



The book cover features a dramatic, low-key photograph of two shirtless men. The man on the left is in the foreground, looking off to the side, wearing a chain with a cross pendant. The man on the right is slightly behind him, looking directly at the camera. A circular inset in the lower right shows a red-tinted image of a city street at night with a full moon. The title 'BLOOD ECLIPSE' is written in a large, stylized, orange-gold font across the middle, with 'ECLIPSE' having a more gothic, pointed style. Below the title, 'ECLIPSE SERIES BOOK 1' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

# BLOOD ECLIPSE

ECLIPSE SERIES BOOK 1

A.J. LLEWELLYN AND D.J. MANLY

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Blood Eclipse

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# BLOOD ECLIPSE

BY

AJ LLEWELLYN  
AND DJ MANLY

## DEDICATION

*AJ dedicates this book to Herve and to all his  
readers, with love and affection.*

*D.J would like to dedicate this to all the  
vampire lovers out there.*

# CHAPTER ONE

*Los Angeles, 2012*

“Come on, Rory,” Dennis pleaded. “It will be a kick.”

Rory sat back in his chair and hoisted his feet up on to the desk. He stretched luxuriously and laced his fingers behind his neck. “Hum, let me think about it again?” He closed his eyes, then opened them. “Okay, I’ve thought about it. And no.” Abruptly, he swung his legs off the desk and stood. As he reached the window and looked outside, Dennis let out a cry of frustration.

“Rory, why not?” he groaned. “You asked me what I wanted for my birthday and —”

“You have been telling me the same thing every day for the last two weeks, I know.”

“You won’t have to pay for anything. I just want you to come with me. If you were really my friend, you’d —”

Rory started to laugh. He turned around and shook his head. “Do you know how pathetic that is? You used to do that to me when we were kids.

We're not ten anymore."

"I don't understand what your problem is with this," Dennis threw up his hands. "It's all government controlled now, completely legal. Why are you so prejudiced against them? You never used to be so narrow minded. You should understand being gay."

Rory sighed. "It's not the same thing. Gay people don't suck the blood out of people to live. These are *vampires*. Actual honest-to-God...scratch the last part. They have a history of murder, Dennis. There is no guarantee that they have their bloodlust under control just because they now drink synthetic blood and run businesses."

"And humans don't have a history of murder? Look at the witch trials and the Nazis."

Rory sighed heavily. "Okay, so you don't understand my reticence. Well, I don't understand your obsession either. Why don't we go out to a fun gay bar tonight? There are a few of those left, you know. We could find you a nice, well-hung, horny, breathing human?"

"And what if he's a psycho?"

"Dennis, you're not being fair."

"Listen to this," Dennis said, jumping up and grabbing his briefcase. He pulled out a magazine and began to frantically thumb through the pages.

"Reading those vampire porn magazines again?" Rory made a face.

"They're not porn, well maybe there are a few pictures. Have you seen some of these vamps? They're gorgeous."

"Gorgeous and deadly," Rory muttered. He could not understand his friend. They were so close, yet so different. Rory was beige-blond and knew he was intense. An Ultimate Fight writer by trade, he'd lost interest in covering the blood sport once the vampires got involved, slipping into the ring one of their own. In the uncompromising world of ultimate fighting where every deadly martial art was an asset, they carried an unfair weapon in their quiver—their lovely, long canine teeth.

Now he was writing a book about his experiences covering the sport. He had one publisher interested until he became intimidated by what he deemed *Rory's anti-vampire stance*.

"Joe, I am not anti-vampire. I am anti-sneak attacks. At least read the book before you pass on it." Joe Rica had given him a small advance and was waiting to read the first few chapters before fully committing to the book, which was now Rory's obsession. He struggled daily with it, but was determined to finish it to honor the fighters he had known and respected, but who had died in the ring.

Dennis was the opposite, dark haired but sunny, the ultimate optimist. It was refreshing

when they were talking about doing fun stuff, but not when it involved a sex den owned, controlled and populated by the new race of vampires. The new breed had slowly but surely taken over southern California. They had their own banks, hotels, theaters and clubs and had also taken over various city councils. It worried Rory that Dennis sought only a cheap thrill and didn't consider the consequences.

Though they were both twenty-five, Rory hankered for a good relationship with hot sex. He wanted a guy who listened to him, a guy who read him. Dennis wanted a guy who was hot in the cot and read the good bits to him out of vampire rags.

"Here, here it is," Dennis announced. "Listen. I won't read it all. It says that and I quote, *humans who have reported having sex with vampires describe it as being like no other sexual experience. Not only are orgasms especially more intense, vampires have the ability to pleasure their partners in exactly the way they desire due to their telekinetic powers. Further, vampires have longer staying power and almost instant rejuvenation abilities. So if you are looking for the sex of your life and you're brave enough, why not visit one of the now-legal vamp brothels and try it out?*"

"Did you notice the disclaimer...if you're brave enough?"

"Rory," Dennis groaned, throwing down the



magazine. "I want my twenty-fifth birthday to be special. I want to experience this once, just like you wanted to jump out of that plane last year? Remember?"

"Not quite the same thing."

"I want this more than anything, but I won't go without you."

"No pressure there." Rory laughed, glancing reluctantly at his computer.

"All you have to do is hang out and wait for me, that's all. Nothing else."

Rory shook his head. "Okay, it's against my better judgement, but if that's what you really want—" He didn't have time to finish his sentence. Dennis was on him, giving him a huge bear hug. "Okay, okay," Rory pushed him away playfully, laughing. "Enough. Leave me so I can get at least a chapter done on my book, okay?"

Dennis made a face. "No problem. How about I pick you up around nine tonight?"

"Okay. And where are we going again?"

"An upscale place in West Hollywood called Eclipse."

"Do you have any idea how much this is going to cost?"

"Cover is fifty dollars, actually doing the nasty with a vamp varies depending on who you choose. Someone I spoke to told me two hundred an hour for normal stuff and one thousand and up

for specialty. I'm paying for everything, so don't worry about it."

Rory shuddered. "*Specialty?*"

"I just want the normal stuff."

Rory balked at the word normal. "You actually talked to someone at this...brothel?"

"They're in the phone book, Rory, geez," Dennis muttered, grabbing his briefcase.

"Right, under what, blood donation?"

Dennis laughed. "Get to work and I'll do the same. I'll see you later. I love you."

Rory lay down on his bed and plumped the pillow under his head. He glanced at his alarm clock. Dennis had gotten up early before work to come over and beg him again to go to this place...this sex and blood club.

He closed his eyes. The first thing he saw was Libreto Barrera lying on the canvas in the caged ring at the vampire-run Hollywood City Casino. The stunning attack to his jugular vein when his opponent, Kolin Karolyi, a celebrated boxer from the Ukraine, bit his neck and left the twenty-year-old champion helpless. He had tried to fight back...

Rory turned over. He had broken ranks with the other reporters and lunged at the cage begging the referee to stop the fight. The ref hadn't seen the blood, hadn't realized Barrera was in mortal danger. Barrera's trainer and cutman, Pinky

Stevenson and Rory had resorted to climbing over the cage, but it was too late.

He felt the tears coming and quashed them. It was Rory, Pinky and the referee who greeted Barrera's wife, Sola, at the hospital when she flew in from Panama and sat vigil with her. Barrera left behind Sola and their two tiny daughters. Rory had gone to the funeral, flying to Panama City, Panama for it. He hated the vamps, hated the lies. The only good thing to come out of Barrera's death was that Ultimate Fighting now had new rules. Full disclosure of vampire status.

Though he was mulling over the idea of being on the new State Athletic Commission overseeing the sport's new rules, he knew he had to get the book done first. His aim was to keep the focus tightly on the stories of the fallen warriors he knew. The book would give him credibility should he choose a government career. It would be impossible to do if he accepted the job first. It would appear to be a conflict of interest, but man, he could sure use the money a job like that presented.

He suddenly remembered Barrera's wild, happy, child-like laugh. The emotion he felt reliving the brave young fighter's death dragged him to the computer and he wrote the words he'd stuffed down inside himself too long.

*They held his funeral in the same grungy boxing gym where he got his start. There was a sickening feeling of disbelief as people brought their own chairs and the bachata music Libreto Barrera always trained to, rang out across the town square.*

*Shops were closed, the streets were empty. Everybody jammed into the gym that still bore the hole in the window from Barrera throwing rocks at it when he was a child.*

*His Panamanian flag-draped coffin sat in the ring. His family sobbed. Fans and friends sported his trademark haircut, close cropped, a little cowlick in front.*

*The last time they had all gathered here was for Barrera's biggest fight. Now they had come to say goodbye. The day they buried him, it rained in Panama City for the first time in five months. The pallbearers, all former fighters who mentored and championed Barrera, cried as they carried his coffin to the local graveyard. The priest said, "In Panama, when it rains for a funeral, we say the angels are crying. Today, heaven and earth are both crying."*

Rory's tears flowed shamelessly as he sat back. He was angry and sad. It was for Dennis' sake that he agreed to go to the club. He mopped his face with his shirtsleeve and reached for a sour-apple candy. At least they knew what they were dealing with, *blood sex*. He could protect Dennis. He would have no trouble calling the police if anything went

wrong. Dennis really wanted this badly.

It was barely nine in the morning. He had time for a short run before tackling the book again. He was tired. He'd been up half the night working on the book, ironically doing his best writing in the last few minutes.

Fighting the urge to close his eyes and shut the world away, he threw on his running shoes and headed outside. Silverlake hadn't changed much since the vamps had invaded the largely gay enclave. He took a deep breath and could still smell eucalyptus. The trees towered around his small, cinderblock apartment building as he ran down Silverlake Boulevard and headed for the lake.

These last few weeks, Dennis had been incessant about wanting Rory to accompany him to one of those vampire brothels, apparently, the newest craze. It was scary how fast things were changing. Ten years ago, a vampire had uncharacteristically *come out* to the public. Nuno Camparo was a prominent talk show host on a major television network. No one would have ever imagined he wasn't human. After the disclosure, others began to come forward, talking about how *a few bad apples* had given them all a bad name, how they'd been living among mortals forever and were very much in control of their *condition*.

Apparently, calling it a disease was vamphobic,

the new catchall word for those who harboured prejudice against vampires.

After that, there had been commissions and inquiries on the matter. The civil liberties union became involved. Finally, the government agreed to register vampires, market synthetic blood and collect their taxes. There was still some opposition to allowing vampires to roam around freely, a lot of opposition, while vampires lobbied for more rights, tried to prove themselves to be like everyone else.

