening portals wasn't the easiest of things to do. Danny could manage to open one, but it always drained her.

Theraline motioned to Danny. "Come."

Danny stepped through the portal and felt for a moment like she was submerged in water. She allowed herself to be swept away, and when she did, her heart began to beat regularly again and her eyes focused clearly.

"Welcome to T'herel Aannan, first court of the Fae." Theraline swept her arms out wide. There was pride on her face.

Danny looked around. Lord Almighty. She had never seen anything like this before. It was magic. The entire place was magic. She felt alive, so beautifully alive, and her entire being was swimming in happiness and joy.

"I can see by your face that you truly understand the magnificence of the realm."

"Why..." Danny swallowed. "Why would you want to leave this place?"

"I have used magic and glamour to mimic some of T'herel Aannan's beauty on your plane. I have managed to create the lushness and earthiness but have not been able to master nor find the exact lightness and beauty that T'herel Aannan is."

It was impossible. Danny shook her head. "You can't replicate this," she murmured. "It is how it *feels* ... you cannot mimic the feeling."

"You understand ... you do," Theraline said with a small enigmatic smile.

"No, I don't understand. Why ... why would you leave this place? Why would you try to replicate your realm on ours?"

"You are a unique creature ... tell me, what does it mean to be unique?" Theraline sighed. "Unique ... different ... loved by many, hated by many. I am not unique here. I am but one of many."

Danny frowned.

Theraline continued, speaking as she walked. "There are over ten courts of the Fae. T'herel Aannan is but one of the courtly realms. All of us wish to be in the inner circle, to be worthy of the attention of the royals. With so much competition it can get quite nasty ... messy ... bloody, in fact. Oh, we don't speak of it, to do so would be improper, but we all have indulged in it. Assassination. We tend to kill one another off."

Danny shook her head. Theraline spoke of murder as if they were taking Sunday tea. Her voice was light and breezy, and completely without remorse. It pointed to Danny's ignorance that Theraline's confession confused and angered her. Danny had always assumed that the Fae were ... well ... better than this. Oh, she knew that they were an arrogant race. How could they not be? They were a race that housed magic of epic proportion and wielded power beyond comprehension. But court politics that led to assassinations and murder? Lord ... it made Danny glad she only had the were pack's to deal with—sort of.

"Every thousand years or so I get quite tired of it all." Theraline pointed to a rocky patch on the ground. "Mind your step." Theraline stopped then and turned to face Danny. "This time I decided to try something new. I thought, why am I constantly battling for a piece of the cake when I can have the entire cake."

It hit Danny then. "You set up your own court."

"Exactly. It was quite simple. Dimensional portals are play to one such as myself. I found that your plane suited me quite well. And, it helps that humans are so easily

manipulated and glamour works so easily on them. It was the perfect place to set up my domain, and how lovely it has been to reign over such simple-minded creatures.”

Danny was horrified. And a little nauseated to boot. “This isn’t a game, these are people’s lives you’re toying with, their minds. You can’t just open and close portals at will and jump around dimensions as if you’re popping bonbon’s. How egomaniacal are you?”

“Careful ... I still have something you want,” Theraline hissed.

“Yes, you do.” Danny was so beyond pissed. “But he doesn’t belong to me. He’s not a toy, any more than the humans that you’ve been fucking around with are. Has it ever occurred to you the reason you have a court system is because you’re supposed to stay in court?” She screamed that last part.

Theraline began to pulsate again.

Danny had seen the show before. It wasn’t scaring her now.

After a long minute, Theraline spoke. Her voice was chilly and matter-of-fact.

“Athawine has been watching over your brother for me.”

They stopped when they reached a large hill. Theraline whispered a couple of words, words that Danny didn’t understand, and the front part of the hill completely opened.

“Come with me. It is not much further now.” They walked through the opening into a cavernous pit of black. Theraline waved her hand and instantly the inside of the tunnel was illuminated by soft light.

“I do not wish you to be startled over your brother’s appearance. He is fine, quite resilient.”

Danny began to growl.

Theraline sighed. “He entered my territory. He was insolent, brash and completely without manners. It was within my right to punish him as I saw fit. Here, we’re here.” Theraline pressed her hand against the door and just like that, it swung open.

She saw him immediately. “Oh, lord!” Danny choked, rushing forward. Daniel was chained to the wall. Heavy silver manacles encircled his wrists, ankles and bisected his middle. His long hair was stringy and hanging in dirty strands against his pale face. His normally stocky frame was now painfully thin and his breath was shallow. “Daniel ... Daniel ... can you hear me?”

“He is a little sedated,” Theraline said casually.

Danny whirled furiously around to face her. “What the hell did you do to him? You’re a monster.”

“He came with a plan of seduction.” Theraline spoke with absolutely no inflection. “But when that failed ... he had no backup plan. He tried to seduce one of my ladies, and he was rather unhappy when he found out that we knew he was using us. He thought he had been so clever. Sadly, this wolf is not the smartest one of the bunch.”

“You tortured him,” Danny whispered, beside herself. She wanted to cry when she saw his beautiful hand missing a pinkie. “You tortured him and then cut off his finger.” She leaned in closely to her brother. “Daniel, darling, can you hear me? I’m here ... your sister is here.”

Daniel lifted his head. His eyes were unfocused and he swallowed convulsively. “Dennison?”

Danny smiled reassuringly. She felt tears, hot and wet running down her cheeks. “Yes, darling, it’s me. It’s going to be all right. I’m getting you out of here. I am.” She

whirled to face Theraline. "I want him unchained, NOW!" Danny harnessed her power, drawing it to her hands, readying herself.

Theraline smiled, it was a chilly smile. "Stand down, *magi* wolf. I have stated a desire *not* to kill you. That doesn't mean I won't change my mind." Theraline cocked her head. "Athawine, Athawine, to my side."

A tall, slender, beautiful man materialized at Theraline's side. He had a mane of beautiful blond hair and his eyes were like the calm after the storm. He and Theraline were so similar in appearance they could be siblings.

"Mistress?" His voice was musical, soothing, beautiful. Danny felt the pull of that voice, as she felt the pull of Theraline's voice. She strengthened her resistance, making sure her barriers were doubly fortified. She wasn't about to take any chances. Not while she was in the company of two strong Fae.

"Remove the chains."

"Mistress, I don't think..."

"Yes, don't think!" Theraline snapped. "Do it. Remove the chains. Do not make me ask again."

Athawine scowled. And suddenly Danny didn't think him nearly as beautiful as he was before.

Athawine came to Daniel's side. He touched the chains, and they evaporated. When he moved back, Danny could see that his hands were red and raw.

Theraline shrugged when she saw Danny's face. She knew that Danny was looking at Athawine's hands.

"The chains were silver," Theraline said simply.

Of course, silver affected the Fae. Danny clenched her jaw and reached out to catch Daniel as he fell. She lowered him to the ground and stroked his matted hair. Oh, God. She just had to remember ... he was alive. Thank the stars, he was alive.

"There will be no lasting effects," Theraline said. "He is a wolf and will heal. You should be thanking me. He was much safer here than he would have been running around the realm."

Danny glowered at her. She wanted to kill her. She wanted to rip out her cold, unfeeling heart and watch her intestines spill to the ground. She wanted to see her on the ground, writhing...

"I would urge you not to try anything..." Theraline's eyes glittered dangerously and she smiled. "I would really urge you not to try anything. Have I not already shown my good will? I have freed your ill-behaved brother. I could easily have kept him ... although I admit, he was losing his appeal and I have other things to do."

Danny strengthened her hold on her brother. He was straining to get free. His arms were reaching for Theraline and Athawine. He was mewling like a small animal and had begun to claw at Danny.

"Daniel, Daniel, my love, stop ... it's all right. You're free ... you're free now." She pulled him closer still. "Please, stop ... it's me."

"He is Fae struck," Theraline said. "Do not worry, it will eventually wear off."

Of course. Damn Fae magic. Danny quickly wove a spell of obedience, and she thrust it into Daniel. He didn't struggle. He didn't have the strength to stand against her ... he never had. Almost immediately his eyes began to droop and he slumped into her embrace. She stood, pulled her brother up, and tossed him over her shoulder. Thank

goodness for super wolf strength.

"I'm taking my brother home now." Danny glared at Theraline and Athawine, as if daring them to try to stop her.

Theraline nodded curtly. "You are welcome to him. I am finished with him now. He would have been released sooner if one had but asked for him. And perhaps brought me tribute. I am rather upset that no one has brought me tribute."

Danny began to walk toward the door. "You are the one who has set up court in territory not belonging to you. If anyone should be bringing tribute, it's you."

"Bring tribute to monsters?" Theraline shrieked. Her eyes began to glow. "We were beings of tremendous power, beauty and magic, when those creatures ... those monsters were just crawling out from the underworld. We owe them nothing!"

Danny's gaze was unwavering as she continued to stare Theraline down. "Be that as it may, their underworld is *our* underworld. Your place is not on our world. You know it, I know it, and *they* know it. If you chose that path then you are trespassing. And it is you that owe the fealty. Otherwise..." Danny swallowed, "...otherwise you risk war."

"They would not dare come against us," Theraline said, her low voice deceptively calm. Danny knew that the rage was there just below the surface.

"I think you underestimate them ... in fact, I know you underestimate them. You have power, yes, but so do they. And your arrogance ... it will be your undoing." Danny stiffened. "I'm ready to go now." She tightened her grip on her brother. "We're ready to go now."

Theraline gave a slight nod. "Then let us go."

"Yeah." Danny exhaled. "Let's."

Chapter Five

Danny walked down the familiar cobblestone and ignored the mist that swirled at her feet. She was focused on leaving the south side as soon as possible, needing to get her brother someplace safe, someplace where he could heal.

The moment that Theraline, Danny, and Daniel had exited the portal, they were back in that beautiful field, surrounded by blooming flowers and breathing the freshest and cleanest air ever. Theraline hadn't tried to keep them, nor had she stood in their way when Danny had begun to walk away ... walk away from it all.

Danny, carrying her brother, had cleared the field and Theraline's odd gingerbread house, and were immediately back on the cobblestone, walking through the deserted village.

Daniel began to stir, and Danny pushed a little bit more of her power into him. She hated to do it but she had to keep him sedated and still, so she didn't risk injuring him more.

"Hey, beautiful, can I give you a ride?"

Danny smiled when she saw Gregor's head sticking out of a familiar black SUV. "We would love a ride, thank you." She placed Daniel gently in the backseat of the car and folded herself into the passenger seat next to Gregor.

"You did it," Gregor said quietly, eyes fixed on the road.

"Yeah. But not soon enough ... not soon enough."

Gregor sighed. "Don't do that ... don't beat yourself up. You found him, Dennison, no one else, just you." Gregor frowned. "Not that I liked your plan any; you should have taken us. That's what we're here for, your protection. That's why Alex sent us with you."

"They would not have let me get as far as I did if you had been with me, Gregor. In fact ... I think she would have killed you."

"Who?"

"I'm not talking about it."

Gregor sighed. "All right. I'll accept that, but I don't think Alex will."

"I'll deal with Alex when the time is right."

"Yeah, I think you will..." Gregor let out a deep breath, "...but you *will* deal with him, you *will* deal with him."

Danny wished that didn't sound so damn ominous.

* * * *

He was so hot. His face was unnaturally flushed. Danny drew the damp cloth across her brother's brow. She caressed his sweaty cheek and continued to sing to him.

"Mother ... mother used to sing that song." Daniel's voice came out harsh and hoarse.

Danny nodded. "Shhhh ... don't talk, darling. You're safe."

"She sang that song ... when ... when ... she still wanted us. She sang that song."

Familiar anger surged through her. It was true. Their mother had sung the song to them when they were little. It was her favorite, a lovely lullaby that she remembered from

her own childhood, or so she had claimed. But it was over all too soon. Their mother had quickly come to the conclusion that her children were nuisances and she could ill afford any distractions. She had sent them away, and the music had stopped ... the lullaby had ceased and Danny and her brother had never heard it again.

"Why..." Daniel's voice came out stronger now, "...why did you do it?"

Danny frowned. "Daniel..."

"No, I want to know. Why did you do it? Why did you take me from them?"

"What?" Danny drew back. "Daniel ... they tortured you. They..."

"—are beautiful and good and so full of power." Daniel's eyes lit up. "They are like paradise ... being with them is paradise. But you..." his eyes were now malevolent, "...you wouldn't understand that. You wouldn't know. You're jealous. You have always been jealous of me. And now ... now this. You couldn't stand that I had them and that you didn't. You had to take me away from them."

Danny felt pain, horrible wrenching pain spear through her. "Daniel, are you still bespelled?" She searched for any signs of a Fae spell. She couldn't find any, but he had to be bespelled. That could be the only explanation for his behavior now, for the horrible things that he was saying to her.

"I'm not bespelled, you bitch." Daniel struggled to sit up.

"Please, Daniel, stop it. You're hurt." Danny placed both of her hands on his shoulders and tried to keep him from struggling.

He shoved her hands off him. "Don't touch me. Don't you dare try any of your tricks on me."

"Daniel." Danny felt as if her heart were breaking. "I don't understand..."

"No, you don't. And you never will understand."

"I'm sorry I didn't get to you sooner. I'm sorry they took your finger," she said softly. Her eyes searched his for any hint of kindness, happiness. Any hint that he was happy to see her ... that he had missed her as much as she had missed him. She came away empty. There was nothing in his eyes except hatred. Oh God. There was so much hatred there.

"Get away from me," Daniel cried.

Danny swallowed deeply. She backed away from the bed, and away from the hatred she saw in his eyes.

* * * *

How had she gotten here? How had it happened? Danny pushed some hair out of her face and fought back tears. Daniel. God, she loved him. She had always loved him. Even as children, when he had taunted and teased and picked on her, she had loved him. He was her beloved brother. But when he had looked at her tonight, there was so much anger and hatred. She hadn't realized how much anger, or perhaps she had, and she hadn't wanted to acknowledge it. It hurt too much to acknowledge it.

"Another." Danny slapped some money down on the bar.

"Ya sure about that?" The burly bartender sporting a multi-colored Mohawk asked.

"Yes."

The bartender nodded. "Kay, one more Fire and Brimstone coming up."

Danny sighed and turned back to the floor to watch the writhing and undulating couples. Maybe this wasn't the place she should have run to, but right now she was

awfully glad she was here. The pounding music helped to drown out the painful thoughts that were swirling through her head and the liquor she was pouring down her throat was comforting and warm in her stomach.

"Here ya go." The bartender passed her the drink.

She accepted the large glass. Fire and Brimstone was just that. It burned like unholy fire as it went down. But it was a strong drink, and when a wolf wanted to get drunk and forget all else, it was about the only thing you were going to get that would do the trick. She downed half the glass and winced as the potent liquid burned her throat.

Savior glided over to Danny, the people on the dance floor parting for him.

"Fire and Brimstone, good choice, *ashleya*."

"I'm not in the mood," Danny snapped.

Savior frowned. "What is wrong, *ashleya*? You are surrounded by dark tonight."

"Actually, the dark is staring at me right now." Danny finished her drink.

Savior laughed dryly. "That is not so funny. You will come with me and tell me what is bothering you."

Danny recognized that he wasn't asking her, but telling her. She convinced herself she was just too tired to argue with him, and that was the reason she stood from her stool and followed him past the dance floor back through familiar double doors toward a room, a room that had gotten her into trouble before.

"You changed the décor."

Savior nodded. "Yes, do you like it?"

"I don't really care either way. It is not my room."

He came to stand by her side. "It matters very much, *ashleya*, I value your opinions."

She didn't like the way his words affected her. Danny swallowed heavily. Her heart had begun to pound the moment she had seen Savior gliding toward her. He was so beautiful ... something about him called to her and pulled her in. His long hair was pulled back from his extraordinary face this eve and he was clothed all in black.

"What does *ashleya* mean?" She straightened her shoulders, desperately trying to maintain her composure. He smelled so good. And he wasn't touching her, but she could still feel his energy, his power ... it was radiating toward her. And she wanted him. God, how she wanted him.

"It means..." Savior ran his hand down Danny's cheek, "...in the old tongue, *lovely one*. Tell me, my *ashleya*, why is there this darkness around you ... what is this sadness in your heart. Such pain ... it tears into me."

She gasped. "Stop it ... please stop it."

Savior pressed his lips to her cheek. He moved his hand to her neck and stroked her soft skin. "Nay, you need this ... you need me. And I need you. Tell me ... share with me. Do not let this burden destroy you."

Danny could not seem to help herself. She pressed into his body and wrapped her arms around him.

"Tell me," Savior urged her.

She pulled his shirt free of his pants and quickly opened the snaps, running her hands over the smooth beauty of his chest.

"Ahhh, that feels..." Savior kissed her throat.

"Please..." Danny unbuckled his belt and began to work on his pants. "I need this ... please ... let me forget ... help me to forget."

Savior pulled back. His eyes were bright with passion. "Yes my *ashleya*, yes ... I need it too. But we will talk ... we will..."

"But later, not now, nothing but this now."

Savior swept her up and strode to the bed. He made quick work of the remainder of his clothes. By the time he joined her on the bed, she was as naked as he.

"You are quick." He smiled. "And you have nimble fingers."

Danny licked her lips. She reached for him, running her fingers gently over the hard length of his cock.

"Very nimble fingers," Danny murmured. She wrapped her hand around him and squeezed gently, smiling when Savior groaned. He seemed to grow harder still in her hand. Pushing him back, she smiled seductively as she straddled him. She kissed his chest and ran her tongue around his nipple, licking and sucking it gently into the warm recesses of her mouth. She loved the sounds that he made, and she loved the power she suddenly had. Danny trailed her lips down ... down ... when she reached his navel she gave it a quick swipe of her tongue.

"Oh ... yessss..." Savior hissed.

Danny swirled her tongue around the head of his cock. When he moaned, she took the head within her mouth and began to suckle. Her hands dug into his hard, muscular thighs and she took more of him into her mouth. He tasted wonderful, musky and sweet ... and so male.

She wanted more.

Relaxing her throat, she allowed his hard length to slide even further still. When she felt him hit the back of her throat, she began to hum. The vibrations tickled his flesh and he seemed to swell even more within her mouth.

"*Ashleya* ... *ashleya* ... ahhhhh, yessss ... that feels ... yessss..." he hissed.

Danny cupped his balls and then released him from her mouth. She licked her lips and then, with one swoop, took him in again. She began to suck, careful to keep her sharp teeth tucked under her lips, and then she used her tongue to caress his hard length, all the while keeping him secure within her warm, wet, mouth. She felt his balls grow tight and knew he was closing in on his pleasure. His cock was so hard in her mouth, and she felt him pulsing, pushing, straining for his ultimate release. She wanted that. She wanted to feel him come in her mouth. She wanted to taste him, to drink him down.

"Enough." Savior groaned and he pulled her up. "Enough. Or I will spill myself in your delectable mouth."

"Yes, I want that."

Savior flipped her over onto her stomach and pulled her up to her hands and knees. He cupped her breasts, kneading and caressing the soft flesh, pinching her hard nipples until she cried out. He brought his hand to her pussy and pressed one thick finger into her wet depths.

"You are so very wet, *ashleya* ... you are so wet for me."

Danny moaned. Her body was burning up. She needed him so badly. She needed to feel him deep within her, she needed to banish all else ... banish all the horrible darkness of the day.

"Please," Danny gasped. "Please, more..."

Savior added a second finger. He began to scissor them in and out of her pussy. Locating her clit, a hard bud that was near to bursting, he caressed it. When she cried out,

he pressed just the tip of his cock into her pussy.

“Savior ... oh, lord ... more ... more...” Danny clenched her hands into the sheets and twisted.

“Yes, my *ashleya* ... oh yes.”

“Savior!” Danny screamed his name. He was so hard and hot within her. And he was so deep, so deep... Her body opened for him, welcomed him ... needed him. Her beast was roaring, screaming with pleasure and satisfaction, and for once, she allowed the harmony that came with feeding the beast. She wanted him so desperately, and she was tired of fighting the animal within her, the animal that was part of her ... would always be a part of her.

“Like fire and silk...” Savior rasped. He withdrew his cock and then slammed it back into her. His motions became forceful then, as his hips pistoned back and forth, giving everything, everything.

Danny threw back her head. “Oh, God, oh, God ... Savior ... Savior I’m going to come ... I’m going to...”

Her words were cut off as her body began to spasm and jerk and her pussy clenched like a tight fist.

Savior wrapped his hand around her hair, yanked her head back and bit her just below her ear. Her blood coated his fangs, his tongue, welled up in his mouth and flooded over.

* * * *

“You will tell me now.” Savior swept some damp hair out of her face. “You will tell me now what darkness you used me to banish.”

Danny swatted his hand away. She sat up and pierced him with a hard stare. “You bit me,” she said coldly.

Savior sighed. He pulled back but didn’t try to deny it.

She jumped out of bed and faced him furiously. “You bit me, you bastard.” Danny grabbed her scattered clothes and began to struggle into them. “Oh, God...” she gasped, “and you did bite me the other time, you did.”

Savior slid out of bed. “You came to me, *ashleya*. You came to me, and you came willing ... eager even.”

“I didn’t come to be bitten!” she shrieked. “The voice...” She felt the blood drain from her face. “The voice ... it was you. You were in my head.”

Savior reached for her, but she jumped out of the way and glared at him. He sighed.

“My head, you bastard, you were in my head.”

“Just a little, my *ashleya*.”

Oh no, oh no, this couldn’t be happening to her. Danny rubbed her eyes. She took a couple of deep breaths. The dead bastard had been in her head. He had bitten her and he had been in her mind ... rooting around ... doing ... doing, lord, what had he been doing? What had he seen? He was right, though. She had come to *Blood Noir* tonight. And what had she really expected? She had expected this ... no ... she had wanted this, craved it. Being in his arms, having him deep in her needy body was incredible, beyond incredible. But what was real? Did she want him ... did she *really* want him. Or was it because of the bite? Was the bite making her feel this way ... act this way?

“No, *ashleya*, the bite but brings us closer ... pulls us together.”

“Get out of my head!” Danny rushed for the door, but quick as lightning, Savior was there, trapping her. She growled. “Do not think I won’t tear off your head if you don’t move right now.”

Savior sighed. “Your need is real, my need is real. And ... I cannot take away the mark.”

The mark, the mark ... oh lord ... the mark. Danny felt real fear invade her now. Nothing, not even standing in the presence of the Fae, brought fear like this to her. But she had dealt with the demon taint. She could deal with this, right? There had to be something ... something that would take this away.

“Nothing will take away the mark.”

Danny extended her claws and slashed them across his face. She knew her eyes had gone molten gold and bright with her fury. She growled. “If I have to dig it out with my bare hands ... I will.”

* * * *

Danny slammed into her room, head roaring, and her heart pounding furiously. She had gotten herself into more than few scrapes ... most of them not her fault, of course. But this one, this huge mega horrible scrape, this was her fault. She had gone in with her eyes wide open—okay, half open—and she had let herself be reeled in. That bloodsucking bastard was right. Even if she hadn’t wanted to see it, he was right. She had wanted him ... felt the call of his power the minute she had laid eyes on him. Not even Draco had pulled her as finely and truly as Savior had. And even now, hurting, raging, full of fear so deep it sucked her in, even now she wanted him. How could she not? Everything in her called out for him.

Danny blinked, and with a gasp she rushed to the adjoining room. She pounded on the door.

Victor answered the door. His chest was bare, and his eyes were cool. “Dennison.”

“Where’s my brother?” She tried to see into the room. “Where the hell is my brother?”

“He left,” Victor said simply.

“What? What do you mean, he left? Okay.” She took a deep breath. “Stop fooling with me. Where is he?”

“Dennison.” Victor sighed and motioned her in. When she was in the room, he shut the door and turned to her. “He left. He did not wish to ... to ... draw things out.”

“What?” Danny sat down on the bed with a thump. “Draw things out?”

“He felt that ... that you would not take kindly to his leaving. He wished to bypass the goodbyes.”

“But he was hurt.” Danny dropped her head so Victor wouldn’t see the tears that were threatening to fall. “He ... was hurt.”

“Yes. But he was well enough to leave.”

“Why didn’t you stop him?”

“Why would I do that?” Victor looked genuinely bewildered. “I am not Alpha. He is not my wolf. If he wished to leave, well then, he had every right to leave.”

“Did he say where he was going?” Danny asked quietly. She felt the fight drive right out of her body. “Did he say ... did he say when he was coming back?”

Victor shook his head. “He said nothing except that it was time he left.”

“Oh, Daniel,” Danny murmured. He was gone. He was really gone. He had left her—again. She walked to the door.

“Dennison?”

Danny didn’t turn, but she stopped, her hand on the knob.

“We will need to leave now, the job is done ... the contract fulfilled. The Alpha will be expecting us back.”

Alex. Alex would want her now. Danny stiffened, opened the door and walked out.

* * * *

“Thad?”

“Hey, Danny, good to hear your voice ... uh ... good to hear your voice so early.”

“What *are* you doing up so early in the morning, Thad?”

“Aren’t you glad I am?” Thad laughed. “What can I do you for?”

“I’m heading home.” Silence met her words. “Did you hear me? I’m coming home.”

“Ah, yeah, Danny, I heard you. Everything okay?”

The Fae were running around the mortal plane. She had screwed the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan and he was thinking about challenging Alex. She had found her brother—and lost him. And now she was vampire marked.

“Yeah,” she said softly, tiredly, “yeah, I’m okay.”

“Uh, you don’t sound okay.”

She sighed, and then, coolly, almost mechanically, she told Thad what had happened ... what was happening with her. She never did this. She never shared. She was an intensely private person, mainly because she didn’t want to burden anyone else with her shit. But this ... this shit was too much for her to deal with by herself. She needed to tell someone, if only just to tell them. She didn’t expect Thad to be able to do anything about it. Nor would she want him to do anything about it. She just needed to unload, if only for a second ... if only for a second.

“Oh, my fucking lord,” Thad said.

“Yeah, that’s pretty much my take on it too.”

“Uh, do you have any idea where he could have gone?”

“No. No, I don’t. But I will find him, Thad, I will.”

“Do you, uh, think that’s such a good idea ... it sounds like he doesn’t...”

“He needs some time,” Danny interrupted. “I’ll give him some time to ... well ... I’ll just give him some time. And then I’m going after him. I’m not going to let it happen again. I let him walk away once before, and look what happened. He’s my brother, damn it, and I’m going to find him.”

“Okay, Danny, okay. I understand. Uh, now about that mark.”

“We’re not going to talk about the mark.”

“I think we need to. You’ve been marked by a master vampire—actually you’ve been bitten, what is it, twice now?”

“Shut up, Thad!”

Thad didn’t shut up. “It sounds like he’s going for it, Danny. He’s trying to make you his blood companion.”

Danny had been thinking the very same thing. Normally bite wounds healed. Vampires would feed and then the wounds on their donors would fade. But the marks on her throat hadn’t faded. They were still very much apparent. In fact, the flesh had re-knit

in such a way that the wound was very much a marking of some sort; there could be no mistaking it. Such a wound could mean only one thing, blood companion. A blood companion was considered, among the undead and their groupies, to be an honor. A vampire chose his blood companion with care. But when a master vampire chose a blood companion it was different ... it was *more*. A master vampire would choose a companion that matched or enhanced their power and their standing. It took five such bites to create a blood companion and the ritual words had to be said. No one save the master vampire who was creating the companion would know the ritual words.

Danny ran her hand over the upraised flesh and frowned deeply. Had Savior said any words? She hadn't heard anything, save the sex talk. She didn't think he had said anything. Maybe ... maybe she was mistaken. Maybe he wasn't trying to make her a blood companion. Perhaps he had only wanted blood.

Yuck. And that thought wasn't much better.

"I've never heard of anybody ridding themselves of the mark, Danny," Thad said quietly.

"I know."

"In fact ... I think, well, that you can't..."

"I will figure something out," Danny snapped. "Listen ... I've rid myself of other marks, I will rid myself of this one."

"What other marks?"

Danny swallowed. She wasn't about to tell Thad of the demon taint. That was a story for another day.

"Hey, hey, Danny, what other mark?"

"Not now, Thad."

"Oh no, no way are you doing that to me. You already told me this much ... come on..."

"No," she said softly but firmly. There was no arguing with the finality of her voice ... the strength there. She wasn't about to change her mind.

"Fine."

"Don't pout," Danny said with a small smile.

"I'm not pouting," Thad bit out.

"Uh, yeah, you are." She could just see him sitting on her couch with his lower lip pooched out. She knew him. She knew he was pouting.

"Okay. Perhaps I am pouting a little."

"Well, stop it," Danny said, laughing.

"All right, seriously though, what are we going to do?"

"*We're* not going to do anything, Thad."

"Hey, no way, we're partners, and partners help one another out."

Danny's smile widened. "We're not partners. You're my apprentice and this is something I'm going to have to do on my own."

"You always do things on your own."

"Yeah, and I plan to keep it that way." Danny sighed. "Listen, thanks for listening to all my crap, Thad. Oh, and how are my plants?"

He let out a groan of long suffering. "Your plants are fine."

"Did you put the plant food in?"

"Yes, I put the plant food in."

“What?” Danny shrieked. “You’re not supposed to feed them again this early. You fed them again? You added more plant food? You’re going to fucking kill them. I knew I shouldn’t have left you in charge, I knew you were going to...”

“Enough already!” Thad shouted. “Your plants are fucking fine. Will you chill out and just get your ass back to civilization so that we can begin to think up a plan to get you unvampirified?”