However, they weren't like everyone else. They didn't get sick, they didn't eat food and they didn't die. They also were severely allergic to sunlight, a phenomenon scientists had recently been trying to develop a vaccine for. Due to vampires' supposed sexual prowess, they'd managed to get vampire prostitution legalized. Vamp brothels had started in Los Angeles and were now spreading across the U.S. and into Canada. Some vampire-rights people, who were morally against what they called the sexual exploitation of vampires, claimed that since vampires had come out, they were becoming ghettoized in the sex industry. They were insisting on more representation in politics and higher-paying professions. Recently, the police force had hired vampires to patrol tough neighborhoods at night in the inner cities, neighborhoods human

officers didn't want to venture into.

Rory couldn't deny that vamps had their uses and he was a live-and-let-live kind of guy. Although now the debate raged over the actual definition of the term *living*, not to mention the number of crazies who thought vampires held the key to eternal life or were some kind of gods sent from outer space.

Although he'd tried hard to see it from their point of view, he really couldn't bring himself to be friends with one of them. The thought of having sex with one, no matter how good it could be, terrified him.

He turned into the wire-fenced runoff to the lake and tried not to think about the night he'd gripped a similar wire fence around the octagon and screamed for the referee to save Libreto Barrera. Sex. Oh, man. He had nothing to say about sex lately. He hadn't had any for almost three months. He was working hard and shutting himself away from the world to write his book. Dennis, however, had finished a social work degree last year and now worked for the government. When his day was done, he was ready to party and he did. He'd always been a bit of a wild boy.

Rory reached the lake, anger and reluctant acceptance warring in his mind. If it wasn't for Dennis, he'd never set foot in one of those vampire

brothels. But he'd go to please him. It was his birthday after all.

"What is all that stuff?" Rory asked Dennis as he wrestled with a pile of papers he'd tucked into the compartment in his dashboard.

"Health stuff. I have all my medical records. I need them. They won't let me, you know...if I don't have it."

Rory fumed when they reached their destination high on Hollywood Boulevard. "Tell me you're kidding. Please tell me this is a joke."

Dennis gave his friend a confused look, then gawked at the strange stone structure. It resembled a medieval fortress dressed up for Halloween with huge multicolored vines and bright flashing lights.

"No, this is it. Why?"

"It's the Magic Castle. This is a Hollywood monument. They've taken over the greatest venue for magicians in the whole world and turned it into a brothel?"

"Relax, bro. You are so agitated lately."

Rory gritted his teeth. An enormous red neon sign with the name *Eclipse* sprawled horizontally across it had two glittering fangs attached to the edges of both E's.

"Hollywood has never taken care of its iconic places," Dennis said.



This was true. Rory could not deny it.

"You gotta admit, it's neat, huh?" Dennis grinned, finally assembling his papers and getting out of the car.

Rory reluctantly stepped out of his friend's car as well, squinting against the blinding lights. "Yeah, neat," he replied without enthusiasm, looking around him. The parking lot was full.

It wasn't a surprise to Rory that this place was on the outskirts of WeHo. West Hollywood had been the first gay city in California with its own militant council made up of rich and influential lesbians and gays. Now the vamps had taken over and they not only endorsed but embraced every type of population mix. The cops had to be gay-vamp friendly and every store and even the gas stations had counseling services. Gay wedding chapels still did huge business.

The residential neighborhood, which ran south of Sunset, was a fabulously edgy mix of yuppies, hippies, punks, witches, new lefties, rednecks, gays, artists and middle class Mexican families. Rezoning laws had recently made room for vampire brothels in this neighborhood as well as the other fetish clubs.

Now they were moving on up north to Hollywood. Beyond the hills and into the San Fernando Valley would come next, he was certain. Rory felt dismayed as they crossed the cobble-

stoned courtyard. He had to admit the vamps had restored the crumbling, old, mock castle into pristine condition. As they approached the wide oak front door, Rory could hear music, some tune he sort of knew the words to. He froze suddenly.

"What?" Dennis said. His face was flushed with excitement. "You look great, don't worry."

Rory felt dizzy. Looking great was not what he was worried about. He recognized this crazy pop song as the signature tune Kolin Karolyi played walking to the ring the night Libreto died. He played it for each of his fights. Rory felt his throat tightening. He couldn't be here...no.

"Let me see," Dennis said, grabbing his arm and pulling him aside.

Rory was grateful for the delay.

Dennis ruffled Rory's blond hair, which hit his collar, curling a little. He placed his hands on his broad shoulders, nodding in approval at Rory's choice of a silky navy shirt and decently snug, faded designer jeans. "Now, if I was as cute as you, I wouldn't have anything to worry about. And don't worry about money, I'm taking care of everything. Let loose and have a good time."

"What am I supposed to do when you're...you know?" Rory sucked in some breath.

"There are other mortals here, like us. Make friends, dance, get laid." He grinned, slapping him on the back.

Rory shook his head. "You know, Dennis, you're perfectly good looking. I wish you'd stop saying that I'm cuter than you. We could leave this place, go into WeHo and you could pick up a —"

"Don't back out on me now. This is what I want. Okay?"

Rory nodded. "Okay."

Two muscular bouncers with electronic bugs fitted into their ears checked their names on a portable handheld monitor. Granted access, the heavy door swung open unaided. Rory admired the remnant of the old Magic Castle. They walked down the dark corridor and his eyes adjusted to the light. It was still a den of red velvet and gaudy gilt fixtures, but there was a decided Goth stamp to everything. A room to the left still featured the image of a Victorian female ghost playing a piano. Her image flickered on and off and at times, the piano appeared to play itself.

Rory had butterflies in his stomach when he glimpsed a counter with an unattended coat check and another door right beside it. Kolin Karolyi, who was more bulked out since Rory last saw him, stood in front of the door, arms akimbo. The door opened as if by magic and the song changed to a sultry blues number and Rory could hear whistling and hooting. He trembled.

He took a breath, told himself everything would be all right.

"Hi," Dennis grinned at Kolin Karolyi, not realizing who he was. "Is this where we pay?"

Karolyi, who had obviously become overly friendly with roids, looked as if he could double for the Frankenstein monster. He flicked a glance at Rory but showed no sign of recognition. He nodded curtly. "Fifty-dollar cover, there are no tables left."

"I made a reservation," he said, which surprised Rory. "Name's Dennis Cotton."

"When did you do that?" Rory asked in a low voice as Dennis handed the doorman some money.

"A few days ago," Dennis said absently, focused on the transaction.

"A few days ago? Then everything was an act. You would have come here anyway—without me?"

"I knew you'd give in eventually," he grinned at him. "Don't be mad."

Rory muttered under his breath as the doorman asked, "Are you looking to rent sexual entertainment?"

"I am," Dennis said. "Not him," he hooked his thumb toward Rory.

"Okay," he said, "follow me. I take you to your table and then you need check in with the regulator. It's the booth near the bar."

Rory narrowed his eyes, keeping close to

Dennis' heels as they entered the main part of the club. He had to walk rather quickly, weaving in and out of a crowd of boisterous men who were dancing and drinking and ogling the stripper on the huge elevated stage in the front.

All around them, the music pumped like an accelerated heartbeat, throbbing with sexual heat. When they arrived at their table near the front, Rory's gaze was riveted to the naked dancer who slithered across the stage like a seductive serpent, his eyes glowing with some preternatural light, his beauty actually creating some kind of unholy glow around his perfectly sculptured body.

It was Dennis who grabbed his arm and pushed him down into a chair, grinning like a kid who had just been presented with a shiny new toy. "Sit," he said. "I have to go see the regulator and get my sheet."

"Sheet?" Rory muttered, trying to tear his gaze away from the hypnotism going on in front of him. "What sheet?"

"All these hunks have numbers. I have to reserve if I want one and hopefully I'll get the one I choose. Demand exceeds supply in these places. Thank God these vamps can do one mortal after another. Order drinks. I'll be back."

A half-naked Asian was standing in front of Rory suddenly, holding a tray. Beautiful but then they were all beautiful, weren't they? "Not all of

us," he said. "What can I get for you, sweetie?"

The waiter was leaning down next to him, his face close to his. Rory instinctively moved his head away. "Ah, two rum and Cokes, I guess. And did you just read my thoughts?"

The waiter grinned and winked at him, walking off without a word, presumably in the direction of the bar. Rory couldn't see anything through the crowd, not even where Dennis had gone.

The table he was at was small, only big enough for two, and right beside him was a larger table filled with six young men who were talking loudly and chugging beer. One of them reached up to touch the dancer on the stage, but he moved out of reach so fast, Rory saw only a flash. The dancer hissed, his fangs coming into view and that, too, seemed to last only a heartbeat. Then his expression became unreadable.

Rory was plummeted back to the past and a memory buried by grief. Damn. He needed his computer. He remembered he'd packed his mini portable screen pad and withdrew it from his pocket and scribbled away with his stylus.

*I went to Panama City three weeks before the fight to watch Barrera train. His trainer, with whom he was living in virtual seclusion, treated us to lunch at an outdoor cafe on the beach. I ordered the house special, a Panamanian favorite of smoked tuna dip. I was*

*delighted when it came with fried bow-tie pasta for dipping.*

*Barrera eyed my meal enviously. He could not have anything fried. He had to stick to a diet of soups and salads to hit his target fight weight. He ordered sancocho, a local specialty. It was a stew and when I took a bite, he asked me what I thought was in it. I said, "Vegetables, a nice broth but the chicken is kinda stringy."*

*He laughed and said, "It's peacock. The poor-man's chicken." I felt grief stricken to have consumed such a lovely, colorful bird. Barrera laughed and said, "Mi amigo, you ate a small bite. Me, I eat it all. I take the consequences...not you."*

The consequences. For the second time that day, Rory thought on those exact words. He felt a bad storm coming...he just didn't know from where.

## CHAPTER TWO

Dennis waited in the bedchamber. It was lavishly decorated with soft furnishings in charcoal, black and white. The filmy black curtains on either side of the Juliet-style windows were tethered back against the wall with whips—a kind of bizarre touch he thought. He gazed out of the open windows at the lights blinking over the Hollywood Hills and across west Los Angeles. It was a rare smogless night and he could see a plane's taillights sinking down as it landed at LAX.