She cleared her throat. “Did you just yell at me? Did you just talk back to me?”

Thad began to stammer. “Uh, well, I mean, I think, yeah, yeah, I did.”

Danny laughed. She wished she could be there to give him a hug. “Well, congratulations. I think you just grew some balls.”

* * * *

The minute that Danny walked into *Great Expectations* she knew by the look on Eloise’s face that Daniel had contacted her.

“Is he all right?” Danny asked simply.

“He’s fine. Thank you, Dennison. Thank you for finding him, and bringing him back.”

“Don’t thank me. I did a shitty job. He’s gone again.”

“By his choosing. Don’t blame yourself. You did what you had to do, and more.” Eloise took Danny’s hands in hers and squeezed. “You cannot take your brother’s journey for him. He will have to find his way on his own.”

“I know.” Danny sighed. “I just worry for him.”

“Yes.” Eloise smiled. “You’re a good sister.”

“I haven’t been.”

“You’re a good sister,” Eloise said again. “Daniel will find his way, eventually. In the meantime you must allow him to stumble, fall and get back up again on his own.”

Danny nodded. “I know, and I will. But if anyone tries to take another of his fingers, I’ll claw their heart out.”

“Yes, I believe you would do just that. But you have things to worry about other than your brother’s safety ... do you not?”

She withdrew her hands from Eloise’s grasp and moved back a step.

“You’ve been marked,” Eloise said simply.

Danny clenched her hands into tight fists. Of course Eloise would be able to sense the mark. She was stupid to have believed otherwise. Eloise was powerful and intelligent. It would stand to reason that she would know. “I’ve been marked.”

“The master vampire?”

“Yes.”

“Of course it would be he. You are both formidable powers. You would not allow a lesser being to mark you, Dennison.”

“I didn’t allow him to mark me. I didn’t realize that he was...”

“Come now, Dennison, don’t lie to yourself. Perhaps you didn’t realize what was happening, not fully. But some part of you knew. You are too smart, too clever and intuitive not to have known that this could happen.”

Danny growled.

“I’m just telling you the truth. And since I am talking truths now, let me give you some more. Perhaps you should reconsider resisting.”

“What?”

Eloise gave her a deep searching look. “Obviously something in you calls to him, and hears his call. You are drawn to him, mark or no mark. And you crave him. You *do* crave him, don’t you?”

Danny said nothing.

Eloise nodded. “I thought so. Did you ever stop to think that perhaps your beast has *found* what it has been looking for?”

“In one of the undead?” Danny growled out.

“Our souls are called when and as they will. Who are we to argue?”

Well, Danny planned on arguing loud and clear. She wasn’t about to be the blood companion to a master vampire.

“I’m not keeping the blasted thing.” She scowled, feeling like a branded cow. To escape the wolf bond, only to be marked by one of the unholy creatures of night. Terrific, this was just fucking terrific.

“And how do you plan on removing it?” Eloise smiled slightly. “To my knowledge there is no way of removing a blood companion mark.”

“There is a way.”

“Oh?”

Danny’s growl deepened. “There is a way and I’m going to find it.”

“And until then?”

Danny clenched her hands into fists. “Until then I’m stuck with it.”

Eloise cleared her throat. “You realize the bond works both ways, or so I’m told.”

“What do you mean?” Danny admittedly knew very little about blood companion marks. It had never been an issue. She had never seen the need to know, as she usually stayed the hell away from vampires. They were trouble. Fuck, yeah, they were trouble.

“I take it that he has been ... foraging?”

“If you mean trespassing on private property, i.e. my brain, the answer would be a yes,” Danny snapped.

Eloise nodded. “I thought so. So, forage back.”

“Excuse me?”

“You can do the same to him, Dennison. In fact ... the stronger the marks, the more, uh, damage you can do. You can make him feel pretty darned uncomfortable.”

Well, well, *that* thought certainly had some merit. Danny almost rubbed her hands together gleefully. “So, I can traipse around his brain?”

“Yes, you can.”

“I’m not sure if I want to, uh, see memories and other such crap like that.”

“Of course. I understand that but I don’t believe the marks work that way. You can, however, as I said, make life in his own head rather distracting.”

“Well, I will think on that.”

Eloise smiled knowingly. “Do. Do think on it.” She sighed. “You are leaving our fair town?”

“I have to. I think my Alpha is chomping at the bit. And...” Danny swallowed, “...I don’t know if I can deal with the crap that is going on here.”

“You can deal with anything, Dennison. Of that I am certain. But I do understand that you would want to separate yourself from certain ... problems. Would you like anything before you go?”

Danny swept her eyes around. She knew they had to be gleaming. Oh yeah, she felt like a kid in a candy store. Oh yeah, she definitely wanted stuff before she went. Definitely.

* * * *

For the first time in a long while Danny felt almost giddy. She had four bags full of supplies, supplies that she got at a great discount. Some girls got giddy over jewels, some over clothes and shoes ... Danny got giddy over *Otherside* supplies. She was dying to get someplace where she could spread them out and coo over them.

"It's a good thing you travel light," Victor said dryly. He was leaning against the side of the SUV. "Cause you sure pick up a lot of crap."

"Oh no, there is no way that I just heard you call my supplies crap. Do you *want* me to kick your ass?"

Victor's mouth curved up in a smile. "No, I don't think I do. Unless that attitude extends to the bedroom."

Huh? Danny's eyes widened. She *so* did not want to go there. The implications were way too many and way too ... disturbing. Instead, she chose to shove her bags into Victor's arms.

"Just load them up."

Victor snorted. "Where are you going?"

"The diner. Just want to pick us up some fixings for the trip."

At that, Victor appeared jubilant. If you wanted to make a wolf happy ... just tempt them with food ... a lot of food.

"Those ham and cheese sandwiches, the ones with the relish..."

"I'll pick up half a dozen."

"Make it a dozen."

Danny rolled her eyes. "A dozen it is."

* * * *

Sitting on one of the plastic covered stools, Danny waited for her order to come up. She loved the scent of fresh brewed coffee and greasy food that wafted in the air.

"Did you think you would be able to leave without saying goodbye?"

She knew that voice. Danny stiffened. God, she wished she didn't. "Actually, I did."

Draco leaned into her and brushed a strand of hair out of her face. "You have magnificent hair."

"Thanks," Danny said dryly. She swatted his hand away from her face. "Now, do you mind?"

Draco laughed. He ordered himself a cup of coffee and a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich.

"Bacon, lettuce and tomato for the big bad wolf," Danny snapped.

"Indeed. You do not like bacon, lettuce and tomato?"

Actually Danny loved BLTs; she just felt snappish toward Draco. She really had hoped she could leave town without running into him.

"The Fae have contacted me. We are to talk ... negotiate," Draco said suddenly.

Danny's eyes widened in surprise.

Draco nodded. "It seems for the moment, they are here to stay and it seems they understand that they will have to deal with us ... as we will have to deal with them." Draco smiled slightly. It was a cool smile. "Am I to assume you had something to do with their change of heart?"

Silence seemed best. Danny said nothing. There was nothing to say. She wasn't so naïve as to believe that she was the entire reason Theraline had contacted the wolves. The Fae were an extraordinary power and extraordinarily arrogant, but ... perhaps Theraline *had* heard Danny's words and taken them in ... if only just a little—perhaps.

"You realize, this is not over, Dennison. It is not nearly over. One way or another ... I will have you," Draco said firmly.

"I'm not something you can have. It doesn't work that way. You make me sound like any other possession. You make me sound like a thing."

"You are hardly like any other possession." Draco grabbed her chin and pulled her head toward his. "You are the ultimate possession."

Enough was enough. Danny lurched from her seat and walked away from him. She stopped at the cash register and regarded the cashier with cool eyes. She asked if her order was ready. When they told her another five minutes, she decided it was past time to get some fresh air. She had just cleared the exit when Draco grabbed her arm and pulled her into the alley by the side of the diner.

Danny didn't think. She just reacted. She brought up her elbow and caught him in the jaw. She sidestepped, brought up her hand in a quick slashing motion and slammed the side of her hand into his throat.

Draco roared in fury and lashed out.

She had less than one second to duck a blow to her head. She dropped to her knees and rolled away. Throwing out her leg, she tripped him and he went down. She was smart enough not to jump him. She knew that physically he was stronger than she, and she would probably end up minus a limb or two if she engaged him head-on—well, any more head-on than she was doing at this moment.

"*Thea a Dul!*" Danny cried out the words to the spell and threw her power forward. She erected the field quickly and was gratified to see that it was holding. There was now a shield between her and Draco.

Draco lunged forward, his hand made contact with the shield, and a spark of light ignited. He pulled back quickly.

"I wouldn't suggest you try that again," Danny murmured, "unless you enjoy being electrocuted."

Draco was panting. His silver eyes were still storm-tossed and turbulent but he reined in the beast and seemed more focused. Moments passed before Danny could sense that he was in control.

The expression on his face was now one of supreme lust. "Amazing..." he drawled. "I knew you were amazing. You will come to Stone Claw Clan, you will come to me."

She shook her head.

Draco laughed now. The arrogance was back with a vengeance. "You will come because you will not be able to do any less ... Stone Claw Clan is power ... *I* am power, Dennison Lee, *magi* wolf. Striker Clan and Alexander will never be able to house all that you are. Eventually your starved soul will beg for what I can offer you."

"Go fuck yourself," Danny spat out before she turned and began to walk away.

“One way or the other, I will have you, Dennison, I will. All you have managed with this display is to stall the inevitable.”

She took a deep breath and continued walking. Master of her own destiny ... she would be the master of her own destiny. She would never allow anyone to take her rights away. She *was not* a possession. She *was not* something to be collected. No, her life was her own.

Damn. Now why couldn't she make everyone else realize that?

* * * *

Danny dreamed she was floating in a sea of red silk. She was naked, her long hair swirling around her, and there was red ... glorious red everywhere.

She was on fire. She ached. She longed and needed. Her pussy was wet and her nipples were tight. She moaned and parted her legs. The silk wrapped deliciously around her ankles and continued to caress her feverish body.

And just when she thought she would explode, she felt his mouth ... his beautiful mouth. It closed around her nipple and sucked, pulled, and licked. Then his hands drifted over her body. The lips of her pussy were parted and then she felt him ... felt his fingers slide into her wet depths. She threw back her head and moaned. She reached for him, desperate to feel his body pressed against her. But he eluded her. His mouth and hands continued to torment her ... continued to drive her to the edge.

“My ashleya ... my beautiful ashleya...”

Her heart was thudding almost painfully now. She was desperate, so very desperate to have him.

And she was frightened. Her beast was rising, having been jerked from its slumber by the promise of passion. She could feel it screaming at her. She could feel its claws raking her insides. And she knew that she had to feed it. She had to feed the beast. It was threatening to devour her.

It was there. Lord above, it was there. Danny screamed. She reached out and pulled him to her. She plastered his hard body to hers and slammed her mouth down on his. His mouth was incredible ... it was hard and yet soft and delicious, oh so delicious. His tongue was amazingly soft and he was licking her, nipping at her, biting her...

“Yessss...” Danny hissed. Her head lolled back and she felt his mouth on her neck. He was licking beneath her ear and gently sucking her flesh. His fingers were still stroking her pussy. She grabbed his hand and pressed him harder to her, she wanted more.

Danny could feel him hard against her. She wanted to feel his cock deep in her body. She reached down and wrapped her hand around him. She heard him groan and gasp her name. She squeezed a little harder and then she slid her palm over the head of him.

Oh God. Oh God. She needed him. She needed this now. She was so hot and wet and she had to have him. She widened her legs and brought him to her and...

“NO! NO! Dennison, Dennison you must stop, you must stop!”

What? What was happening? She wasn't supposed to stop. He wasn't supposed to stop. He was supposed to be fucking her now.

“Dennison, you have to stop now. Alexander will kill him. You have to stop.”

Why was Gregor in her dream? Danny felt the phantom hands squeeze her breasts roughly and she moaned. *Oh yeah...*

“Victor, goddamn it! Stop, you have to stop right now!”

Danny felt the great haze in her head begin to lift. She blinked. *What the hell?* She was lying in the backseat of the SUV, her shirt was pushed up to her armpits and her skirt was pooled around her ankles, her panties ... she had no idea where her panties were. And ... Victor ... what? Victor was lying on top of her.

“Hell no!” Danny shouted. She shoved at Victor and began to struggle. Her knee jerked up.

“Fuck!” Victor roared and jumped back. “Careful, damn it ... I am planning on having children someday.”

She scurried back until she felt her back hit the car door. She swallowed and shook her head trying to clear it more. Oh lord. What had just happened? Danny pulled her shirt down and zipped up her skirt. She glared at Victor.

Victor had zipped up his jeans but his chest was still bare. He pushed back some errant hair and regarded Danny with eyes that were still hot and potent.

There was something in those eyes. He looked ... lord ... he looked like he was bespelled. But that wasn't possible? He couldn't be bespelled. She certainly hadn't put a spell on him. Danny bit her lip.

“God,” Gregor said, eyes trained on the road. “Okay, we all, uh, normal now?”

“I'm not sure what normal is,” Danny murmured, never taking her eyes off Victor, who was still staring at her as if she was a choice piece of meat. “But if you mean ... are we now not about to fuck one another ... yeah.”

Gregor sighed deeply. “Thank God.”

Danny spoke to Gregor, but her eyes were only for Victor. “What the hell just happened, Gregor? Can you tell me?”

“I'm not sure. It all happened so quickly, Dennison. One minute you were eating a ham and cheese sandwich, the next...” Gregor gulped, “...you were naked and writhing around, and ... uh ... begging Victor to take you.”

Shit. Danny rubbed her eyes. She had begged him to fuck her? No wonder Victor was freaking out. His beast was riding him hard. A dominant female had just stripped naked in front of him and begged him to take her. He was still *wildside*—in the throes of a passion hold.

“Thank you,” she said to Gregor. “Thank you for snapping us out of it.”

Gregor nodded, still concentrating on driving. “I'm just glad I have a set of pipes on me. I was afraid I was going to get us into a crash, or I was going to have to pull over and slash Victor up real good ... which let me tell you, I really didn't want to have to do. That boy has wicked claws. But I knew that Alexander would...”

“I know, I know,” Danny said quietly. If Victor had taken her, regardless of how much Danny had begged, Alexander would probably have killed him. Not just because he wanted her and had a history with her, but because, as Alpha he could not have such defiance in his ranks. Victor was a lower wolf. Danny was a dominant female. If Victor had fucked her, taken her over the rights of the Alpha, Alexander would have had no choice but to show the pack that his authority was absolute. He would have killed Victor, if for no other reason than to make an example of him.

“I want you,” Victor growled. His eyes were still glowing. His beast was radiating outward and battering Danny. She winced as it continued to prowl around her. She knew that if she didn't do something quickly that she risked having him change involuntarily

... and that was something she certainly didn't want. Not only was an involuntary change tremendously painful, they were in the backseat of a fucking SUV.

Now that her wits were back, Danny took a deep breath and used her hands to conjure up a quick and simple slumber spell. She cast the spell over Victor and watched as his lids drooped, his body sagged, and just like that ... he was asleep.

"Niiice," Gregor said with a smile. "Can you teach me how to do that?"

Danny laughed dryly. She slumped back in her seat. Okay. She had to think. She had to figure out what was happening to her. She didn't remember much. They had loaded up the car, sped away (so as not to risk having to deal with Draco—again) and all dug into the bags of food that she had bought from the diner. She remembered ... she remembered chewing her food thoughtfully and ... and ... thinking about...

Fuck.

Danny gasped.

"What? What? Everything all right back there?" Gregor asked.

"Fine. Everything is fine," Danny said quietly. *Fuck and double fuck.* She had been thinking about Savior, the bloodsucking bastard. She had touched the raised skin on her neck and couldn't help but be brought back to that moment when she had felt him drive himself into her body and pierce her flesh with his fangs. She had been thinking of him, and then ... then she was floating ... floating on a sea of red silk.

That was right. Oh yes, it was coming back to her now. She had been floating on a sea of red silk ... beautiful silk, and it had been caressing her body. She had heard a voice, a deep beautiful seductive voice float over her like cream or liquid night. It was Savior's voice. She was certain of that now. He had spoken to her. He had called her *ashleya*. He had whispered the endearment and then ... then she had needed more. She had needed him so badly. She reached out and touched ... flesh, and she had pulled that flesh to her.

Only it hadn't been Savior she had pulled to her. It had been Victor. Shit. She was going to have to do major research when she got back home. She had to learn everything there was to learn about vampire marks. She had to figure out how to control the marks, for she wasn't about to let that damn creature of the night play havoc with her head. She was going to learn how to conquer this, and then...

Danny narrowed her eyes and smiled evilly. "It's payback time, you asshole."

* * * *

"Oh, did my babies miss me?" Danny crooned to her plants. She ran her hand lovingly over the soft leaves and smiled. "I missed you, my precious babies." She had dropped her bags in the front hallway and made a beeline to her plants. They looked good. It seemed that Thad had done a pretty good job.

"I think I'm going to puke now," Thad muttered, rounding the corner, a sandwich in hand.

Danny snorted. "You're just jealous cause I love my plants more than you."

Thad laughed. "Yeah, I think that sums it up admirably." He ran his eyes over her. "Uh, you okay?" he asked finally.

"Yeah. I'm okay."

Thad's eyes landed pointedly on her neck.

"It's still there," she said dryly, heading to the bathroom. "I'm gonna take a shower,

and then I'm heading out for the night."

She stripped quickly, turned on the shower and stepped in. She heard Thad enter the bathroom.

"Where are you going?"

"Out."

"Uh-huh, where? If you don't tell me, I'll just follow you doggedly."

She lathered up and reached for her favorite shampoo. She hated it, but he was telling her the truth, she could sense it. If she didn't let him in, he would just stalk her until he learned everything there was to learn. Damn it. She should never have shared as much as she had with him. It was her fault. She had opened the door, and now he wanted to come all the way into the room.

"Onyx, I'm going to Onyx," Danny spat out. She tilted her head back and let the hot water pour over her, rinsing away the soap. She just wished it would rinse away the taint as well.

"Fuck that, Danny!"

She turned off the water, stepped out of the shower, wrapped a towel around her body and hair and headed to her bedroom.

Thad followed. "No way, you are not going."

Danny whipped around. She could feel the heat that had entered her eyes. "Are you challenging me, boy?" She heard her voice, gravelly and hard ... more beast than anything else.

Thad swallowed. Obviously sensing the beast that his words had provoked, he whimpered and dropped his head submissively. He was not a wolf but he knew the protocol, and he knew, when in the presence of a rising beast, how to behave if he wanted to keep his head attached to his shoulders.

"I would never challenge you, Dennison," he spoke quietly. "I would never dare challenge you."

Danny blinked, coming back to herself. She nodded. "Good, that's good." She opened her closet and began to forage through it for something suitable to wear for tonight's excursion.

"But, I beg you..." Thad touched her shoulder, "...don't go to Onyx."

"I don't have a choice." She remembered what had almost happened in the car and strengthened her resolve. "I have to do a little ... research."

"This is not the right way to go about it."

"I need an 'in', Thad, and this is the quickest and most effective way to go about it." Danny gave a little, "Aha," as she found what she was looking for.

"Wow." Thad's voice was almost choked.

"I take it that's a good, wow?" Danny asked with a smile.

Thad swallowed. "That's a, 'holy mother of God, if I didn't know that you would gut me alive if I did so much as touch you, I be on you in a second', wow."

Danny laughed heartily. "That'll do." She stepped into the form fitting bodysuit and zipped it up. It hugged her like a second skin and covered her from neck to ankles. There was an oval cut out right above her breasts that revealed an impressive amount of cleavage. Danny stepped into her five-inch wedge boots and buckled them up. She strode back into the bathroom to apply her makeup and work on her hair.

"You look..." Thad just shook his head in wonder.

“Thanks. Will you go to the living room and get me my supply bag?”

Thad strode off.

Danny began to meticulously work on her makeup. She didn’t usually bother with the stuff. But when she did ... she went all out. She applied a heavy dose of dark midnight blue eye shadow and used kohl eyeliner to accent her slightly up-tilted eyes. Gently dusting gold powder over her high cheekbones, she finished the look off with clear lip-gloss. She twisted her hair up and called out for Thad.

“Here, here.” Thad handed her the supply bag.

With one hand on her hair, Danny rummaged through the bag. She found what she was looking for, a small black case. She snapped it open and smiled wickedly.

Thad peered around her and his mouth dropped open. “What the hell?”

She gently removed a razor blade from the black case. It was an odd crescent shape, but a razor blade nonetheless. One curved side was wickedly sharp. The other had two little hooks at either end of the blade.

“Hold it,” Danny said, and then snapped, “gently.”

Thad took the blade carefully.

Danny began to twist her hair expertly. “Give it to me.” He handed the blade over to her and she hooked the razor blade into her hair, continuing to weave the heavy mass into an intricate braid. She continued the ritual with four more blades until she got to the very end of her braid. She pulled out another razor from the black case. This one was double edged and pointed at the very end. Danny quickly tied the blade into the end of her hair and surveyed her handiwork with a critical and assessing eye.

“Holy...” Thad’s voice dropped off. He licked his lips and shook his head in wonder.

Danny nodded. “I think I’m ready to go and play.”

Chapter Six

Onyx was a haven for *Othersiders*. A huge warehouse-like building, it was fortified like Fort Knox and reeked of magic, power and sex. Danny had never been there before. It was run by vampires—as most establishments such as these were. And as she had never had much use for the undead, she had never had much use for Onyx. A lot of Danny's acquaintances, clients and marks frequented the place, and that was even more reason for her to shy away from it ... but the cherry on top of the fucked-up cake, master vampire Tavius, owned Onyx. Yeah, Thad had all the reason in the world to be afraid for Danny ... this was a powerful place, a powerfully dangerous place.

Danny strode up to the door and eyed the huge bouncer. He was trying to stare her down. She felt like laughing.

"Wolf," the bouncer growled. His voice was cold, but his eyes were hot and filled with lust.

She raised one eyebrow. "Spawn of Satan, guess we all have problems." Danny grinned when she saw the fury rise to his face. He was dead, but not long. She placed him at perhaps thirty years or so, in dead years. "Gonna let me pass? Or do you want to try to take me on?" Danny knew she was baiting him something awful, but she couldn't seem to help herself. She was in a pissier of a mood tonight and she had to let off some of the edge.

"You wouldn't last against me," the bouncer said with certainty. He opened the door. "Be my guest..."

She entered, pleased at her self-control. She could have thrown that nasty bouncer across the street ... but she hadn't. It wouldn't do to start something—so soon. Her eyes adjusted quickly to the darkness. Onyx was barely lit and it was huge, almost twice the size of Savior's club. There were heavy velvet drapes hanging from the ceiling, pulled back to accent podiums and small stages. There were several full bars and more than a few private rooms from what Danny could see.

She sniffed, allowing the scents familiar and unfamiliar to absorb. She needed this, needed to know what she was up against. Her eyes sharpened as she watched the dancing couples and mentally tallied each and every species. The club was full, full of *Othersiders*.

Her steps were graceful and light. She could feel her body, was one with it, and knew that she could use this ... use all this power and magic. She soaked it in and allowed herself to gently join the dance of magic that rippled through her. She made her way to the back of the club, keeping her eyes sharp and her senses on the alert.

"Uh-huh, there you are," Danny murmured. She saw her quarry and quickly began to stalk her. She knew the minute the vampire was alerted to her presence, for a wash of power poured over her and suddenly she was standing but an inch away from the vampire.

"Looking for me, little wolf?" The vampire was beautiful. She had a fall of rich auburn hair and eyes the color of the deepest emerald. Her skin was like snowfall and her body, encased in a slinky black dress, was slender and lean. "Why is that, I wonder?"

Danny met the vampire's gaze unflinchingly. "I was looking for the strength in the

room ... and I found it.”

The vampire appeared thoughtful. She cocked her head to one side. “And how do you know I am the strength in the room?”

“Just as you know that I’m no lesser wolf.”

“Indeed,” the vampire murmured. “Indeed.”

“I want a meeting with the master vampire,” Danny said.

“Oh?” The vampire smiled now, revealing sharp fangs. “And what makes you think that the master would be interested in a wolf ... an interesting wolf, but a wolf all the same.”

Danny pulled the zipper to her suit down several inches and parted the fabric. She tilted her head to the side to reveal the red and raised flesh on her neck.

The vampire hissed. Her eyes began to glow.

Danny pulled the zipper back up, and nodded. “Yeah, aren’t I lucky, I’ve got the golden ticket ... now bring me to the master vampire.”

* * * *

The room was dark, very dark, and cold. Danny narrowed her eyes. Something was wrong ... she could smell it. Something was coming...

She saw the figure jump down from the ceiling and she brought up her arm just in time to deflect the blow. It was vampire ... and yet it wasn’t. There was something wrong ... something terribly wrong. She rolled to the side, jumped to her feet and prepared herself for the attack. The creature was grotesque. It had glowing red eyes and skin that was so sunken and dry that it appeared like parchment pulled over bone. It was completely feral, nothing, nothing in its glowing eyes and salivating mouth that hinted that it understood anything past the need to feed, attack, and kill.

The creature lunged and Danny fluidly turned to the side. She whipped her head out and around and her braid went flying, catching the creature’s cheek, ripping flesh away from bone.

Danny grabbed the end of her braid to still it and crouched low. She pulled the flesh free of the razor and took several steps back. The creature was snarling and chomping and she could sense its hunger.

She couldn’t stop the scream as searing pain wracked her. She kicked back, dropped to her knees and rolled away. *Two of them. Fuck.* There were now two of the creatures and one of them had just taken a hunk out of her back. Danny gritted her teeth. Her back was on fire. It probably wasn’t too bad. It just hurt like a sonofabitch.

“Okay, now you’ve pissed me off!” Danny eyed the two red-eyed creatures and took stock of her situation. She could take them. She could take them in human form. Of course, the fight would be over much sooner if she just shifted. Decision made, Danny allowed the change to overtake her. She felt the power ... the call of the beast rise to meet her need and she allowed the energy, the motion, the beauty of her other half to take over. Her muscles, tendons, sinew, stretched and pulled, elongated and changed. She heard the crack of bone and the splinter as the last vestiges of her humanity slipped away.

She was wolf. And she was ready to feed.

Danny lunged. She caught one of the creature’s arms and she pulled, tearing the entire thing off. It shrieked and howled and hit her on the side of her head. The blow was strong enough to send her sprawling. She was up in a minute and with one precise move

she pounced. Her claws caught the wounded creature in its back and brought it down.

She went for the kill, and tore its throat out.

The creature lay gurgling and spitting out its own blood. Her head spun in the direction of the second creature. It was growling at her. She stalked it, knowing it was coming for her. It could do no less. It was a creature that knew nothing but blood and death.

The thing flew forward. Danny met it as it came down. Her claws hit true and she dug them deeply into its side, tossing the creature across the room. It hit the wall with a sickening thud. She didn't give it a chance to recover but jumped on the creature and swiped her claws across its throat, tearing out chunks of flesh. The creature slumped and wheezed. Blood poured out of its wounds and its arms lay limply by its side.

"Stand down!" a commanding voice rang out.

Danny growled and whipped around. There was a man—no, vampire—standing in front of her. His power was incredible and it flowed over her, rippling her fur and chilling her bones.

"No one will harm you," he said. "No one will harm you."

She continued to growl but knew the moment her body became her own once again. She could feel the return to *self*, and knew the beast was receding. Taking several deep breaths, she allowed the shift to take her.

She stood, naked, in front of the incredible vampire in front of her, meeting his gaze straight on and lifting her chin defiantly. "That was a hell of a welcome. I take it you don't get many visitors, what with a greeting party like that."

The vampire blinked and then, throwing back his head, burst out laughing.

* * * *

Slipping into the robe, Danny tied the sash briskly, keeping her eyes trained on the vampire who was eyeing her with unabashed interest.

There was no doubt that this was Tavius, no doubt at all. Master vampire Tavius had hair the color of her eyes. It was a rich toffee streaked with caramel, it was beautiful. Everything about him was beautiful. But then, Danny hadn't met many vampires who weren't beautiful. His eyes were shockingly light amber, so light, they appeared almost fluorescent in their brilliance. His features, all of them, were perfect, they looked sculpted; high cheekbones, full mouth, arresting brow, and astonishingly symmetrical face.

And in the face of such beauty, Danny felt nothing, not even a twinge of attraction, a spark of lust ... nothing. So why did Savior make her so hot ... make her so needy, and wet ... lord, she was wet ... so wet...

Danny's eyes widened and she quickly banked the lust that was rising in her body at the thought of Savior. That was just what she didn't need, to get turned on at the thought of the damned conniving bloodsucker who had marked her.

Hell. What was wrong with her? Just thinking of him made her hot.

"That was an extraordinary display," Tavius said finally.

Danny clenched her hands into tight fists. "So, what? You were testing me? Because I fucking didn't appreciate it."

Tavius' face stiffened. "No, that was not a test ... it was an unfortunate incident. The one responsible for the release of the *Couchettes* is being punished as we speak."

“*Couchettes?*”

“Yes. The creatures that attacked you are *Couchettes*.”

“Not vampires?”

Tavius shook his head. “At one time they were but those who are not strong enough, who cannot resist the lure of blood ... they sink into madness. What you saw in that room is the result of that madness. They are nothing but mindless things that know nothing but the need for blood and flesh. There is nothing else.”

“So, like zombies.” Danny wrinkled her nose. Vampire zombies, terrific, just terrific.

Tavius shrugged. “The humans would call them such but they are what they are, *Couchettes*.”