He suddenly felt afraid. He was excited, but afraid, yes. He realized he was out of his depth here. He'd done some crazy things for a sexual high. *Was this going too far? Should I just go for a mere mortal and be sensible for once?*

No. He'd come too far, passed all the requirements. He'd paid his entrance fee and loved his choice of partner's sleek exotic look. He wanted to be able to say, *Hell yeah, I fucked a vampire. It was great!*



"Well?"

He looked up from the canopied bed. "Number Six. That's who I want."

The regulator gave him a knowing smile. "He won't be long."

Dennis felt an extrasensory thrill knowing he'd just ordered a man, well, a vamp, as easily as ordering a hamburger.

He lay back on the bed in anticipation.

\* \* \* \*

Rory still felt uneasy being here. He glanced at the stage as the dancer lay on his stomach and pumped the floor, his perfect ass clenching and unclenching as he did. The eroticism of it was intense and something about the look on his face elevated that eroticism to the surreal. It was as though the key to absolute sexual fulfillment dwelt in those eyes. But that was crazy. He was becoming influenced by Dennis' nonsense.

"You don't like him?" Someone said suddenly.

Rory looked up to see a handsome young man in a light blue jacket and black pants standing beside his table. There was some sort of government insignia on the jacket.

"Ah, yes, I...guess, but I'm not really into vampires." Rory shifted a little in his seat. In spite of his words, his cock was hard. *How could it not*

be?

"I'm Jack, Jack Thornton. Mind if I sit down?"

"Well, no I don't mind except my friend is coming back and —"

"Dennis Cotton?"

"Yeah. How did you —"

The song ended and the stripper left the stage.

Jack sat down. "I'm the regulator. He just came to see me to get his papers checked. I offered him Number Six and he took it."

"Number Six?"

"The dancer who was just up on the stage."

"Oh. That fast?"

"Well, it was good timing. I told him he had better take it now. Sometimes it's a long wait."

"Oh." Rory didn't know how to respond to that. *What should I say? Lucky Dennis?* He settled for a simple introduction.

"I'm Rory, Rory Jacobs."

"Nice to meet you, Rory," he shook his hand. "I'm sorry if you think I'm bold. I just saw you there and..."

"It's okay, thanks. I'm glad to have someone to talk to while Dennis is...you know..."

He grinned.

"So, if I may ask, what makes someone do this job?"

Jack laughed. "The money."

Before Rory had a chance to comment, the

waiter came back with the drinks. Rory took out his wallet.

"I took care of that," Jack said.

"Thanks."

The waiter walked away.

"Don't they take tips?"

"No tipping here. Blane doesn't allow it."

"Blane?"

"The vamp who owns Eclipse."

"Oh. So, what does a regulator do exactly?"

Another song began, this time they were back to a fast pop tune. Two half-naked vampires came out on stage and began bumping and grinding into one another.

"We have to make sure the clients are healthy before they copulate, for one thing."

"I'd be more worried about afterward," Rory scoffed.

"That too." Jack grinned. "We have ways of checking that clients only lose the legal amount of blood. It's monitored."

"Legal amount?"

"Some clients want to be bitten, want the vamp to suck their blood. That's why we must monitor it, so that they don't lose too much. And the sex is often strenuous. People with heart conditions, for example, have to sign a disclaimer."

"Oh my God." Rory's senses reeled. When he thought of the cavalier way Kolin Karolyi had

attacked Libreto Barrera, giving him no chance of survival...he snapped back to the present.

"Jack, have you ever...you know... I'm sorry, it's none of my business."

"No." Jack reached over and touched his hand. "I'm only interested in humans."

Rory smiled, gazing into beautiful blue eyes. Sounded promising.

\* \* \* \*

Number Six opened the door and his beautiful, strange eyes met Dennis' rapidly blinking gaze head-on. Number Six was wearing a red silken robe barely meeting his thighs and Dennis gulped when he glimpsed the gigantic cock peeking through the folds. Even half-hard, the vampire was huge. *Can I do this? Really?*

"Don't be nervous," Number Six said.

Suddenly Dennis felt himself relaxing, even though this was the hottest man he'd ever seen in his life. "What is your name?" Dennis asked, surprised his voice actually worked.

The vampire smiled and Dennis was aware of the glistening sheen of oil on the man's skin as the red robe fell. His beauty filled Dennis' senses with awe. The vampire was waxed completely, save for his treasure trail leading to a smattering of hair on his crotch. His cock was hardening now as he

leaned down and removed Dennis' black boxer briefs. He dropped to his knees, sucking the tip of Dennis' hungry cock into his mouth. Just the sensation of this remarkable creature touching him made Dennis cry out with pleasure.

He lay there in shock and increasing pleasure as he felt the hot, wet mouth closing down over the entire shaft.

"Oh, fuck yeah, suck me." He felt the sensation of something cold pressed against his perineum and felt around until his fingertips touched an ice cube. He felt the sensation of one hell of a goddamn orgasm building fast behind his own pubic mound. It ripped through his groin and up and down his spine. His toes flared out and he came in the hot, exotic mouth, screaming his ecstasy to the blinking lights outside.

\* \* \* \*

Blane glanced out of the one-way mirrored window from his office above, surveying his kingdom below. The place was hopping as usual. He could hardly meet the demand anymore. He checked the clock on the wall and called out to Frankie.

Frankie, his right hand, walked into the office immediately. "Boss?"

He was far too ugly to be used in the sex

service, but he was one hell of an assistant, in charge of escorting exhausted clients to the resting room and making sure they stayed there until they recovered. He also made sure the others were adequately fed before servicing the clients. He couldn't afford any slip-ups, not with the government watching every move he made. "Is Alan Spencer here yet?"

"No, sir. I have someone outside awaiting the arrival of his limo."

"Where is Carden?"

"In his room, I believe. Do you want me to bring him to you?"

Blane smirked. "Brave boy. Do you really want to bring Carden against his will?"

Frankie stiffened. His head lowered and he shook it slowly.

"I'll go to him. Has he fed?"

"I made sure he had what he needed tonight, but he wouldn't take the fresh one I brought him last week. He will only drink the government-issued stuff."

Blane nodded, watching two of his best whores simulating the sex act on stage. One of them had been turned at the age of eighteen. He was a hit with the pedophiles and perfectly legal under the law because, although he looked eighteen, his actual age was seventy-three. They had it all over the human sex trade. "As soon as Spencer arrives,

take the package from him. Bring it up here and put it into the safe. I will go see Carden now."

Frankie nodded and hurried off.

\* \* \* \*

There was a slight breeze coming through the open balcony doors. Carden had been standing there immobile for the last little while, his eyes closed, trying to picture Danny in his mind, telling himself that Danny wouldn't be afraid, no matter what they did to him. He was brave and he'd believe, truly believe, that Carden would protect him.

But he really couldn't protect him this time. All he could do was prolong the inevitable. He really didn't know what was worse, the fact that Danny's life was now in the hands of Blane's hoods, or the disease that ravished his body, a disease that for many years, Carden's blood had slowed the progress of.

"He's dying anyway," a voice said from behind him suddenly.

Carden clenched his fists at his side. How he'd come to hate him.

"He's been dying for years actually, AIDS. Isn't that what mortals call it? I believe he contracted AIDS back when they didn't even know what it was. Why didn't you turn him, Carden? Why did

you let him age and..."

Carden closed his eyes. He wouldn't let Blane get to him, wouldn't let him forget his civility, lose control. "What will you do when he dies?"

"We may not let him do that."

Carden turned now, glaring at Blane. "No."

"We will do what you wouldn't do a long time ago." Blane stood a few feet away, a hand still on the door handle.

"He doesn't want that. He never wanted that."

"And now you don't want that either, because he's no longer young and beautiful. The disease has really ravished him, especially these last few months, without the supply of your pure blood."

"You bastard," he whispered between clenched teeth.

"That's what you get for playing with your food." He laughed. "Did you think we'd just let him die, sweet Carden? I'm not a fool. I know if that mortal lover of yours dies, you'll rip me limb from limb."

"And enjoy every minute," he replied hoarsely, his eyes flashing red before going back to their usual dark brown.

Blane shook his head, a faint smile on his lips, but he had flattened his back against the door. "You could have joined me, been my partner here. But instead, you insisted on wasting yourself with that mortal, living among those heart-beating



morons, pretending to be human. You're a pureblood and a disgrace to our kind."

"But I'm not your kind, Blane," he gave him a triumphant smile. He knew what hurt Blane the most. "You're a mutt, a vampire turned, merely a hybrid. I'd never lower myself to be with you. At least with a mortal, there is no pretence. They are what they are. But you, you're an impostor, a poor excuse for an immortal."

Blane's expression darkened. "Spencer will be here shortly. You will service him well. He pays good money for you, more money than you're worth. Go down to the bar. He likes to have a drink with you at his side, make a show of walking up the stairs with you. And it will stir the trade at the same time."

"And if I don't?"

"I'll give the order to turn Danny before the sun is up tomorrow."

"Eventually, Danny will die. And I guarantee you, Blane," he pointed his finger, "you'll die right along with him."

He smiled smugly. "Maybe, but that won't be for a while yet, beauty. I'm making sure he stays alive as long as possible."

Carden's voice lowered, humbly he asked, "Is he comfortable, in pain? Please, don't hurt him, Blane. He's innocent. He's done nothing to you."

"Do as you're told and I'll make sure he is as

comfortable as possible. You have my word." He was gone.

Carden sighed. He went to the door and opened it, leaving his black shirt hanging open. He walked silently down the hallway and to the top of the stairs. His eyes darted quickly to the two vampires coming up the stairs. They squeezed to the right to let him pass. He was a pureblood, born a vampire and among vampires, that afforded him a higher status, although it never mattered among the humans, which is where he had chosen to exist the last forty years.

He walked down the staircase, feeling nothing, wanting nothing except to see Danny, the man who had spent the best years of his life with him. He had cared for Danny, deeply, found a way to help him survive a disease, which at one time had no treatment. He'd been Danny's best friend, his lover and his savior and Danny had given him the one thing he'd craved most of all, a semblance of a normal life. Carden had moved to Danny's rhythm, his pureblood enabling him to withstand the day light. He'd even taught himself to sleep at night, although sometimes it was a challenge. Although he'd never really passionately loved Danny, he'd fulfilled his every sexual desire, his love for Danny as pure as his own blood.

Carden had never heard of the pureblood club until Blane had forced him to work at the brothel.