“And do you mind telling me why they tried to make me dinner? Well, I know why they tried to eat me but why did you put me in a room with crazy, flesh eating vampires?”

Again that icy look crossed Tavius’ face. “It was not my intention. Again, I am dealing with the situation.”

“That’s nice,” Danny said dryly. “I’d like to know what situation that is.”

“I am sure you would. However, it is not yours to know. Now, we will talk about more pleasant things ... like how come this is the first time I have met you?”

Danny sighed. Everyone seemed to think they should have had her company before now. “This is my first trip to your establishment.”

“Yes, I know...” his eyes glittered, “...rumors ... I have heard rumors of an amazing wolf, a powerful wolf ... a lone wolf.”

“Lone wolf no more.”

“Ah, so you have rejoined the pack?”

Danny nodded. “I have.”

“And you are this extraordinary wolf I have heard so much about...” He moved closer to her. “You are this powerful wolf...”

“What do you think?” Danny said stiffly.

“I think that what I have seen tonight would prove I should pay more attention to the wolves. Now ... you will tell me your name.”

“Danny...” She cleared her throat. “Dennison Lee. My name is Dennison Lee.”

“Interesting name. I am Tavius.”

Danny snorted. “I thought as much.”

“Well, Dennison Lee. I am glad to make your acquaintance.” Tavius’ eyes narrowed. “I am only sorry I did not get to you sooner.”

She squared her shoulders. She knew he wasn’t talking about rescuing her from those hideous creatures. He was talking about the mark, Savior’s mark.

“I want to know how to get rid of it,” Danny bit out.

Tavius’ amber-colored eyes widened. “Well ... that was not what I was expecting to hear...”

“Oh?” Danny said dryly. “What were you expecting to hear?”

“Those who are marked ... they are marked willingly, eagerly. As you cannot be marked unless you are joined in *every way*...” Tavius smiled.

Danny narrowed her eyes. “I said yes to sex. I did not say yes to being cattle branded. I want it off.”

“And you thought that I could...”

“Tell me how to get rid of it, yes. I thought if anyone would know ... well, it would

be another master. I want to know how to get rid of this damned thing. Will you help me?"

Tavius laughed heartily. "Help you? You are precious. You are absolutely precious."

"I take it that is a no?"

Tavius stopped laughing but his smile was still present. "I did not say that, no. But I believe you understand enough of our ways to know that nothing is given for free. There is always a price ... always. So, perhaps I will help you but you will pay me for any help that I give."

Payment ... it was always about payment. "What would you expect?"

Tavius glided over to her side. He touched her hair. "Beautiful hair ... you have extraordinary hair."

Danny stepped forward, out of his reach. What was it with everyone's fascination with her hair? It was just a rat's nest on top of her head. "It's just hair," she snapped. "And, by the way you owe me a new bodysuit."

"Oh, I believe we can work something out." Tavius pressed himself against her back.

Now she just didn't want to be here. Danny stiffened and tried to move away. Tavius used his arm to anchor her to him. He was strong, very strong, and it seemed, determined. Danny could probably free herself if she were willing to risk a limb or two ... or one or two of *his* limbs (she liked that idea a whole lot more). But since she was asking the master vampire for his help—so to speak—decapitating or dismembering him in any way would probably put a kink in her plan, and his willingness to offer her his services.

So she stilled herself completely and tried to keep her breathing nice and even. But she didn't want him near her. She didn't want him in any way near her. She wasn't attracted to him—though his beauty was something fierce—he made her terribly uncomfortable. There was a feeling of ... wrongness ... that he shouldn't be near her ... that she shouldn't be near him.

"It's the mark," Tavius whispered in her ear. "The mark that binds you to your master. You will not be able to stand, nor feel comfortable, so close to a master who is not your own as long as you wear that mark. The mark is designed so that you feel the pull of your master, as he will feel the pull of you..." Tavius licked the delicate shell of her ear with his tongue and Danny could feel his smile against her flesh. "In fact," Tavius continued, "I am sure he is quite unhappy at this moment, knowing that you are here with me."

"He can't know..."

"Oh, but he can. He will feel as you feel ... uncomfortable ... unsettled, like there is a great fist in your throat trying to come out. It is the nature of things. It is the nature of the mark."

"Well, I don't fucking want it," Danny shrieked. She began to struggle in earnest now. Her beast was enraged, looking for a fight. She needed to let out her anger, her rage at having her freedom, her life taken from her. For that was what was happening to her here, her life was being torn from her.

"Shhhhhh ... little wolf." Tavius' grip on her tightened. "You will hurt yourself..."

"Let me go," Danny said, her voice low and hoarse. Tavius sighed and released her. She sprang away from him. "I don't want it," she repeated.

He held out his hands in supplication. "You fascinate me, little wolf. You are all fire and magic ... and power ... a heady combination indeed. Now, you will tell me who has

marked you.”

“First, I want you to tell me how to get rid of this mark,” Danny demanded.

Tavius’ eyes began to glow. “I will tell you this much, little wolf, I cannot remove that mark as it now stands. I can, however, look into the situation for you.”

Danny fought down the panic that was threatening to overwhelm her. Oh lord. She was here in the presence of a master vampire, having come here of her own accord hoping to get some answers about the mark that now lay upon her skin, and he was telling her there was nothing that he could do. Nothing he could do. She was branded. There was a fucking mark on her skin and it was dragging her under day by day. What the hell was she going to do?

“I would know the name of your master,” Tavius said, his amber eyes eyeing her intently.

“Why?”

“To know the master is to know the mark.” Tavius smiled. “So, you will now tell me who it was that marked you.”

It couldn’t be worse than it was now, right? Danny sighed. “Master vampire, Savior Knight.”

Tavius went, if possible, even whiter. “Savverilor Knexxius,” he whispered.

Danny frowned. “Excuse me? What did you just call him?”

“The master who marked you ... you said he went by Savior Knight?”

“Yeah, but let’s go back to the part where you called him some weird name ... uh, weirder than it already it.” Danny watched Tavius’ face go completely cold and blank. Something was going on here ... something very strange. And why had he blanched at the mention of Savior’s name?

“You must be formidable indeed,” Tavius murmured. “You must be of great value for Savverilor, oh yes, he goes by Savior now.” Tavius grinned. “You must be of priceless for him to mark you.”

Danny cleared her throat. She began to eye the exit, starting to think that it was time to get out of here—fast. “Uh, thank you for taking the time to see me. I think I’ll just be going now.” She began to edge toward the door but was stopped by Tavius’ large form. Well, wasn’t this just *déjà vu*. “Move, now. I’m getting out of here.”

“You are being rude, little wolf. We have not finished our conversation. Nor have we finished negotiating.”

“Nothing to negotiate,” Danny snapped. “You’ve already said you can’t remove the mark. Why should I negotiate for nothing?”

“I said that as it now stands, I cannot remove the mark. I did not say that there would not come a time when I could remove his mark from your flesh.”

“What aren’t you telling me?”

Tavius smiled slightly. His eyes glittered brightly. “I tell you what you need to know ... now. The rest...” he chuckled, “...we will negotiate.”

Danny thought about Alexander and the pack. She had signed Alex’s contract. She now had to remember all the exact nuances of the contract. What did she have the right to negotiate? What could she give away without contacting Alex? For if she gave away something that Alex had a right to, she risked harsh penalties. Of course, to rid herself of this accursed mark, she would do just about anything ... even face Alex’s punishment. Nothing could be worse than this vampire mark—or the way she craved the bloodsucking

bastard who gave it to her. For it was pointless to deny it, she wanted him. She wanted Savior.

"I cannot give you anything that is contracted by the pack," Danny said finally.

Tavius smiled a triumphant smile, a smile that said he knew he had won. "Then, let us talk."

* * * *

Had she done the right thing? Danny wasn't certain. There was a lot she was discovering lately that she was uncertain of. She hadn't set anything in stone. She hadn't signed a blood contract with Tavius. That was certainly something to feel better about. God, the thought of signing a blood contract with a vampire gave her the creeps. And yet, she still felt uneasy. There was so much that she still did not know. There was a lot, as much as it pained her to admit, that she did not understand.

Tavius had told her a little bit more about the mark that now branded her. That she was not so wrong in her fears. It was pulling her in day by day, or should she say, night by night. Savior would pull strength and power from the mark. He would be able to harness some of her strength, but he had taken the first steps toward making her a blood companion. On the upside, she was learning how to erect barriers. The stronger Savior lashed out at her, the more determined Danny was to keep her mind hers, and hers alone. There were some drawbacks. She was getting headaches. And it took an extraordinary amount of energy to keep the shields strong and fortified. Savior was very determined ... and very, very strong. If he wanted to get through badly enough ... well, Danny knew that the energy it took her to keep him out could in the end destroy her.

But...

Danny sighed. He didn't want to destroy her. The call she received from him was one of longing ... one of need. There was nothing destructive about it, nothing that would speak of his want to kill her ... end her. No. Savior did not wish to destroy her.

He just wished to cage her ... cripple her. She could feel her brow wrinkled in consternation. He wanted her. Yes. He called to her. Yes. But in the end, he was just like the others. He wished to put her in a cage. He wished to harness her powers for his own gain and cripple her spirit.

"Goddamn the bastard to the lowest level of Hell," Danny cried. He was tormenting her. She could see his eyes ... those magnificent blue eyes, like clear pools of crystal ... and they held no traitorous intent. They held nothing but the need for her, the very essence of being. Why couldn't she have detected hatred? Why couldn't she have detected the need to kill, or to hurt, or to destroy? Why this? Why just the aching pit of loneliness. Because she *had* seen loneliness in Savior's stunning eyes, she had seen that horrible yawning gape of dark that sucked him in. And she had wanted to heal that. She never would have admitted it to him. Hell. It was the first time she was admitting it to herself. But some part of her (the part that wasn't fighting and arguing) had wanted to heal that horrible ache ... that pain she saw mirrored in those clear blue orbs of his. "But what's real?" Danny murmured.

Was any of it real?

She didn't know anymore. She was horribly lost in a sea of doubt and disillusionment. What was real? And what was the mark calling out to her? Could she trust any of her feelings? Or did she have to fear that everything she felt was merely a

product of the vampire mark.

Tavius had claimed that the mark was a calling of sorts. That Danny's soul and Savior's soul would call to one another now, even more than they had before. He would have her believe that her thoughts were all her own and that Savior could not influence her *feelings* ... only enhance what was already there. But Danny still could hear Savior's voice in her head. She could still feel his hands on her body ... and she could not forget what she had almost done to Victor in the car. That person ... that person could not be her. And if it was not her, then who was it? Who was this person she was becoming?

And now this odd verbal agreement with master vampire Tavius ... who was to say he would even honor such an agreement. It was, of course, the only agreement that she would make with the master vampire. She was not about to blood contract with him. Oh lord. Blood contract with Tavius? Danny could still see his eyes as they were when they settled upon her as she passed *the room* ... the room where she heard those shrill cries and muffled pleas.

As Danny left she had passed a large room, the door was ajar and before Tavius could stop her, she had seen ... seen too much. The beautiful auburn haired vampire who had directed her in Tavius' direction had been strung up by her ankles and suspended from the ceiling. She was bleeding from grievous wounds and there were two *Couchettes* being dragged away from her mutilated body. The hideous creatures were still snarling and snapping and trying to get to the bleeding vampire.

Danny had been horrified. Tavius, however, had coolly explained (his face had been icy as a winter's morning) that this was Leonor's punishment for what she had done. Danny learned then that Leonor was the one who had released the *Couchettes* on Danny when she had first arrived. It seemed that Leonor believed she had rights to Tavius' affections and was infuriated at the thought that some mere wolf would supplant her. She had believed—foolishly—that the *Couchettes* would finish Danny off before Tavius ever discovered what she had done.

Tavius thought the punishment that he had ordered for Leonor was quite fitting. And, as he pointed out to Danny, it was not like she would die. It was not like she could not take the punishment. She would be in pain, and that pain would be a reminder to her of what happened to those who crossed Tavius.

Danny thought it barbaric. But even more barbaric was her realization that Alex was no different. The pack was no different. The methods of punishment were different, yes, but the absoluteness, the finality of authority and the viciousness of total leadership were the same. Alex would have done the same. And, if Danny were honest with herself, she might have too under the circumstances.

Allow none that would defy you, live.

She had heard those words like a litany throughout her childhood. When she had joined Striker Clan, Alex was already ten years into his leadership. She remembered the first moment they had met over the dead body of one of his enemies. He had looked up, pierced her with those cobalt blue eyes of his, and hissed, "*Allow none that would defy you, live.*" It was a motto he would live and kill by many times during Danny's stay in the pack. It was a motto that had kept Alex as Alpha and leader of the Striker Clan all these many years.

It was the same motto Danny knew Draco lived by ... for she had seen the same truth in his eyes. If anything, Draco was even more vicious than Alex. All the more reason

why she would never, never join Draco's pack. She would never put herself under his thumb. And if she joined Stone Claw Clan, no matter how powerful a clan, no matter how powerful the Alpha, she would always be under Draco's heel. He would demand no less and she would eventually be forced to try to kill him. Perhaps she would win. But it wasn't something she was longing to find out. No. She was finished with Draco. She was finished with the Stone Claw Clan. But damn it all, if Draco challenged Alex for her, she was going to have to find a way to assassinate the blasted wolf for she wasn't about to allow Alex and Draco to fight. She wasn't about to leave her life hanging in the balance of a ridiculous battle to the death, wolves-fighting-over-a-bone thing.

"You look like death warmed over," Thad remarked from her doorway.

Danny pushed by him and walked into her apartment. She dropped her keys on the hallway table and turned weary eyes to him. "Don't you *ever* go home?" she snapped.

Thad shrugged, his expression remaining jovial. "Why should I? You have an extra bedroom, a fridge full of delicious food, which may I say I appreciate heartily, and plants that need caring for when you're away on exciting adventures." Thad frowned. "Exciting adventures that you never invite me on, and oh, why the hell are you wearing a robe?"

"Forget it."

Thad smiled. "No way, I totally need to hear this."

Danny looked at the clock and groaned. "Too early, way too early. I need to get some shuteye."

"I take it since you're back, and not dead and gutted, that the meeting at Onyx went well?" His voice was light, but his eyes were deep and worried.

"It went," Danny said. She headed to her bedroom.

"Learn anything about the, uh, well..."

"Fucking brand from hell?" Danny stripped, and too tired to get into the shower, she fell into her bed.

Thad nodded.

"You want the good news or the bad news, Thad?"

"Uh, the bad news."

"Bad news is that I'm stuck with the damned thing until master vampire Tavius figures out a way to remove it, which by the way means I'm going to owe the fiend of this city a favor or two for helping my butt out of this situation. Oh, and now it seems I've attracted master vampire Tavius' attention. A risk, of course, that I knew going into this but was hoping to avoid."