A group of ultra-rich, mortal men, they'd historically worshipped pureblood vampires. In exchange for allowing the vampires to feed from them, they would experience the ultimate in sexual ecstasy, a kind of euphoria that could only be experienced with pureblood vampires. It was rumored that they believed that sex with a pureblood had the power to grant eternal life. This had never been proven and as far as Carden was concerned, it was pure nonsense.

Carden glanced around at the crowd, the music seeming unusually loud in his ears tonight. Blane was a capitalist in every sense of the word and this club was making him a fortune. And now that he was here, the business had skyrocketed with these billionaire cult members.

He had no idea how Blane knew about him or about Danny. Purebloods were rare. And he'd lived his life undetected among mortals for the longest of time. One day he went to the hospital to see Danny and he was gone. Blane had his henchmen kidnap him right out of the hospital where he was dealing with a particularly bad infection. The police searched everywhere for Danny, as did he. Twenty-four hours later, Blane sent for him. Carden had had no choice but to go to him and agree to service the members of this insane cult. But he was bidding his time, deserting the brothel by day to hunt for Danny and

returning before sundown every night. So far, nothing. Wherever they were keeping Danny, he was well hidden.

Carden reached the bottom of the steps and moved through the crowd silently, not looking at anyone. Heads turned all around him, the gazes of men caressing every inch of him. Some of them touched his long, flowing black hair and moaned. Carden kept walking. He spotted Alan Spencer at the bar, a fit man in fifties with snow-white hair. A slow, sexy song played in the background, a sax whining plaintively. The stage was empty. Men huddled together on the dance floor.

Alan Spencer held out his hand to him. "My angel," he whispered softly, knowing that Carden could hear him even over the noise. He kissed his hand, held it to his cheek. "My love," he breathed, "my beautiful god."

Carden indulged him for a second, glancing up at the window where he knew Blane stood, observing.

"Have a drink with me," Alan urged, pulling him closer.

"Upstairs," Carden said. "We'll drink upstairs."

Alan Spencer nodded and moved away from the bar.

\* \* \* \*

Number Six licked around Dennis' balls and ass. Dennis lay on the bed, arms askew, his legs wide open as the vampire held his ass in his hands, holding him up to his face. He'd never wanted to be fucked so badly in his life, but Number Six was taking his time. When his hot tongue touched Dennis' ass, the man on the bed screamed out. *Oh, I am going to come*, he thought.

"No," said Number Six. "The next time you come will be with my cock inside you."

"Please," Dennis whimpered. "Please put it in me."

"Humans are always in such a rush. It pleases me to see how excited you are. Now, open your legs wider."

Dennis opened wider, feeling the hard chin against his ass hole. He was afraid he'd come in seconds, but Number Six chuckled, pinching him at the base of his cock. It wasn't a painful sensation. It was a strange feeling of passion receding. Number Six leaned up, his rigid cock going straight for the hot spot waiting for him. His professional veneer slipped for a sweet second as his cock entered the tight ass begging him for domination.

Number Six gazed down at Dennis who was watching him. Both man and vampire were aware of a shift in energy, but Dennis was aware of the man fucking him taking control now, fucking him

with smooth strokes. The cock inside him found his prostate right away and he opened his legs wider, allowing the beautiful man inside him total access. He loved being fucked like this and was surprised. Normally, he was the top and if he allowed himself to get fucked, he liked it from behind, because he had total control.

He surrendered to the plundering cock inside him, felt a fresh ice cubes plunked on each of his nipples followed by a hot tongue at his throat. He sobbed when he came, his cock erupting in trapped wonder between his body and the rock-hard belly rubbing it from above.

Dennis' eyes dropped tears, his heart thumped in his chest and he felt the amazing sensation that he was flying. He felt the vampire slamming into him now, felt the raging fire of vampire come shooting into him and he came again. This time he thought he was having an actual heart attack, his senses were all so inflamed.

He screamed when the vampire took his cock away.

"Put it back! Put it back!"

"As you wish." Number Six cut into him and Dennis' legs shook with the force of his third orgasm which made him scream in pleasure-pain.

\* \* \* \*

"What was that?" Rory asked Jack Thornton, looking around him. He thought he heard someone screaming but decided it was his imagination. Then he felt a peculiar sensation...a frisson of energy. It was strange, like everyone in the room had held their breath for a moment, the expressions on their faces dazzled, almost hypnotic.

"Oh, probably just Carden," he shrugged.

"Carden? What's a Carden?"

"Not what," Jack laughed, "who?"

"Oh. Is he a vampire, one of the prostitutes?"

The room seemed to be normal again, as if the patrons had suddenly awakened from a trance.

"Yes and no."

Rory lifted an eyebrow.

"I haven't quite figured out what he is yet. He's not like the others. Blane swears he only does exclusive clients. They all sign disclaimers, so I'm not involved. Well..." He laughed. "I mean the three of them."

"Only three?" Rory joked. "This Carden isn't a big money maker."

"He's ah...special." Jack seemed to be far away suddenly, deep in thought.

"Special how?"

"Insanely beautiful, haunting, as if the secrets to life itself are in his eyes."

"You sound like you got a thing for him." Rory

felt a surge of disappointment. He'd really believed that he and Jack were hitting it off.

"No, I mean, not like that. He's a vampire and I don't...you know, usually get off on them. But Carden, I always feel like I should keep my distance from him. It's the vibes he lets off. He's different from the others, very quiet. I haven't gotten to the bottom of it yet and you know, I don't think I want to."

"I don't trust them, vampires, in spite of all I hear about them," Rory said, finishing his drink. "I mean, right now, I'm worried about Dennis."

"You've been friends a long time, haven't you?"

"Since we were kids. We really bonded when we both discovered we were gay."

"Never romantic?"

"No, we're more like brothers."

"Don't worry about him. He's perfectly safe and having the time of his life right now."

"Is it so much better than sex with a human?"

"Like I said, I don't know from experience. I can only tell you what the clients say. They tell me it's like nothing else, indescribable and..."

"Wait," Rory said. He turned his head. The crowd seemed to stir, divide, a moaning, which sounded like a wave, echoed around the room. Rory stood up. Suddenly, he saw him. He moved smoothly, as if it took no effort at all for him to walk. Tall, lithe and muscular, long shiny black



hair flowed down his back. Rory caught his breath. He couldn't look away. An older, white-haired gentleman followed at his heels. The vision stopped on the steps suddenly. Rory's heart beat hard in his chest as the vision turned his head ever so slightly and scanned the crowd. For a second it seemed as if he was looking right at him. Then he disappeared quickly as he scaled the steps, leaving his companion to finish the climb alone.

The music seemed to fill the room again, movement became fluid. Rory was shaking.

Jack reached out and touched his shoulder, startling him. "You all right?"

"Was that..."

"Yes, Carden."

"Carden," he echoed. "Is he real?"

"Oh, I assure you he is real."

Suddenly the doorman came by the table. "Thornton, you're wanted."

"Okay, I'll be right there," Jack said, standing up to his full height. "I have to go, it heats up at this time of night and sometimes after Carden makes an appearance, it fuels the fires, so to speak."

Rory nodded, speechless.

"I was wondering if...well, you'd like to have a drink with me at my place later, if you care to stick around that long? Or I could meet you?"

"Yes, I mean, I'll wait, no problem." Rory

glanced at the staircase for a second then back at Jack's face. He smiled. "See you later?"

"Yeah. Your friend should be in recovery now. I'll check on him."

"Recovery?"

"Nothing to be concerned about. They all need to rest a bit after. It's rather like running a marathon."

"Oh," Rory said, a little stunned, as Jack walked off through the crowd.

\* \* \* \*

Dennis lay on the hospital bed and opened his eyes. It was as if he was emerging from anesthesia.

A young blond woman in a nurse's uniform sat waiting with him. The hospital ward was like a real hospital. Bright lights, medicinal smell. Nothing sexy here. His shock at the jarring switch from seduction to recovery woke him instantly.

"How are you feeling?" she asked him. She didn't even look at him. Her gaze was on the heart-monitor readout on a sleek, black screen.

"I'm fine. I feel pretty good. I don't remember anything. Did he bite me?"

She laughed. "Not even close. You passed out after your third orgasm."

"Oh no...I'm such a wuss."

The nurse's kind gaze connected with him

finally. "No, you're human. You must have had quite a connection with Thiago. He doesn't usually make people pass out so quickly, but a lot of humans don't make it as far as actual bloodletting the first time."

*Thiago.* Number Six's name was Thiago? Dennis held this precious knowledge to himself like a piece of gold panned after a long day in the dirt.

He had to stop himself from asking if this was really Number Six's name. He had to be smart. "Where is he from? I thought I detected an accent."

"Ah, you're right. He's Brazilian. He's a specimen, isn't he?" She smiled and ripped the white discs from his arms, neck and chest that sent his health report to the monitor.

"Since you didn't experience bloodletting, I can give you half off your second visit if you return within thirty days. We will need to check your heart rate first."

"Thirty days?" he squeaked. "I want to come back tomorrow."

She laughed. "Whoa, tiger. You were out cold for six minutes. It's a mandatory sixteen-day abstinence."

"Can you book me in? I want him again. Thiago..." even saying his name brought the taste of paradise to his tongue.

She made some notes and handed him a pink

piece of paper. "In case you experience headaches, light-headedness, vomiting, diarrhea or heart palpitations, this paper gives you a free treatment at the Cedars-Sinai emergency room."

The nurse ripped off a second, blue sheet. "This is your confirmation of your half-off second visit. And this," she flourished a black card in a see-through charcoal casing, "is your confirmed appointment. We require twenty-four hours' notice of cancellation. Have a very pleasant evening."

"Wait..."

She looked at his restraining hand on her arm and he let it fall away.

"Please don't tell anyone I passed out and didn't even get bitten."

"Of course not," she soothed. She looked like she was about to leave and suddenly said, "He didn't tell you his name, did he?"

Dennis was tempted to lie, afraid his visiting privileges would be revoked. Fear muted him and he shook his head.

"I had a feeling he liked you. He came and checked on you twice." Her voice dropped. "Please don't ever tell him I told you that. He is a man of great..." she was groping for the right words and Dennis' spiraling emotions hung in the breeze as he waited. "He is tough and distant. But he can also be a very kind man." This time when

she smiled, it actually reached her eyes.

\* \* \* \*

Alan Spencer fell on his knees, his eyes lowered to the floor. "Won't you bestow eternal life on me?"

*How in the hell am I supposed to do that?* "I don't have that power."