"Uh, okay." Thad rubbed his temples. "What's the good news?"

"What good news?" Danny yawned.

"You asked me if I wanted the good news or the bad news."

"Uh-huh, but there wasn't any good news." Danny flipped over to her side. "And I knew you'd ask for the bad. Ni-ight."

Thad blinked owlishly for a moment or two before making a disgusted sound deep in his throat and leaving the room.

* * * *

Danny spread her legs wide and ran her fingers gently through the dark curls at the apex of her thighs.

She was wet. She was so very wet. She bit her bottom lip, and then ran her tongue

over the plump fullness. She separated the soft folds of her pussy and inserted one delicate finger into the aching depths. It wasn't enough. Pressing a second finger into her body, she moaned as delicious shivers broke out upon her skin. Her breasts felt heavy and achy and her nipples were incredibly tight. They were stiff points of desire waiting to be suckled, nipped, licked and bitten.

Sweat began to pool upon her skin.

Oh yes. She wanted this. Danny began to scissor her fingers in and out of her body, the delicious friction was becoming frustrating ... Danny inserted a third finger into her pussy and the fullness sent shivers of ecstasy running throughout her body. Arching her hips forward, thrusting her breasts out, she continued to pleasure herself.

Light of my world.

Danny smiled seductively. She heard the words echo in her head. She knew who had spoken but she was not unprepared. She was not as naïve as she had once been. She remembered how Eloise had told her ... *forage back* ... and she remembered Tavius speaking to her about the call of the mark ... it was a call to both parties. Yes. She knew who spoke to her and now ... now it was her turn to speak to him.

Quickening her movements, she opened her mouth and gasped, running her tongue slowly over the downy soft petals of her lips. She removed her fingers from her pussy and slowly brought them to her mouth. With knowing, wanting and watchful eyes, she licked them clean ... savoring her essence ... knowing what it did to him. Danny plunged her fingers back into her aching core and now began a rhythm so strong, so beautiful that it took her breath away. Her heart was pounding and sweat was running down her brow. She could feel herself building ... building ... and it was so good ... it was so very good.

Light of my world. Let me in. Let me in. I ache ... I ache ... I burn for you.

She held him at bay. She kept that single barrier up, barring entrance to her body through that one portal in her mind. She would not allow him in but she would allow him to see. She would allow him to know ... and not be able to do anything about it. He was in excruciating pain. He needed her ... the mark demanded release and she would not give it to him.

Danny caressed one of her breasts, pinching the hard nub of her nipple, never stopping the rhythm of her body as it strove toward release. It was coming ... oh, it was coming. She could feel the fire burning brighter and hotter than before. Her body began to spasm and her heart was thumping so hard she could no longer hear anything but the sound of her own body.

She was there. She crested and then it opened to her ... everything ... everything opened to her. She flooded over, brimming so full that her vessel could not hold it, and she spilled forth, and gave herself over to the extraordinary pleasure of release.

You deny me.

Was she dreaming? No. No. She was not dreaming. She was on the half-plane—the plane between waking and sleeping. It was here that he could reach her. It was here that he tried to sway her. He had tried to take her in her dreams, and could not. He had tried to take her when she was awake, and he could not. Now he tried to reach her on the half-plane. But she had been ready for him and she had had her revenge.

And it was satisfying.

He could see everything ... and he could have nothing. She kept all open to him, save that one portal that would allow him to join her. He could not meld his body to hers.

And he was forced to feel the pain of separation. Torment for torment. If he thought to play with her, she would play right back. And in the end she would be the victor. Because, in the end, her freedom meant more to her than anything else in this world, and beyond. She would do anything to keep it.

* * * *

Danny gasped and sat up in bed. She swallowed and blinked a couple of times to clear her head. The half-plane, yes, she had really been there. And yes, she had just bested Savior at his own game. “Well, you bloodsucking bastard, your wolf has learned a new trick.”

Chapter Seven

"It arrived this morning by courier." Alex tossed the thick piece of parchment across the desk toward Danny.

She picked it up and read, swallowing heavily. "Well," she said quietly, "he hasn't set a time and date."

Alex snorted. "No, he hasn't, but he has set everything else. He makes it very clear that this is but a friendly note of intent between Alphas ... that he means to challenge for you, Dennison."

Rubbing her eyes, Danny fought the urge to groan. She hadn't slept well and it was too early in the damned morning to be dealing with this sort of shit. But Alex had called—no, summoned—and when Alex summoned, Danny came. So, here she was, sitting across from the Alpha of the Striker Clan, wearing sweatpants, a wife beater, and looking, for all intents and purposes, like crap. Well, it was Alex's fault. If he summoned her so early in the morning, and so soon after her return from a trip, he couldn't expect her to have any clean clothes on hand. So if he was pissed at her very casual wear, then that was too bad. It irked Danny that Alex, as Alpha, could wear whatever he wanted. Hell, if he wanted to strut around wearing nothing but a fucking sash, he could, but Danny was expected to afford him courtesy and the appropriate respect. That meant she was supposed to be properly groomed when she was in his presence.

Well, fuck. It was early. And she hadn't had her cup of coffee yet. "I'm not going anywhere with the cavewolf," she snarled.

Alex's eyes crinkled up and he smiled. "I take it you found Draco a tad ... chauvinistic?"

"Chauvinistic? Chauvinistic would have been a blessing. Draco is a wolf from another era, and hell, he should have been left there. He's totally psycho. No way am I joining Stone Claw Clan, no way."

Alex nodded. "And yet you fucked him."

Danny growled.

Alex sighed. "Partly my fault, I should have taken you before you left."

She felt like banging her head on the desk—hard. It had been a mistake, a big mistake, to fuck the Alpha of the Stone Claw Clan. But it would have been a mistake to have allowed Alex to sate the beast. Control. It was all about control. And Danny wasn't about to allow either Alpha to wrench that away from her.

"But now, to the larger issue at hand." Alex frowned at the parchment that she still clenched in her hand. "Challenge..." Alex tapped his fingers restlessly on the desk in front of him. "There hasn't been a challenge issued in quite some time..."

"And there isn't going to be one now," Danny spat.

"I cannot stop him from issuing his right. He has a right to challenge for you if he wishes to."

Danny leaned in, placed her elbows on the desk in front of her and speared Alex with suddenly very cold eyes. "He can do *nothing* if he's dead."

Alex blinked.

"Have you thought on that at all, Alex?"

"It is a great risk. Draco is a great force. He is a powerful Alpha."

"You have no doubt that you would win?"

"We are well matched, physically ... and both our powers are strong..."

"You are certain you would win?" Danny asked again.

"I am certain that it is his right to challenge and I am not so much of a coward not to meet that challenge head-on." Alex narrowed his eyes. "Do you understand me, Dennison? I will not have my honor taken from me. If he challenges ... I will accept, and I will not have any interference ... not any."

Danny frowned and leaned back in her chair. She knew what Alex was telling her. He was basically warning her to stay away from Draco. That she was not to try to kill him in any fashion, be it by wolf form or magic use. He would observe all pack customs and rules and he would not have her meddling. Stupid men. Stupid wolves. Stupid man wolves. It wouldn't be meddling. It would be fixing the situation. If he would just let her kill Draco then everything would be solved. There would be no challenge. There would be no grotesque ancient combat in a circle of stones. There, done, it would be finished.

Of course, Draco could possibly kill her. Danny sighed. Physically she was not a match for him, but if she used magic, well then, that would be another story altogether. But drat, Alex was telling her she couldn't kill the annoying cavewolf, not by any means. God. Sometimes he was such a spoilsport.

"You are thinking hard. Which means you are probably plotting something quite horrific," Alex said dryly.

Danny huffed. "I take offense to that."

"Fine, take offense. But it is true. Now, do you understand me?"

She sighed heavily. "Fine, fine, but I'm telling you it would be a lot simpler if you would just let me..."

"No."

"But..."

"No."

"You're being stubborn," Danny said.

Alex started to laugh. "I'm being stubborn. Well, that is certainly a delicious thought as it is you who is usually unreasonably stubborn."

Danny folded her arms across her chest. "Well," she snapped, "we all have our moments."

Alex's expression turned somber. "Indeed we do," he murmured, "indeed we do."

* * * *

Thad tossed the pad of paper at Danny. She caught it in the air. "Read it," he said, right before he took a bite of cold pizza.

Danny read the note and sighed, beleaguered. Stupid inept coven. Well, at least she would make out like a bandit on this one and she could use the money. "I'm charging her extra," she muttered. "I warned her I would if she called on me to put it back."

"I'm going with you on this one," Thad cried. He held up a hand when Danny would have argued. "No way are you leaving me behind. I'm going," he said firmly.

"Fine," Danny grumbled. "It shouldn't be that bad anyway. They're just young and stupid and have a ridiculously inept *Airok* for their coven leader. I summoned it. I'll send it back." She retrieved her supply bag and began to check the contents. "Hmmm ... okay

... looks to be in order.”

“It was low level, right?”

Danny nodded. “Uh-huh, though who knows...”

“Who knows what?”

“Who knows what they called it for, so who knows what sort of condition it’s in. They’re just young and stupid, which is why they probably couldn’t banish it. But...”

“Yeah?”

“Well, sometimes these creatures surprise me,” Danny said softly.

“But you’ve dealt with dozens upon dozens of them, Danny.”

“I know, that doesn’t mean they don’t sometimes surprise me.” She remembered the taint and stiffened. Yeah, sometimes they were surprising ... and sometimes, damn them to hellfire, they even got the better of her.

* * * *

Airok Elsa looked like shit. Her hair was stringy, her eyes sunken, and her face completely sallow. She looked like she had just gone ten rounds with a demon—and lost. Of course, she *had* just gone ten rounds with a demon and lost, so perhaps Danny should cut her some slack.

Danny saw the familiar bitter and condescending look on *Airok* Elsa’s face and snorted.

Then again, perhaps not.

“Up front,” Danny said in her best professional tone.

Airok Elsa hissed. “It’s disgraceful ... the price is...”

“Exactly what I said it would be if you called upon my services again,” Danny said curtly. “Are you, or are you not, willing to pay my fee?”

Elsa retrieved her checkbook and wrote out the check. She thrust it out at Danny who accepted it with a smile, slipping it into her pocket.

“My thanks. So where is the little bugger?”

Elsa paled. “We’ve been keeping it in *Atheud*.”

Danny paled and swore. “Are you completely demented? Why would you put a demon in a summoning room?”

“It was the safest place for it. The *Atheud* has strong wards and it has been...”

“—giving the damned thing a perfect meal all this time.” Danny swore again. “Don’t you realize the demon has probably been feeding from the magic in that room? Why didn’t you put it in your temple ... or your chapel? I’m assuming you do have a chapel on the premises.”

Airok Elsa stiffened. “I would not have that creature defile our place of worship,” she spat out.

Stupid bitch. “So, instead of placing it in a room where it would have been drained of energy ... you stuck it in a room where it could feed and grow stronger. That’s just fucking brilliant.”

“It would have defiled...”

“So fucking what!” Danny shrieked. “You could have cleansed the room later. I cannot believe you.” She looked over her shoulder to where Thad stood, waiting, like a good little apprentice should. “I want you to stay here.”

Thad shook his head. “Uh, no.”

Danny turned on him furiously. “Don’t you realize what has happened here? That thing I summoned is going to be ten times stronger than it was when I yanked it out of hell. I’m not going to risk you...”

“I’m not going to learn anything if I don’t take some risks, Danny,” Thad said quietly with a small smile.

Danny clenched her hands into fists. “I’m just trying to keep you safe. I don’t want anything to happen, that is, I don’t want you to ... you mean...” She trailed off helplessly.

Thad touched her shoulder reassuringly. “It’ll be fine. Let’s do this and let’s go home, I’m starving.”

* * * *

This was bad. It felt bad. Danny shivered. She could feel the magic, dark and evil, rippling on the air. It was horrific. Yes. She knew the risks when she summoned a demon and usually she didn’t much care. Money was money and she had to make a living. So she whored out her talents, so what? At least it was an honest way to make a living—sort of. But now, now she was uneasy. Perhaps it was time she rethought her occupation. Summoning a demon was one thing ... putting it back was another thing all together. And when the demon summoned had been feeding unhindered ... then, lord, have mercy. She just let out a sigh of relief that it hadn’t managed to escape the *Atheud*. She couldn’t imagine the kind of damage this demon would do if it were let loose on the city. So much more to clean up. And damn, Danny hated to clean up. Destroy ... yeah ... make a mess, yeah, but not clean up.

“It’s big,” Thad whispered, shivering.

Danny nodded. “Yeah, it is.”

“I didn’t know low levels could be so big.”

“They come in all shapes and sizes, you’d best remember that. And this one has been sucking up the energy from the *Atheud*. It’s powerful and it’s really pissed. Do you have your cross?”

Thad fingered the gold chain around his neck that held a delicate crucifix. “Yeah, I have it.”

“Good. Keep it with you at all times and make sure to...”

“I know, Danny.”

She shook her head. “You don’t know, Thad. But you’re going to learn. You’re going to learn real fast.” Danny began to weave simple patterns on her palm. She took a deep breath and pushed open the double doors to the *Atheud*.

The demon was monstrous, and huge. With a giant head that sported six pairs of eyes and a row of mouths, it was a nightmare come to life. Its body was gargantuan. It had four arms and its flesh was black as midnight, black as coal ... black as the Hell it came from. It was hissing and spitting and snapping at the wind. It was pounding at the stone that held it encaged, and ripping at the chains that held it to the ground. It had managed to free itself from the arm shackles and was now working on its legs.

Danny didn’t hesitate. She drew the power of the fireball to her hand quickly and threw it at the demon. It hit dead center, burning a way through the black flesh of the creature’s belly.

The demon roared and lunged forward. Danny easily jumped out of reach and

shoved at Thad, who remained transfixed at the entryway.

“Get your fucking ass out of line of fire,” Danny screamed. She tossed another fireball at the creature. She needed to try to conjure a vanishing spell and start the ceremony that would banish the demon but she couldn’t do any of it now ... not with the demon so powerful and not with it attacking her as it now was. She had to debilitate it. She had to keep it down, and give herself enough time to start the ceremony.

“What can I do?” Thad screamed above the roar of fire and the shrieking of the demon.

“Start the circle. See if you can find a way to start the circle ... I sort of have my hands full over here.”

Thad nodded. He scooted along the side of the wall, keeping his eyes trained on the demon. It was engaged with Danny and paying him no attention. He dropped to his knees and began to draw the circle with the chalk that he had pulled from his pocket. The moment Danny saw that Thad had begun the circle, she pulled a vial of holy water from her pocket and threw it at the demon. The glass shattered, spraying the demon with the blessed water. It shrieked and struck out with one of its many arms. She rolled away and began to chant. “How far?” Danny screamed out at Thad.

“Almost there,” Thad yelled back.