"The prophesy proclaims that a beauteous blood drinking god..."

Blane had told him to play along with this stuff, but it really tried his patience. Carden lifted up Alan Spencer's chin. He looked deep into his eyes. "Take off you clothes," he told him. "I know what you want. I will give you what you want."

Tears ran down Spencer's cheek. In his youth, he'd been exceptionally handsome, but he wasn't in good health. Carden could hear the blood flowing through his veins and its journey was becoming more labored, the narrowing of the arteries making the heart work overtime.

Spencer lay on the bed, watching with admiration as Carden slipped off the shirt and his jeans. He stood there naked for a moment, his erection a function of his mind, rather than of any actual desire. His feet left the floor and he landed on his knees between Spencer's thighs. He licked the skin there slowly, felt him shudder. He was whimpering. Carden reached up and stroked his

hair, kissed his forehead. "Shush," he said softly, his eyes glowing in the darkened room. He opened his jaw, projected his fangs. He lifted the man's legs and went into his ass with one forceful thrust.

Spencer cried out as Carden pumped him, slowing when he heard the mortal's heart beat quicken too much. He feared the man would go into cardiac arrest.

Carden held the man's gaze and pulled out, but gave him everything in his mind, filled the mortal's senses with the ultimate orgasmic rush, sliced into his neck with his teeth, drinking with long, satisfied moans.

Spencer was exhausted, happy and his heart unaffected, his skin un-punctured. Carden lay beside him, task accomplished, when in actuality, physically, he'd done very little.

"Make me like you," Alan Spencer whispered in the dark, his fingers tracing Carden's jaw line, fingering his hair. "Give me eternal life. I don't want to die."

"I can't."

"You can. You just won't. I'll give you everything, all my money."

Carden smiled faintly. "I don't want your money."

"What will it take?"

Carden didn't reply.

"Do you know that you could have anything you want, some would pay anything to live forever? What is it that you want, Carden?"

*What do I want?* He wanted to be with Danny right now, to be at his side when he took his last breath. He wanted to thank him for allowing him to share his life, to thank him for being allowed to feel human for the briefest of time. That's all he wanted. But Alan Spencer couldn't give him that.

Carden placed a hand on Spencer's forehead when he started to speak again. "Rest now," he said, "rest."

And Alan Spencer's eyes closed in sleep.

Carden carried him to the recovery room then returned to his bed. He lay there waiting for the sun to rise, remembering the first time he met Danny. He had been desperately searching for a reason to go on, the meaning for his existence. Danny was searching too, as lost as he was, desperately trying to deny who he was, his desire for men tearing him apart, engaging in cycles of endless anonymous sex and the aftermath of self-loathing.

He was dying. Carden knew that the moment they'd met, long before Danny knew himself, a mysterious blood disorder which had no name, ravishing his immune system. He could save him. They could save each other, two oddities in a world that celebrated sameness, clinging to each

other as one clings to a lifeboat in a raging storm. His Danny – warm, kind, passionate and tormented – his savior.

He closed his eyes, expecting to see Danny there, smiling at him, laughing at some shared joke, but it was a different set of eyes he saw, these ones not brown, but blue, frightened, yet astonished, beautiful. And then his heart said, *Rory*.

\* \* \* \*

Rory studied Dennis carefully when he finally returned to the table. He was smiling but he looked exhausted, like he hadn't slept for a few days. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," he laughed. "No...I'm more than fine. I can't...oh Rory, it was...I'm addicted. I've got to come back again. Sex with a mortal will never be the same." He fell silent.

Rory pursed his lips. "Did you lose blood?"

Dennis hesitated a little too long and Rory became concerned. "No, not tonight. I want to come back...I really liked my guy."

"Number Six." Rory shook his head. "You think that's wise? I mean it's like trying a dangerous drug and going back for more."

"So, you want details or what?"

"Ah, no I don't think so."



He laughed. "Sissy. I'm going to tell you anyway. I do tell you everything after all. Rory...he fucked me three times. I never came that hard...I never saw the colors, had the sensations I did."

Rory stared at him, his mind drifting to a dark and sultry world, where he contemplated sex with Carden. He felt as if the charismatic vampire tuned into his thoughts, felt the breath of wings against his face. Rory shook his head. No. It was never going to happen.

"So, what did you do?"

Rory snapped back to the present. "I met someone, that regulator guy."

"Oh, yeah, he's hot."

"Um, I'm meeting him afterward."

"Great." Dennis looked at the stripper on the stage. He sighed. "God, they're sensational."

"What about when you want to have a real relationship, Dennis? If only vampires get you off then..."

"Why not fall for a vamp? Nothing wrong with intermarriage."

"A vampire and a human? Sex is one thing but living with one?"

"There goes that vampphobia again."

Rory shook his head.

"Let's have a drink." Dennis signaled the waiter. "My birthday isn't over yet."

\* \* \* \*

Dennis found himself in a wonderful place he had never visited before. He knew somehow that he was still inside the Magic Castle. His spirit had somehow left his body, because he found himself entering a small, dark room and Thiago, lying naked on a huge, king-size bed that dwarfed the room, sat up, surprised to see him.

"What the...how did you find me?" Thiago's face softened from its initial fury. "You shouldn't drink and vamp-fuck. Didn't anyone tell you that?" He drew Dennis down beside him. Thiago's soft, warm hand ran across his brow and Dennis felt the dizziness evaporate. He turned his face to Thiago and they exchanged a kiss. Just as it deepened, Thiago took himself away.

"No," he said, his canine teeth elongating, his red eyes flashing. "You must leave. I will never, *ever* love a *human*!"

\* \* \* \*

Rory was in the backseat of Jack Thornton's car with Dennis passed out on his lap. He could only be grateful that Dennis wasn't throwing up all over him.

"How is he?" Jack asked Rory as he stopped at

a red light.

"Out cold. He's not feeling anything right now, but he will in the morning. I'm sorry about this, Jack. I'm sure it's not what you imagined."

"No problem. It is his birthday. Thank goodness no one has to work tomorrow."

They got Dennis into his apartment and onto the bed. Rory partially undressed him and threw a blanket over him. "I should write him a short note, let him know his car is okay."

"Good idea. I can drive him back tomorrow."

"That's nice of you, Jack, thanks," Rory said, scribbling the note.

"Leave my phone number," Jack said, rattling it off.

Rory smiled. It looked like he was going to stay with Jack tonight.

He put the note where he thought Dennis would see it, locked the door behind him and got into the front seat of Jack's car.

Jack reached over and kissed him passionately then released him.

"Wow," Rory grinned. "I wasn't expecting that."

"I've been wanting to do that all night."

"Show me more."

"I will, if you stay with me tonight."

Rory nodded, reaching over and squeezing Jack's thigh.

Jack started the engine. "I'll try not to speed," he smirked.

## CHAPTER THREE

They were both horny as hell when they got back to Jack's. It was very late and in spite of their eagerness to rip each other's clothes off, fatigue was running a close second to their enthusiasm. As a result, the sex had been rough and exciting but fast. They fell asleep in each other's arms, the noon sun full in the sky when Jack finally disengaged himself and wandered into the bathroom.

The sex had been good, even if they were both short on energy before getting into it. Rory felt wonderful, at peace, released from the coil his body had been tied into lately. Jack had sucked his cock then rimmed him, reducing Rory to pleading for Jack to fuck him when he was rolling on the condom. Um, it had been quick but damn satisfying. He had no objection to a repeat performance.

Jack was back in bed now, smiling at him. "I'm sorry there wasn't more...foreplay. I was quite worked up, but I think we were both a little tired.

Can we do it again?"

Rory grinned at him. "Um, yeah, sure. It was great, just what I needed."

Jack pulled him close. "So, tell me about your book."

"Not much to tell you. It's my passion." He hesitated. "It's my pain."

"I'm sorry. What is it about?"

Jack couldn't tell him that it was about Ultimate Fighting and the rise of vampire fighters. Jack worked for vampires. He decided on a half-truth.

"I was a boxing writer. It wasn't what I studied. I studied political science but then I started working out at a UF gym. Next thing I knew, I was covering fights, especially the Latin American and Pan Pacific titles." He could see Jack had already lost interest and was frankly relieved.

"Does writing books bring you much money?"

"Nope. Which is why I plan to spend the summer looking for part-time work."

"You got anything special in mind?"

*Yes. I would like a nice, fat advance that would do more than pay a couple months' rent so I can quit worrying and just finish my book.* "No, not yet."

"Want to work for me?"

"Work...for you?"

"We're desperate for regulators. I have to go from place to place and sometimes there is no regulator at all. I'm the district supervisor."

"Work with vampires? I don't think so."

"You don't work that much with the vamps. You work with clients mostly, the human variety." He told him the salary.

Rory's eyes widened. "Holy shit, that much? I don't understand why people don't want to work for that wage."

He realized he'd been given a tremendous gift. He would be close enough to the vampires to get a better sense of them. From now on, he had to quit talking about his book. He'd be a sort of undercover reporter. He would be privy to their private thoughts on humans. He might even get to know Kolin Karolyi and find out what made him tick. This was possibly dangerous but very exciting.

Rory realized he would have to tell Dennis not to talk about the book to anyone at the club, since he was going back.

"We get a lot of people," Jack was saying when Rory tuned back into him. "We train them and then they work a few nights and quit. It's the vamps. They play on their fears, show their fangs, goof around. They find it pretty funny. Some of them think we're stupid for our prejudices and they play on that."

"Would I work with you?"

"I'd be around every once in awhile, but since I have to supervise more than one club, I wouldn't

be there all the time. I need someone at Eclipse right now. It's really out of the way compared to the other clubs."

"I...I don't know. Give me an example of what I'd have to do."

"Bookkeeping mostly, check the medical records, enter the data, make sure each client that checks in, checks out, monitor the blood levels. We have a special device for that. It's easy."

*This is getting better and better. I'll have access to vital information. So far, asking for anything on Karolyi is like asking for vital state secrets.*

Aloud he said, "And I don't have to go near the vamps?"

"Not really, although you have to confirm that they all have government-issued licenses to work in the trade and that their papers are up to date. That's it. Most of them are pretty cooperative."

"And this Blane, the owner of Eclipse, what's he like?"

"Cautious. He keeps everything on the up and up. He won't give you any trouble, although he's not thrilled about our presence, naturally. None of them are."

Rory fell silent.

Jack leaned over and kissed him softly on the mouth. "You don't have to. Don't feel pressured."

"No," he said, thinking of Barrera and the terrible fear in his eyes as he died. "I think I want



to. Dennis says I have a hang up with vampires and he's right. Maybe if I got to know some, I'd be okay around them. And if I find my dream job in the meantime?"

"Two-weeks' notice," he said, "and you're off the hook."

Rory took a breath, grinned and said, "I'll do it."

"Great," Jack snuggled down into the bed with him, "you start next week."

Rory looked at the ceiling. *Oh, my God, Dennis is going to freak.*

\* \* \* \*

Carden sat on the park bench inside the compound for the La Brea Tar Pits across from the towering twin units with the sixteenth-story condo he had shared with Danny, feeling the pile of letters he held in his hand, bills mostly, advertisements.

The park, though pristine with its soft, emerald green grass, still smelled of tar and he knew that despite decades of excavation and the astonishing discovery of thousands of preserved mammoths, tigers, lions, wolves and coyotes, many more lingered in the thick black liquid. With each earthquake tremblor, with each passing month, fresh specimens popped to the surface.

It fascinated him, this history of Los Angeles and he wondered how so many animals perished in this earthly black hole. He adjusted his sunglasses and gazed forlornly up to the sixteenth-floor balcony. He could picture Danny standing out there in the mornings, that old, chipped coffee mug in his hand. *Danny*. There was no point of him sitting here. No point in going up to the apartment either, to stare at photographs, or look in the empty fridge. Danny wasn't there. And he had no sense of where he was.

For years, he had fed Danny his blood, but he'd never drunk from him. If he had, maybe he might have a better sense of where he was. Even so, he should be able to sense him. Danny had his blood running in his veins. None of it made sense.

Danny had offered to let him feed off of him many times, but Carden had refused. He'd been off human blood for over one hundred years and he didn't want to develop a taste for it again. God knows it would be easy enough to. Besides, Danny was already weakened by the disease. He wasn't a good candidate for a blood donor.

Danny didn't deserve this. He was sick and what little time he had left shouldn't be spent like this, being held prisoner by fiendish vampires.

He stared at the envelopes, thinking that he should go to the bank and pay the bills at least until he heard someone call his name. He stood

up, his face breaking into a faint smile as he saw their neighbor, Annette Mancine.

Annette was a woman in her fifties who lived with her mentally challenged son. She worked in a school cafeteria.

"Carden," she called out, her face animated. She hugged him. "My God, there you are? I haven't seen or heard from you in weeks. How is Danny?"

*What can I say?* Chances were Danny would never come back to his home. "I'm afraid he's ah...not very well," he said.

"Is he still in the hospital? I called but..."

"No. They've moved him to a private place."

"I'd like to see him."

He placed a hand on her shoulder. She'd always been kind to them, good to Danny. "I'll let you know."

"Okay, sweetheart," she nodded. "And how are you doing?"

He shrugged. "I miss Danny." That was no lie.

"Of course you do," she hugged him again, tears in her eyes. "You're not living here anymore?"

"Not right at the moment. I'm not able to."

"Of course, a lot of memories. Anyway, hope you come back. I miss my neighbor. Kenny misses the movie-and-popcorn nights."

"How is Kenny?"

"The same. He loves his job at the community center."

"He's still there?"

"Yes. But like me, he misses you guys. He asked me the other day when he could go over to see you and Danny. I tried to explain to him that Danny, you know, was very sick. I don't think he really understands."

They talked for a few more minutes, then Annette said she had to go to work. He kissed her on the cheek and watched as she walked off. After a few minutes, he walked off himself, aimlessly wandering the streets, trying to imagine where they could have taken him. In this city, it could be anywhere.

When the sun began to set in the sky, Carden headed back to Eclipse. The glare from the gaudy flashing lights repulsed him. He hated this place. He hated Blane.

He walked in the main door and nodded absently to the doorman. The waiters were setting up. The mechanism for the self-playing piano hadn't been set up yet. Sometimes he felt the only sane person was the fake female ghost playing that thing.

A few regulars sat drinking in the corner. *Rory*. The name came to his thoughts out of the blue. It was an unusual name. *Why am I thinking it?* He didn't know anyone by that name.

"There you are," Blane said, a note of disapproval in his voice as he marched over to Carden.

Carden removed his sunglasses.

"You have a client waiting, you know that. It's Mark Walden. You know how important he is."

Carden said nothing.

"Don't try my patience. Danny will pay."

Carden reached out his hand and grabbed Blane by the throat. It was automatic and immediate. He didn't think. Blane's feet left the floor as Carden squeezed. Everyone around them froze.

*Carden. I'll kill him slowly, make him suffer.*

Carden dropped him to the floor. Blane landed on his ass. He got up hastily and wiped off his dark suit. "You dare," he hissed, his eyes glowing.

"Fuck yourself, Blane," Carden said. He walked past him and up the stairs.

\* \* \* \*

Jack and Rory could hear the noise from where they were in the regulator's office. "What in hell was that?" Rory asked.

"I think we're better off not knowing," Jack said. "Anyway, seems to have quieted down."

Jack had brought Rory there to Eclipse tonight to teach him what he needed do as a regulator. He

seemed to want him to start as soon as possible and Rory was more ready than he knew he should be. He was in research mode. The only thing blocking complete joy in his new endeavor was the knowledge that there were tiny cameras everywhere, hidden in strategic places. Jack had pointed out a couple as a security selling point.

He'd said, "There's a camera here." He had pointed to a statue of the Chinese elephant goddess Ganesha. "Right behind her left eye. There's also another one imbedded in the right corner of the Renoir over your shoulder."

Jack told him it was unlikely they would ever be held up or robbed since so many security features were in place, but it was an extra precaution.

He and Jack would be responsible for assembling each day's bank drop, to be double-checked by Blane and ultimately handled by armed guards.

"This is the blood meter," Jack said, drawing Rory's attention back to the task at hand. It was a small handheld device. "You point it at the person's iris and it will record the blood level. You write it down. Then you do it again when they are in recovery. Here's where you put the out level." He pointed to the place in the book.

"Wow, that's kind of cool."

"Now, with health records, you must really

check them well, Rory. Heart disease, pace makers, anemia, any of those things on the record means they are rejected." He skimmed down the page with his thumb.

"Also, HIV and Hepatitis are on state files now, since the hep epidemic of 2011. You must check those, not because the vamps can get these diseases, but because it makes them sick and a sick vamp is a non-performing vamp."

*Geez, it always comes down to money.*

"Is there an age limit, I mean, aside from having to be an adult?"

"No, but we don't get many eighty year olds." Jack laughed.

Rory nodded.

"Okay, stay with me tonight and observe. Soon you should be able to do the job alone. I may have to leave you for an hour or so, but I'll come back."

"You're going to leave alone?"

"Maybe not." Jack grinned. "We'll see."

\* \* \* \*

Mark Walden paced up and down Blane's office. "Have you told Carden about the ceremony?" he inquired, pausing in the middle of the floor.

"That will be costly."

"Cost is not an issue. The issue is will he do it?"

"He will do as I tell him. Anyway, it's not for

six months. We did speak about the cost, didn't we?"

"Yes," he said. "And we agree. This is the most important of ceremonies. The timing has to be just right. We need Carden to complete the process."

"It would be easier if I just bit you," Blane grinned.

Walden looked offended. "This is not to make light of, Blane. Carden is a pureblood. He is sacred."

"Yes," Blane tasted that in his mouth, "and right now, he is being rebellious. I must go and speak to him. I've kept you waiting long enough."

"Carden is worth waiting a lifetime for, Blane."

Blane nodded and left the office.

\* \* \* \*

Dennis was restless. He hadn't left his apartment since returning from Rory's. They'd had a bad argument. He felt awful about it now, their harsh words rattling in his brain.

*"Why in the hell would you work with vampires? You're terrified of them," he'd said to Rory.*

*"I'm not terrified. I'm just a little skittish. I figure this is a good way to get over it, not to mention what the job pays."*

*Dennis laughed. "You won't last the night."*

*"Thanks for the vote of confidence."*

*"Rory, it's not for you. And if they sense you're*



*afraid, they'll play on that. They're smart. One will sneak up behind you and show his fangs and you'll faint."*

*"I will not."*

*"Care to put money on it?"*

*"Sure. How much?"*

*"One hundred bucks, you don't last more than a month."*

*"You got a deal," Rory slapped Dennis' palm as Dennis left his apartment. "Call me."*

*"Okay. Thanks for the birthday. It was great."*

*"Didn't cost me a cent," Rory laughed.*

*Dennis raised a hand and ran down the stairs.*

Dennis tossed and turned. He and Rory had some...discussions over the years but never parted on bad terms. Now they were fighting over vampires of all things. He realized now he was jealous. Rory would get close to Thiago. *What if they fell in love?*

He felt only happy in his sleep, when he felt Thiago close. It was always the same. Thiago being surprised, delighted and then swiftly angry to find Dennis with him.

He felt like an idiot, a lovesick fool lying across his bed playing old albums. He played Roberta Flack's *The First Time Ever I saw Your Face* over and over until the old man next door started thumping their shared wall with a broom.

Dennis got off the bed and switched on lights. The Hollywood sign was the first thing he saw

from his unadorned windows, morning and night. He loved that sign. He loved living here in the oldest part of the movie capital. His small place on Hillhurst was comfortable and shabbily elegant. He wondered what Thiago would think of it. He chastised himself, throwing off his two-day-old clothes, showering, shaving and changing into button-down Levis and a fresh T-shirt.

He still could not get over Rory working at Eclipse.

Picking up his keys, he threaded his way along Franklin until he reached the gelato bar and stood at the glassed-in counter studying the brightly colored Italian treats.

"I'll take the pink pampelmousse," he told the barista who handed him a hard-packed cup of the lip-puckering red grapefruit gelato. He felt lost when he was awake...disoriented. He spooned the gelato in his mouth as he stood outside, propping up an art-deco lamppost, a genuine relic from the 1920s.

The thought came to him like a pleasant thunderbolt. *What's to stop me from going to visit my best friend, my old buddy Rory at his new job?* It was a club after all. They served drinks to people. He was a person who liked drinks.

He didn't mind ponying up the fifty-bucks' entrance fee for a drink or two. He needed to see Thiago again...he needed to be near him and he

felt the breath choking in his throat at the thought that he couldn't bear it if Thiago had the night off.