Danny screamed out a warning. The demon had managed to loose its feet. It kicked out and slammed one of its massive legs into the floor, rocking the foundation. The entire room shook. Danny saw Thad slip from his position and fumble for the fallen chalk.

Okay, distraction, the demon needed a distraction. Danny quickly brought the spell to her fingertips. She wove the threads and thrust the power out, into the air. The magic took form and then, to her right, there stood a shimmering shape. It looked like a person ... as much as a hologram made from magic could look like a human. The demon took the bait, and began to attack the hologram.

Danny saw Thad retrieve the chalk and continue to form the circle. She pulled out her sulfur, and while the demon continued to try to destroy the magical hologram, she began to form the inner circle with the sulfur. She knew the minute that the demon figured out something was wrong, that magic was tricking him. He roared and turned his massive body back toward Danny and Thad. Their reprieve was over.

“Done!” Thad screamed over at Danny. “Done, I finished it.”

“Good work.” Danny uttered the praise just before she had to jump out of the way of a blow sent in her direction by the demon. “Get your ass out of here!” She eyed the small bit of remaining bare ground. She just needed to close the circle with the sulfur and then she could say the ceremonial words. She just needed—

Thad’s eyes bulged. He looked down at his stomach, which was now gaping open. The demon had struck and pulled out his innards. His mouth opened and closed and his eyes turned glassy. He looked up at Danny, giving her a small smile before he fell to the floor.

“NO!” Danny screamed. “NO! NO!” She rushed over to Thad’s side, mindless of the ruin she was making of the circle, mindless of the demon who was regrouping, mindless of the stench of hellfire that was beginning to fill the room. She had eyes only for Thad. “No, oh God, please no...” Danny grabbed either side of his head and held on, tightly. “Thad ... Thad ... baby ... come on ... come on stay with me...”

Thad blinked. He had gone chalky and clammy. “Danny...” he whispered, his voice

thin. "Danny ... I did it ... I did it ... I made the circle..."

Tears were streaming down Danny's face and she nodded. "Yes, baby, you did. You did it. Please ... shush ... you're going to be okay."

The demon was licking its long talons. Thad coughed, blood dribbled out of his mouth.

"I ... I don't think so. I don't think this is all right." His head lolled to one side.

Please, God. Please, God, don't do this. Don't take him away from me. Please don't take him away. Danny repeated her prayer over and over and over again.

Open to me ... open to me and meld. I will help you ... I will always help you, light of my world. I will help you destroy the evil...

Danny didn't hesitate. She let down every barrier. She opened her mind completely and let him in ... let everything in.

And he was there, standing before her, holding out his hand to her. "Come," Savior said urgently. "We have much work to do. We must destroy the creature."

Danny cast one more look at Thad who was wheezing on the ground. She had thrust some of her magic into his body ... trying to prolong ... prolong his life but he was in hideous pain. And she had merely prolonged his life ... she had not stopped his death. She took Savior's hand, not questioning how he had come to her, why he was here or what he wanted.

"You will keep your mind open to me at all times," Savior said, eyeing the hulking creature in front of them. "We will need to keep our power melded and in harmony to defeat this evil. Do you understand?"

Yes. She had to do this. She understood. She felt cold, she felt so cold. How had it come to this? Her best friend lay dying and she had to meld her energy and her power with a master vampire to defeat a demon ... a demon she had released.

"Focus!" Savior spoke sternly. "You must focus. You can mourn later, berate yourself later. Right now you must focus."

Danny nodded curtly. He was right. Savior was right. She had to focus. She had to do this for all of their sakes. She opened her mind. The barriers were already loose, but now she flung them wide open. She touched Savior's power, a potent thing, and created a bridge between her mind and his. She allowed the ebb and flow of power to be released between them ... and she welcomed it. Her beast was holding on, urging her on and there was no fight, no animosity between her and her animal. They were one. They were all linked together in a perfect chain.

"NOW!" Savior shouted.

Danny threw out her hand and watched as power flew forward. Her power was hot like molten lava and her eyes widened when she saw Savior's power, cool, like rivers of ice, join her power streams. They entwined, like lovers, and hit the demon. The demon stumbled back and let out a roar of fury. It lunged forward with its arms, trying to get free, but it was pinned by the formidable power that Danny and Savior wielded together.

"Now, *ashleya*..." Savior's eyes were turbulent. "...you will send this creature back to hell. Keep your mind open to me ... do not let me go, not even for a second. I must keep our forces together while you perform the ritual." He gave her a small smile. "Hand it over to me now. Trust me, *ashleya*. Hand it over to me ... just for a moment."

Danny knew, as surely as she knew she needed Savior, that he was right and she had to do this. She let go of his hand, and whispering the spell words, she passed her streams

of power over to him. Savior took both streams, red and blue and handled them as carefully as if they were glass. He continued to wield both of their powers, while Danny quickly closed the ruined circle. She did not look over at Thad's fallen body. She could not allow herself to be distracted. Not now. She had to do this. She finished the formation. And then, kneeling on the cold ground, she began to say the ritual words. The words came to her as easily as breathing. They were there. It was part of her gift. She was *magi*, and all *magi* could take as well as give. She was taking the demon's power, its energy, and sucking it dry. She heard the demon's cry, as if coming from a deep, dark well and she continued to chant. Then she felt it, the cool, blessed breeze and she watched as the floor opened up and sucked the demon down. And in a moment ... it was finished.

"A little dramatic, but it'll do in a pinch," Danny murmured.

"It was well done, *ashleya*. It was very well done."

Danny blinked and then with a gasp she ran over to Thad's side. He was so pale, and cold. And he wasn't moving.

"Thad ... Thad..." Danny cradled him in her arms.

Thad's eyes cracked open and his mouth moved stiffly. "Did ... did we do it?"

"Yes, we did it."

"You must let him go," Savior said. "He is dead."

"No, he's not dead, he's not dead yet."

Savior sighed. "The boy will not live no matter how much power we push into him. The wound is too grave."

"No," Danny moaned. "No..."

"I can save him, *ashleya*."

Danny's head jerked up. "What?"

"I can save him. But you must make the decision quickly, before he truly passes over ... for then ... even I cannot bring those back from the beyond."

"How?" she asked softly.

"You know how, *ashleya*."

No. No. She couldn't do it. She couldn't allow him to do that to Thad. But ... but if it saved him ... if it kept him from true death.

"You will have to agree to the last three marks," Savior said.

Danny shook her head. "No."

"It is the payment I demand for saving your friend. It is the payment I demand for the information that led to your brother's return."

"No," Danny repeated.

"Danny..." Thad gasped. "I ... I love you."

She stroked Thad's icy cold cheek. "I love you too but don't tell anyone I told you."

Thad smiled slightly. "I ... I don't want to leave you..."

It was done. She was decided. Danny bowed her head and let out a heart-wrenching sob of anguish. When she raised her head, she could feel the heat that lay there ... that burned a path through her otherwise frozen body.

She speared Savior with her dead eyes and nodded. "Do it."

* * * *

It was dark, so very dark ... and she was so cold. Had she ever been this cold before?

Danny stood still as a statue in the enormous room. She was shivering and pain was riding her hard. There was so much pain in her heart.

“*Ashleya*.” Savior’s eyes were filled with deep understanding and acceptance. He held out his arms. Danny didn’t think, she ran into his embrace. She buried her head in his chest and sobbed. She let the tears come, a flood of pain, memories and hurt so deep she didn’t know if she would ever be able to bury it. “My *ashleya* ... it will be all right. Your friend ... he will live now. It will be all right.”

Danny sniffled. “Live as what?” She choked back more sobs. “As ... as...”

Savior nodded. “There is a price for everything. You knew the price and you paid it. Your friend, he wished for it too. I could feel it in his heart, see it in his eyes when he looked at you. He did not wish to leave you. He did not wish to leave your side. He chose *you* over death.” Savior smiled softly. “Anyone would choose you over death, my *ashleya*.”

Danny felt Savior’s hand, cool and comforting on her cheek, and she looked up into his brilliant eyes. There was so much fire there ... so much yearning. And she wanted that fire. Lord, she wanted him. “Savior,” she whispered.

He smiled, touching her lips with his finger, smoothing it over the soft pliant flesh. “Yes, my *ashleya*?”

“I want you,” Danny murmured. “I want you.”

“You are the light of my world.” He gripped her bottom, pressing her even more tightly against his body, letting her feel the strength of his arousal. Letting her know the depths of his need and hunger for her.

“Unless I get to watch or participate in the merry making, I would prefer if you would take to one of my many spare rooms,” Tavius spoke from the doorway.

Danny gasped and tried to pull out of Savior’s embrace. He would not let her. He held her in his firm embrace and turned them both so they could see the master vampire lounging so casually in the doorframe.

Savior sighed. “Very unfortunate timing you have, Tavius.”

Tavius smiled slightly, gliding effortlessly into the room. He looked first at Danny, growling at him like the wild wolf that she was, to Savior, cool and collected at her back.

“I can come and go as I please in my home.” Tavius cocked his head to one side. “It has been a long time since I have seen you. I was surprised to see you at my doorstep ... with the wolf in tow.”

Savior inclined his head, respectfully. “I thank you for your hospitality, Tavius. For the sanctuary of your establishment. And I offer you, of course, payment in kind.”

Tavius chuckled. “I did not offer you the use of my home to garner some payment from you. You are welcome here ... as is your delectable wolf.”

“Call me delectable again, and I’ll bite your head off,” Danny snapped. She growled when Savior tightened his grip on her. She knew he did it in warning but she wasn’t much in the mood to be warned.

“Extraordinary acquisition you have managed to get for yourself,” Tavius drawled. “You are most fortunate ... she has spirit, beauty ... and so much power, Savverilor.”

Savior clenched his jaw. “I am called Savior now.”

Tavius’ eyebrows rose. “Yes, that is right. In this land you choose to call yourself Savior. How interesting ... your choice in names.”

“Okay, listen, I don’t know what is going on between the two of you, but enough

already.” Danny turned her gaze to Tavius. “I would like to see Thad.”

Tavius’ face betrayed nothing. “The new one is still in the healing sleep. He most likely will not rise this night.”

“I understand. I would still like to see him.” She swallowed her pride and everything else. “Please, I would like to see him.”

“By all means then, see him.” Tavius speared Savior with a cool assessing look. “He is at the end of the hall. *Savior* and I have much to talk about. He shall stay here with me.”

Danny didn’t move.

Savior released her from his embrace. “Go, *ashleya*, check on your friend. I will stay here and speak with Tavius.”

She nodded slowly. She walked from the room, aware that both vampires followed her every move.

* * * *

Thad looked dead. He looked well and truly dead. His face was unthinkably pale, and so cold, he was so cold.

Danny ran her hand down his icy cheek and continued to study and memorize each and every pore.

He was gone. The Thad she knew was gone. He was no longer human. His humanity had been stripped away when Savior had converted him. Now he was an *Othersider*. Worse still, he was a creature of the night.

She pulled the sheet away from his body. The mortal wound was gone. His skin was now pale, smooth and unblemished. There was no indication that he had been so near death. Should she not be thankful for this? Should she not be thankful that Thad was still with her? Perhaps he was not the Thad she knew, but she could get to know him all over again. Yes, she could get to know him all over again.

She covered him with the sheet and stood. Pushing some of her wayward hair away from her face, she sighed deeply. She was so weary.

“We do what we must. We all do what we must and sometimes we pay a heavy price,” Savior said softly from behind her.

Danny nodded. She didn’t turn around. She didn’t want him to see the pain that she knew was evident within her eyes.

“*Ashleya* ... all will be well now. It is, in essence, a new beginning.”

A new beginning? Danny blinked. A new beginning. What a thought. She had always gone about her way, so sure, and, if she admitted it to herself, righteous. She lived by a code, oh it was a twisted one, but it was a code, nonetheless. She had been born an anomaly. A unique creature in a world that did not seem to value the unique. Her mother had given her up, abandoned her when she realized that Danny’s powers and potential far outweighed her own. She had been left to fend for herself in a world where weakness was not tolerated, and power was coveted above all else. She asked for no help, for no one had ever truly helped her. Help always came with an addendum ... there was always a price to pay. Even her teacher, her mentor, had expected something from Danny. She learned that you forged your own way, did whatever you could to survive, and you followed the rules that you set for yourself ... lest you falter from the path.

But the rules had changed. The code had changed. Perhaps it had never been there in

the first place. Now she was here, at a fork in the road, and she was forced to reevaluate everything that she thought she knew ... and everything she thought she had ever wanted.

A new beginning ... yes, perhaps it was.

* * * *

"This is creepy." Danny wrinkled her nose and frowned deeply at Savior, who lay on his back smiling his beautiful smile at her.

"What, *ashleya*, is so wrong with spending the night in Tavius'..."

"—den of sin?" Danny finished sarcastically. "Love nest, place of unthinkable horrors and even worse, sexual depravity?"

Savior started to chuckle. "Very eloquent, very eloquent, indeed."

She swept her eyes around. The room was red, bright red. There were heavy black drapes and everything was lush and rich. Black and white pillows decorated the costly furniture and the bed they were currently lying on was as large as a continent. "As I said ... this is creepy."

Savior trailed his hand down Danny's side and watched as her eyes darkened with desire. "It was very kind of Tavius to offer us one of his rooms. You wished to stay near your friend, and your home has not been fortified and renovated for vampire use."

Fortified and renovated for vampire use ... lord ... she was going to have to work on her home so she didn't end up inadvertently frying her best friend. That was certainly a sobering thought.

Savior leaned over and captured one of her nipples in his mouth. He sucked the taut bud strongly, relishing in the soft moans that she emitted. Savior began to knead her thighs, urging them to part.

"Savior..." Danny moaned.

Savior smiled against the cushion of her breast. "Open for me, light of my world, open."

Danny parted her legs. "I..." She watched as he moved down her body. He gently blew the curls at the apex of her thighs and then, ran his tongue the entire length of her slit. Danny moaned. "I ... I..." she closed her eyes tightly, "...haven't changed my mind about ... uh..." Savior parted the lips of her pussy and began to lick and lap at her cream, "...the ... absurd creepiness of this place ... oh ... oh ... my..." Her words trailed off as he buried his tongue deep within her aching pussy.

Savior located the tight bud of her clit. It was ripe and full, and grew riper still under his ministrations.

"Oh, Savior ... please..." Danny's legs stiffened. The fire was burning brightly within her body. Her heart was pounding fiercely and she could feel the desperate screams of her body.

Savior quickened the thrusts of his tongue, parrying it back and forth. He gently raked his teeth against her most tender flesh and when she screamed in pleasure, he applied a little more pressure, letting her feel the first delicious bite of pain.

It was impossible. Danny couldn't stop the explosion of light. She was overcome and allowed herself to be carried away.

Savior allowed her no reprieve. He flipped her onto her stomach and pushed two pillows beneath her heaving body.

"I cannot wait. I need it now, my *ashleya*. You will have to trust me. The pain will

be well worth the pleasure...”