\* \* \* \*

Rory. Carden walked down the staircase and headed to the bar. Silk was there, Eclipse's mortal bartender. He was a Goth, who was probably hoping Blane would turn him eventually. Blane kept him around because he liked to be worshipped and also because Silk had his ear on everything.

"Hey, Carden," Silk murmured, coming over and giving him that moony look.

"Who's Rory?"

"Always a man of little words, straight to the point. I'd give anything to fuck you."

"Who's Rory?"

Silk laughed. "That's it, break my heart pureblood. Rory? Ah, probably the new regulator. Jack's training another one. Want to put money on how long this one lasts?"

Carden was already walking away. *Another regulator? Okay, so why was he in my head?*

Suddenly, the door of the regulator's office opened and Carden paused, his head moving in the direction of the voices. *Jack and...Rory?* Jack walked off in the other direction, leaving Rory standing there. Carden studied him for a minute.

He'd seen him before. He had been in here before, in the crowd, he'd seen him.

The object of his curiosity seemed to freeze, his eyes a little wide, mouth slightly open. Carden could feel Rory's emotions, so strong that they were totally assaulting his senses. There was a mix of awe and fear and something else, something that was intensely sexual.

Carden actually smiled. He took a step toward him. Rory took a step backward. Carden laughed softly. "Afraid?"

"No, I'm a..."

"If you're afraid of me, Rory, this might not be the place for you. I'm probably the least of your worries."

"I...ah...no, I told you, I'm not afraid," he shook his head.

Carden drew closer. "Aroused then?"

"Aroused?" The word seemed to stump Rory for a moment then he flushed. "No," he snapped. "What in hell...I mean, certainly not that. What would make you say that?"

"A simple no, would suffice." Carden laughed softly.

"Who are you? I saw you last night and there was something strange, I mean, the people in the crowd, they..."

"Oh, there you are," Jack said suddenly, interrupting them. He glanced at Carden, nodded

curtly.

Jack had always kept his distance from him for some reason, although he was personable enough with the others. Carden couldn't understand it. He had blended in with humans for many years without any problems, but it seemed that being among his own kind again made him seem different from all the others. He had been tempted to ask Jack about that. As for the people in the crowd, it's because they knew he was a vampire and Blane had created this mystery about him, made him an unattainable commodity. But Jack? He wasn't sure what his problem was.

"I'll leave you to your business," he heard himself mumble, Jack already taking Rory's arm and leading him in a different direction. He was surprised when he heard Rory say, "Goodbye, Carden." He turned and flashed him a smile and made his way out.

\* \* \* \*

Rory stood there for a few seconds, a little spellbound. Jack gave up on tugging at him and sighed. "He's just a vampire, Rory."

"He's not just a vampire. He's...magical."

Jack laughed. "Hardly."

"There's something different about him."

"Yes, I know, he's Blane's pet. He may be more

powerful than the others. Perhaps he's older."

"Um. Do I look aroused to you?"

"Aroused?" Jack grinned. "Um. Let's go in the back and..."

Rory gave him a push. He laughed. "Never mind. Okay, show me what you need to and forget I said that."

\* \* \* \*

Thiago stared at the client through a hidden pinpoint in the wall. Geez. This one was a closet case. He wanted to get fucked in the ass from behind while he was blindfolded, hands cuffed behind his back.

He was a local businessman. He wasn't bad looking, which was fine by him. He was thirty-five, married with two children and had a gay vampire fetish. Thiago was mad at himself for not being able to stop thinking about that Dennis guy from a couple of days ago. He'd never enjoyed human sex so much. He was sorry he blew the human's circuits after three orgasms.

The man on the bed would probably last longer. He came to the club often and had sampled a few of the guys. Thiago read the notes. *Loves to suck cock...really enjoys nipple play and adores being told he's a slut and forced to his knees. Loves being fucked. Has a daddy fetish.*

*I'll pretend he's Dennis.*

Thiago pushed that thought out of his mind as he entered the room in a short back robe and saw the nervousness on the man's face. He had never serviced the man before, but he was a regular and apparently had the same fetish with everyone.

"Good evening, son," Thiago said and dropped the robe as he advanced on the client who licked his lips. Thiago glanced down and saw the client's cock was not too small.

"Suck my nipples," Thiago ordered and the man's lips closed on the left nipple as Thiago played with the right. He liked the way the client held reached over to grip his balls in his hand as his lips released first one nipple, then went to the other. Thiago was enjoying the man's sensuality, his genuine talent at pleasuring another man.

"May I suck your cock?" the client asked, gazing up at him.

"Yes." Thiago felt irritated now. He wanted Dennis to suck his cock. When he closed his eyes, it was no longer the middle-aged, married man feasting on him, but lovely Dennis. He wondered how Dennis had come to him on the astral plane, not once, but many times. *Was Dennis himself aware of doing this?*

"Daddy wants to fuck you, son," he said and the client released Thiago's cock with a drunken pop.

He pushed the man down on the bed. Before cuffing and binding him, Thiago kissed the man's mouth and moved down to his puffy nipples, before slipping on a snug nipple hugger over each one. This was one of his favorite discoveries. They were gentler, yet more arousing, to nipples and left the buds available for tweaking, teasing and licking.

"Get on your knees, you little slut," Thiago said as he finished cuffing his client. A nice tight ass lay before him, the client whimpering with pleasure as Thiago dipped his fingers in warm, chocolate Kama Sutra oil and slicked up the tight hole. The oil would lend extra fire, not to mention desire to the encounter and Thiago badly wanted to fuck the shit out of the man writhing underneath him.

"Daddy's gonna fuck you now, baby." The client came as soon as Thiago entered his hot, ravenous ass.

\* \* \* \*

"Why are you being such an asshole?" Blane blared at him from the threshold of his room. "He's waiting. He's a very important client and —"

"If he wants to get laid, there are plenty of others to —"

"He wants you."



"He wants me to give him eternal life. You'll have to destroy me first."

"What in hell is the big deal?" Blane threw up his hands.

Carden swung his legs over the bed. He sprang to his feet causing Blane to stiffen his stance as if he was ready for a fight. "I'm not a god. I don't give eternal life to anyone, including those crackpot cultists."

"He's willing to pay —"

"You give him eternal life."

"He doesn't want me. He wants a —"

"Real vampire," Carden sneered.

"A pureblood."

"Um."

"You know what I'll do to Danny if you defy me."

"Go ahead," Carden growled. "Do what you want. I'm tired of being your slave."

"Fine," he said, rubbing his hands together, "I'll tell them to go ahead and feast right down to the last drop and I'll tell Danny you are giving him this gift, making him into a —"

"Okay," Carden cut him off, putting up his hands. "I'll do it. I'll see Mark Walden. Send him to me."

Blane smiled the smile of victory and left the room.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Dennis was nervous. The doorman hesitated before letting him in. As he arrived beyond the entrance, he was relieved until Jack and Rory cornered him.

"You do understand you may not have sex tonight?" Jack asked him without preamble.

"Yes." Dennis avoided Rory's hurt gaze. He hadn't really told his friend that he'd passed out and was now on a sixteen-day medical restriction.

"I just came to have a drink and—" he glimpsed a dancer on the stage and his heart sank. It was not Thiago. "I wanted to congratulate Rory on his new job."

"Fine." Jack seemed convinced. "I'll let you two visit a moment. I need to speak to Blane."

"Thanks for telling me you were unconscious the other night," Rory hissed on Jack's retreating back.

"I didn't think it was important."

"Important? You're my best friend!" Rory's

eyes narrowed. "Oh geez, you're here to see him, right? Number Six?"

"Well, both of you."

"Look there's something you need to know about Number Six."

Jack returned, interrupting them.

"I need you," he said to Rory and Dennis noticed the frustration in Rory's eyes.

Dennis smiled at his friend. "I'll go grab a drink, yeah?"

Rory nodded and followed Jack to the door. "How long are you going to be gone again?"

Jack paused as he was putting on his coat. "I won't go if—"

"No. I understand. I just didn't think it would be this quick."

"It's an emergency. I'm sorry. I have to go help him out with this. I'll be back as soon as I can. You know what to do. You'll be fine." He touched Rory's cheek and left the club.

The club was still relatively quiet. Rory wandered over to the bar and asked Silk to give him a Coke as he joined Dennis at the bar.

"What's wrong?" Rory asked him in a low voice as Silk poured him some Coke and put a wedge of lemon on the side of the glass. Silk grinned at him. "You okay man? You look a little queasy."

"I'm fine, just nervous."

"Don't worry. You'll be okay."

Rory's eyes cut back to his friend who seemed depressed.

"Let's grab a table." He didn't want Silk listening to their conversation. Jack had already told him the guy had big ears and an even bigger mouth and blabbed everything to Blane.

"What's wrong?" he asked Dennis again, surprised by the devastation he saw in his friend's face.

"That bartender told me Thiago is in bed with a guy and...and..." Dennis squeezed his eyes shut.

"And?" Rory was trying to follow the logic. Thiago was a vamp whore and he was fulfilling his duty.

"How can I compete with any of the guys he fucks if I can't screw him for another two weeks?"

Rory absorbed the shock of this statement. "Are you in love with him?"

Dennis nodded slowly.

"Oh God, Dennis. Look, I've been here two hours and I already know he hates humans."

"He doesn't hate me. We had a connection, Rory. I just have to make him see that."

"You're serious?" Rory blew out a breath. "Well, my friend. I've never seen you act this way over anybody. I've been waiting for the mighty tree to topple. If this is what you want, I can only say I wish he weren't a vampire and I can only

wish you good luck."

"You...really mean that?" Hope had returned to Dennis' face and Rory's heart melted.

"Yes. And may I suggest instead of sex, you woo him with love?"

"Woo him with love? How the fuck do I do that? You pointed out yourself I've never been in love before."

"Court him. Invite him to dinner...dancing maybe. Coffee. Get him away from here. Two weeks of no sex with him will let you see if this is meant to be. Now, I gotta get back to work."

"Brilliant!" Dennis jumped up, hugged him and ran out of the bar. Rory picked up his drink and crossed back to Silk. His gaze wandered over to the staircase. "Is that where the recovery room is?"

"Yeah. Didn't Jack take you up and show you?"

"Not yet."

"Go ahead and have a look. It's at the end of the hallway. You can't miss it."