“Pain?” Danny frowned, and craned her neck. “Uh, what pain?”

Savior chuckled. He dipped his fingers into her dripping pussy and then spread her cream generously over the puckered ring of her ass.

Danny’s eyes widened. “Oh, no ... no way ... I’ve never...”

“I know,” Savior whispered. “It is delicious ... knowing that I will be your first...” He gently inserted the tip of one of his thick fingers into her ass, her tight flesh closed upon his finger like a vise. “Oh, *ashleya*, you are so incredible ... so very incredible...”

Danny swallowed. It was not unpleasant, in fact, she felt an aching, a yearning that was beginning to spread throughout her body. She had never felt this ... this ... need before.

Savior groaned. “You are calling to me, *ashleya* ... your body already knows what it needs, it is already readying itself.” Savior removed his finger and positioned his hard cock against her. “You will take a deep breath now...”

She did as he bid. Danny took a deep breath, and as she was about to exhale, she felt him push his way into her ass. She gasped and tensed immediately.

“No, my *ashleya*, no, not yet ... relax...” Savior hissed.

Danny felt so incredibly tight against him, and he had pushed no further than the head of his cock into her body. He took a deep breath. She relaxed slowly, her muscles no longer closing him out. He pressed further into her ass, allowing her body to envelop him.

Danny screamed in pleasure. He was so deep now and she felt amazingly full. Her body was stretched beyond belief ... and it was wonderful. She wanted more.

“Savior, I’ve never ... oh, lord ... oh...” Danny pressed back, arching against him. She was rewarded with a hard thrust. Her eyes widened in startled pleasure. “Yesss...” she hissed.

Savior gripped the rounded globes of her ass and began to thrust in earnest now. He kept the rhythm of his thrusts even and smooth, allowing her to feel everything.

Danny began to pant and groaned when she felt Savior’s fingers delving into her dripping pussy, all the while moving in and out of her ass with his unbelievably hard cock.

“Oh yes, my darling, oh yessss...” Savior quickened his thrusts, and pressed his thumb against her full clit.

Waves of ecstasy washed over her, and she began to shiver, her entire body began to quake. She let the energy, the power and the pleasure hit her, and she welcomed it.

Chapter Eight

Danny stared at the small store. She had been standing here for over ten minutes debating whether or not she was going in. So far, she wasn't making much progress in her decision making process.

The door to the shop opened and a pretty girl with two long braids hanging loose, popped her head out. "I know the outside is fascinating..." the girl's eyes twinkled merrily, "...but I assure you the inside is even more interesting."

Danny snorted. She nodded and walked into the shop. The scent of light incense and the burn of gorgeous candles instantly put her at ease. The shop was aesthetically pleasing and stocked amazingly well for such a limited space. The shelves were a rich cherry wood and there were thick volumes of books lining each and every one of them. There were glass cases filled with crystals, rubbing stones and a varied assortment of charms. The back corner of the store boasted an impressive array of ceremonial cloths in every color, texture and weave.

"Looks can be deceiving," the girl said with a knowing smile on her face. She obviously saw the look of disbelief on Danny's face.

"The store is lovely," Danny said simply.

"I'm Whitefeather."

"Danny, Danny Lee."

"Well, Danny, Danny Lee, what can I do for you?"

"Well, I saw the sign in the window ... and ... well ... I was thinking, hoping in fact that..." Danny's voice trailed off and she wondered what the hell was wrong with her. She felt like an idiot.

Whitefeather's smile widened. "You're here to apply for the job?"

"Yes." She let out a deep breath. "Yes, I am."

"Do you have experience working retail?"

"No."

"You've never worked as a cashier before?"

"No."

"Well..." Whitefeather led Danny over to the check-out counter, "...it's simple, really, and..." she grinned, "...I think you'll learn quickly."

Danny blinked. "You're hiring me? You're actually hiring me?"

Whitefeather nodded. "You're ridiculously overqualified, let me tell you. But I think you'll be good for my store, and I think my store will be good for you. It's nice *Othersiders* will be put at ease by your presence." Whitefeather's smile widened. "Just don't eat any of my customers, okay? Because sometimes they can be a pain and you'll be tempted."

Danny matched Whitefeather's smile. "I'll keep my appetite under control, promise."

Whitefeather cocked her head to one side. "You're strong. Your power shimmers all about you like a fine cloak. And ... you're wolf." Smile still in place, she asked, "What are you?"

Danny sighed. "*Magi*."

If Whitefeather was surprised, she didn't show it, she just nodded. "Like I said,

you're incredibly overqualified."

"Question."

"Yes?"

Danny felt anticipation zing through her. "Do I get a discount?"

Whitefeather burst out laughing. She nodded. "You do."

Okay. Life just got a whole lot better. Danny couldn't stop the huge smile that split her face. Supplies ... she got a discount on supplies. Oh yeah, it didn't get better than this. It really didn't.

* * * *

"You're doing what?" Thad blinked rapidly. "I'm sorry. I don't think I heard you right."

Danny pulled her long hair into a ponytail and tossed him a cheeky grin. "Nope, you heard me just fine. I'm working at *Universal Portal*."

"As a..."

Danny shrugged. "Whatever Whitefeather needs is what I'll be. She's going to teach me how to use the cash register and ... well ... knowledge of the products isn't going to be a problem for me." Danny slapped Thad on his shoulder. "Hey, be happy for me."

Thad shook his head, bewildered. "I ... I am happy for you. I'm just surprised. I mean, uh, you're not going to be making as much money, I'm assuming."

"She's paying me twelve dollars an hour."

Thad nearly choked. "Twelve dollars an hour? Danny, have you gone crazy? Have you lost your mind?"

"Nope. I think I've finally found it." Danny sighed happily. "Listen, I own my apartment. I have good savings and hey, twelve dollars an hour adds up, especially when you're working forty to fifty hours a week."

"It's just ... well..." he sighed, "...you're not going to need an apprentice now, are you?"

Danny reached over and pulled him into an embrace. She smiled against his shoulder.

"I may not need an apprentice right at this moment, but I do need a friend."

Thad snorted. A tender smile broke over his handsome face. "You'll always have a friend in me, Danny, always."

"You call me friend still ... after what I have done?" Danny dropped her head.

Thad nodded. "Even more so because of what you have done."

"I took away your humanity, Thad."

"No, Danny. I may no longer be human but I retain my humanity." Thad's eyes were warm. "I will always have that. Nothing and no one will take that away from me. I have a soul. I still have a soul."

She tried not to sniffle. She would not cry. She absolutely refused to cry. But Thad's words and his truly beautiful soul humbled her.

"No tears now, Danny." Thad squeezed her to him and smiled broadly. "I'm alive, well, as alive as a dead guy can be. And you're alive, and hey, all is right with the world. Why don't we go get an ice cream soda?"

"Now that's a little too positive and happy-go-lucky even for me," Danny said, smiling.

“What can I say?” Thad’s smile widened. “I’m pretty glad to still be here ... still be here with you. And hey, I don’t have to worry about my weight anymore.”

Danny burst out laughing. It was true. “Oh, and you don’t have to worry about pimples or...”

“Wait a second, I didn’t have pimples.”

Danny grinned.

Thad slapped her on her shoulder. His expression turned somber. “Are you going to be okay with all of this?”

Danny laughed, but it was a brittle laugh. “Thought that was my line.”

“I’m doing fine. You’re the one riddled with guilt.”

“I’m trying, Thad. I really am. I just ... I just can’t understand. Perhaps because...” Danny swallowed. This was difficult for her to admit. “Perhaps because I couldn’t deal with it so well ... I couldn’t deal with it...” Her words trailed off.

“You’re Dennison Lee, wolf extraordinaire.” Thad laughed. “I think, I know you handle everything well.”

Danny shivered. Savior. She had made promises to Savior. She shook her head. “There is one thing I don’t think I’ll handle too well,” she whispered.

* * * *

It had to happen now. There was no denying it. Danny wanted to run. She wanted to shed her human skin and feel her fur, thick and soft. Her beast was hungry. It wanted to feel the forest at its feet. It wanted to bask in the glow of the moon. It wanted to be ... just to be itself.

She had left Thad, watched as he’d walked down her street and disappeared into the darkness of the night. She knew that he was returning to Tavius’. It was the only place truly safe for him now ... for the meantime. Thad was of Savior’s line. Savior’s immortal blood ran through his veins. And Savior was his master. If he chose to leave, Thad would leave for Savior’s territory. And of course, it was possible that Savior would demand Thad’s allegiance and pull him from Tavius’ keep early. In the end the result was the same, Danny would have to let Thad go. She had made the decision that had preserved his life and now she had to leave him to his death.

Danny broke through the clearing and lifted her head to the moon. She was alone save for the sleeping birds. The park was empty. She could not resist. She howled. Her soul felt lighter, her heart free ... the beast was part of her, and at this moment, such was the truth of her existence.

She sprinted to the nearest patch of clustered brush and bramble. She took a deep breath and focused her energy ... focused her power. She allowed her beast to roam free and the change was upon her. Muscles pulled, tendons split and bone reformed. Wolf and woman were one.

Danny shook out her fur. She howled again, this time as beast. Danny began to run. She ran as fast as her legs would take her. She ran to merge her two souls. She ran to be free.

Savior materialized in front of her. Danny skidded to a stop. She cocked her head and growled at him.

Savior smiled. His beauty was staggering. “You truly are the light of the world, *ashleya*.”

It was time to refocus her power. Danny quickly brought about her change. She stood in front of Savior gloriously nude, glistening in the moonlight. “I know why I am here.” Danny straightened her shoulders, meeting his gaze soundly. “Why are you here?”

“I am where you are, my *ashleya*.” Savior’s eyes raked over her body. “I am where you are.”

Danny realized that she had to know. “Why, Savior ... tell me why?”

“What wearies you, my own, my *ashleya*?”

“I must know, Savior. The last time ... the last time we were together, why did you not take what was owed to you?”

Savior glided over to her. He reached out and ran his hand caressingly down her side, molding her breast and causing a burning fire within her body.

“I would not take it,” he murmured.

Danny swallowed, and her breath hitched when Savior pinched her taut nipple. “You would have taken nothing. I gave my body to you willingly.”

“Yes, my own, you did. But you gave me your body ... I want more.” Savior pressed forward, his brilliant eyes speared hers. “And until you surrender it to me, I shall not further the prison you believe yourself to be tied to.”

He knew. He knew her soul ... he knew her fears ... he knew it all.

Savior nodded. “I see, of course I see it, my own, and your fear pierces the soul I thought I did not have.” He wrapped his arms around her, bringing her close, breathing in the scent of her. “You do not see, not yet, that these marks are not marks of slavery...” his eyes burned, “...but marks of destiny. We are destined, my own, to be as one.” He smiled a sad smile. “But until you see that, until you are called on to understand and be filled with the knowledge of such destiny, I cannot take what I so long for.”

Danny breathed deeply. She looked up into his probing eyes knowing her own had to be filled with tremulous disbelief and errant fear. What was he saying now? He was telling her that he was not going to mark her further? She had given him her word. And now he was telling her that their agreement would not be fulfilled—at least not now. It was not to be borne ... nor understood. Such humanity, such true humanity from one who was no longer human. Was this what Thad spoke of? That you could die but you could still retain your soul.

Savior’s eyes sparkled. “You are a power such as the world has never known, my *ashleya*, but there is much that *you* do not know.” He stepped back from her. There was such heat ... such true longing and desperation in his eyes. “But the future holds much, light of my world. Oh yes, the future holds much.” Savior gave her a smile, and dematerialized.

Damn him. It wasn’t fair. *She* couldn’t dematerialize.

Epilogue

It was a wonderful feeling, helping people. Danny smiled as she handed the wrapped package over to the satisfied customer. She surveyed the busy store with a pleased expression on her face. Whitefeather had been right when she had told her that she would catch on quickly. She was already working the register and stocking the store like a pro.

And ... she hadn't eaten one single customer—yet.

Danny enjoyed working at the store and was surprised at how much she enjoyed it. She loved working with people, loved helping them find what they needed and loved seeing their satisfied faces when she passed them their purchases. It was a joy. It was a joy to give and to help. She no longer felt the gnawing and aching guilt of using her gifts for profit. She was coming into her own. Learning what it meant to be a wielder of such power ... learning the responsibilities that one had when housing such magic.

Alex was unhappy with her newest profession. He claimed that retail was demeaning and that she was wasting her precious talents on the unappreciative human horde.

She told him to bite her.

No. For the first time in her life she felt a modicum of peace. She fortified her shields, not that it was necessary, for Savior was keeping his distance. Danny couldn't help but wonder when the other shoe was going to drop but she found she didn't want to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Her life ... it was her life and she was just beginning to truly live it.

"Danny..." Thad stood before her.

Danny smiled and shook her head to clear it. "Thad, I'm so glad you came in. What do you need?" Her smile faltered when she saw the look on his face.

Thad swallowed. "I'm leaving, Danny."

"What?"

He nodded. "I'm leaving."

"Why?" Oh, she knew that this was a possibility but she hadn't been prepared for it to actually happen.

"My master bids me to come," Thad said simply.

Danny stiffened. She knew it was true that Savior was Thad's master but she still did not like to hear Thad call him by that title.

"So, you go, just like that?"

"I must. I have no other choice. And..." Thad nodded, "...it is my desire. My master gave me life again. It is an honor to serve him."

"This doesn't sound like you."

Thad smiled slightly. "This is a new me. This is me reborn."

Danny snorted. "Now you're being melodramatic."

Thad laughed. "Yes, you're right. I am." His smile faded. "You are to come as well, Danny."

"Excuse me?" She frowned.

Thad nodded. "He has asked that you come."

"What the hell? He asked you to ask me to come?"

"It was a much more formal invitation than you just made it out to be, but in essence,

yes.”

Danny clenched her hands into tight fists. Her life ... her life ... her life, yes, she could not forget that but ... she could not be dishonorable and she could not allow Thad to go into Savior’s territory alone ... not if she could act as guide.

Thad nodded slowly. “You will go,” he said quietly, reading the answer in her eyes. “I will go.” Danny lifted her chin. “I will go.”

The End

About the Author:

Ever since I could pick up a pen, I have been writing. I became fascinated with fantasy at the age of eight, when my mother bought me a copy of ‘The Hobbit’. Not too long after that I became addicted to anything and everything about vampires. The duality of nature fascinated me.

But it was an event four years later that would shape my future career as an author of erotic romance. At the age of twelve I discovered my grandmother’s stash of romance novels, hidden of course, in her closet. I devoured them. My grandmother kicked me out of the closet. But alas, the damage had been done...I was a hopeless junkie—a romance junkie.

To this day I keep my love of fantasy, vampires and romance. What’s more, I have learned (through much practice) to meld the genres to create, for myself, the perfect environment to pen my erotic romance novels. I live, quite simply, for love, lust and the complex nature of the human heart. And I write to share my love, lusts and complex nature with others.

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