Rory took a couple of swallows of the soda and then put it back down on the bar. He walked over to the stairs and slowly he mounted the sweeping staircase, his hand sliding up the banister. At the top, he paused for a second, cautiously peering down the long, dimly lit corridor. He figured the recovery room was at the end hall. Quietly he continued along the carpeted floor, admiring some of the oil paintings on the way, mostly nudes from

the renaissance. Suddenly he heard sounds, muffled voices speaking low. He froze, not quite sure what to do. He took a few more steps, coming to the door of a room, which lay open just a crack. He couldn't really see anything, but the voices were now clear and sharp.

"I want you to fuck me and drink from me at the same time. I don't want to wait for the ceremony. Do it now, give me what I crave." This voice sounded insistent, yet strangely weak.

"It's too dangerous," a voice replied, strong yet seductive.

"Why? Why dangerous? Because it can get a little rough? You know I don't mind rough, Carden. I can take it."

*Carden.*

"It can get a lot rough and you are only a mortal."

"I want it that way. I want to be your slave. Use me, oh, Carden, you're so beautiful. Just use me, use my ass."

Carden said something in reply but Rory didn't wait to hear it. He backed away from the door, swallowing hard, his mind puzzling over what he'd heard. He felt his forehead break out in a cold sweat. Abruptly, he turned and hurried down the hallway, only to stub his toe and fall flat on his face before reaching the stairs.

"What in the hell are you doing up here

snooping around?" A loud voice invaded his ears. "Who in the hell are you?"

Rory winced and picked himself up off the carpet. He recognized the vampire who now stood in front of him, Blane, the club owner. "I'm Rory, I...well, we met earlier. I'm the new guy working with Jack, the regulator." He held out a shaking hand, his eyes darting toward that door a little ways away. *Did they hear him? Did Carden know he was standing outside the room, eavesdropping?*

"You have no business up here." Blane's face was hard.

"I was trying to find the recovery room. I need to see it because I..."

"Wrong direction," he glared at him. "Recovery is in the other wing, down there." He pointed straight ahead. "This side is offices and private VIP rooms. Don't come here again."

"I'm sorry," Rory muttered and made his way again down the stairs. His heart was racing when he reached the bottom.

After a few seconds, he began to feel truly ridiculous. Then he got angry. Hey, he worked here. He was supposed to be here. It was the law. The only reason these vampires were allowed to run these places was on the condition that they were monitored. *I don't really need to take shit from the owner, do I? And what the hell is going on up there anyway? What are they trying to hide?*

It was Dennis who shook him out of his ponderings suddenly by wandering over to his side and saying, "Hey." He looked discouraged. "I haven't seen him yet. He must be busy upstairs."

"Who?" Rory muttered. "Oh, yeah, him, that vamp you're enamoured with."

Dennis scowled at him.

Rory patted his back absently. "I'm sorry. Bad timing. And I really wish though it was someone who was breathing instead, but if you like him..." Rory watched the door. There was a group of rowdies coming in.

"It's more than that. I told you. We had a connection. It was weird."

"Don't say I didn't warn you about him not liking mortals. I have the impression that a lot of these vampires think we're beneath them, you know?"

"Thiago isn't like that."

"But I heard he was like that. In fact, I heard he was the worst. Dennis..."

The music ended abruptly and a voice came over the loud speaker, causing them both to pause. "Gentleman, get ready for a show you won't soon forget. Two of our finest blood-sucking studs, Thiago and Suede."

Rory looked up to see Blane standing upstairs, staring out through the glass, a microphone in front of his face.



Blane looked down at him a moment and gave him a surly smile.

Rory looked away. For some reason he'd gotten on the bad side of that vamp and that probably wasn't a good thing.

Dennis had already turned around and was focused on the stage. Rory smiled and shook his head. *Oh well, what harm could a little infatuation do?* He was sure that Dennis would eventually get it out of his system and move on to the next trip. He tried to tell him he was going to work, but Dennis was no longer receptive to anything he had to say. Rory sighed and focused on the three young men who were roughhousing in the lobby.

The doorman motioned to him. Frankie was one of the only truly homely vampires he'd ever seen. Most of them were drop-dead gorgeous, for reasons he'd yet to figure out. Jack warned him that Frankie was, in all respects, the boss when Blane wasn't on the floor and tonight he was subbing as a doorman. That job was well suited to him as he was a huge son of a gun and Rory knew not many humans would dream of messing with him.

"These two here," Frankie announced, shoving two grinning overage schoolboys at him. One was a chubby, bespectacled guy and the other, tall and skinny. He looked like he should be in a library. "The third guy just tagged along for the ride,"

Frankie muttered. "I'll show him to a table." He fixed his gaze on the guy, who looked absolutely terrified. "We have no tables down front."

"Th-that's o-okay," he said, nodding a little too much.

"Okay," Rory said to the two others, "come with me." This was it. Jack had showed him the ropes. He knew the routine. He knew exactly what to do. This wouldn't be so hard.

Before Rory showed them into the screening room, he paused to check out what all the hooting and hollering was about. He moved a little closer to see what was happening on the stage, as did the two guys at his side.

"Holy mother of—sh-it," the skinny guy gasped, his mouth hanging open.

Rory's eyes widened. The object of Dennis' affection was naked, oiled and his cock was bound. His wrists were caught over his head and attached to a hook overhead. The one called Suede, knelt in between Thiago's legs and was working his way up his thigh with his tongue. In one hand, the blond held the biggest electric dildo Rory had ever seen. It didn't take much imagination to know what he was planning to do with it. Thiago's head went back and every once in a while, his eyes seemed to glow, fangs exposed. The crowd was lapping it up.

"What a body on him. I want that one," the

other one gulped. "Who is he?"

"His name is Thiago," Rory said. "He's rough trade all the way. Not for the faint hearted." Silk had told him that, along with Thiago not liking humans.

"I don't care. Um, I want that," he groaned.

Rory tore his eyes away, mesmerized as Suede began to enthusiastically suck the head of Thiago's bound cock. "Come on. I can't guarantee you'll get that one," he said, walking into the room and telling the two guys to have a seat. He took out the equipment and indicated that they should take a form that was sitting in a tray on the desk. "I assume it's your first time here."

"Yeah," the chubby one said. "I've been wanting to come for a long time but —"

"He's chicken shit," the thin one interrupted.

They both laughed. They looked like Mutt and Jeff.

"Pens are there. Now, it's important that you be totally honest, because if something happens and you've lied on the form, there will be no recourse. Do you have the necessary documents?"

Both men took out data disks. It was the new way and damn convenient. All he had to do was stick the disk in the computer and a clean bill of health was verified. "Now," he said, satisfied that their documents were in order, "are either of you intending to..." he wrinkled his nose, not letting

them see his expression, "do you want to be fed on?"

"I do," the chubby one stuck up his hand. "I just want to experience it, you know?"

"Fine. I'll need to measure the blood levels for both of you anyway. And you?" he turned to the other.

"No way, thanks. I'll keep my blood. Too scary."

"Who's the chicken shit now?" his friend joked, handing Rory his disk.

"Okay, I'm going to issue you a number. When the number is called, stand and someone will come and escort you to the room. You've read the literature?"

"Yes," the plump one said. "We have to go to this recovery place later? I doubt I'll need it."

"You might not," Rory told him, "but it's a precaution. It's like after giving blood, they won't just let you go until they're sure."

Both men stood up now. "Can we go?" the thin one asked.

Rory nodded. "Your friend was given a table. The doorman will take you to it."

They both nodded and walked out, jabbering excitedly.

Rory sighed and closed his eyes. It wasn't that bad, but he couldn't help feeling that he'd just sent two lambs to the slaughter.

He walked out of the screening room and looked around for Dennis. The music had changed to something slow and sultry. Rory's gaze riveted back to the stage. Thiago turned around now, his luscious ass on display, for all to see. The blond had grabbed a fist full of his hair and yanked his head back. The oversized, vibrating object was poised in between his ass cheeks, only the tip of it drilling in and out. The men in the room were shouting, "Fuck him...fuck him...fuck him!"

The room was thick with sexual intensity and a frenzy of lust. The blond turned and smiled at the crowd, a look of arrogance on his sharply angled face. He removed the makeshift cock and reached around to unbind Thiago's cock, making a fanfare of throwing the leather band into the crowd. Several patrons scrambled frantically to possess it. Then he whirled Thiago around again, displaying his weeping erection, playing with it mercilessly for a few minutes while Thiago hissed at him and showed his sharp fangs. The crowd was captivated, completely in their power. Suede licked up the length of Thiago's chest slowly, prolonging the agony then spun Thiago around again. He slapped his butt cheek once, laughed and then with one thrust, he pushed the object up into Thiago's ass. He proceeded to ram it in and out, simulating a cock, stroking his own erection at the same time. The crowd went wild, moaning,

rubbing their own cocks under the table. And before Rory knew it, he had a line up outside the screening room. It was going to be a long night.

\* \* \* \*

Dennis' cock was as hard as rock and he was ashamed of himself. Although he surmised that Thiago was not in any kind of pain and that he couldn't possibly be hurt from that object, it must be humiliating. And the animalistic cries coming from the mortals around him made him embarrassed to be one of them. He walked out of the club before the end of the act. He didn't want to see anymore. He took a breath of cool air and tried to figure out what he was doing here. He had the distinct feeling that pursuing Thiago was probably a certain recipe for heartbreak, but they were connected somehow, why and for what reason, he wasn't sure.

A few minutes later, Dennis made his way back inside. He spotted Thiago at the bar, wearing a pair of loose fitting red silk trousers. He lifted a glass of something to his lips, most likely that synthetic blood they drank. "Is it good?" Dennis was nervous as hell approaching him and he knew his voice shook.

Thiago turned his head to look at him, but that was all. "It will do," he replied dryly.

"You want to have...ah...do you want to go for a walk?" That was stupid. That sounded really lame.

"A walk?" He gave him a strange look.

"Coffee?"

"I don't drink...coffee."

"Right, yeah. Ah, do you like movies?" He was ringing his hands together, looking anywhere but at him.

Thiago looked at him again. He lifted an eyebrow. "Dennis, are you asking me for a date?"

Dennis tried to breathe but his words came out like a man gasping for breath. "I...suppose...so."

Thiago gave him what could be considered a smile. "I don't date."

"Ah. But you could. It's not ah...illegal or anything."

"I don't think so." He wasn't looking at him anymore.

"I saw you."

"Did you like it?"

"No. I mean, not that on stage. I saw you in my head."

"Um," Thiago replied. He turned his entire body to him now. Dennis couldn't help drinking in his smooth, muscled chest. "How did you do that by the way?"

"Do what?"

"Get inside my head like that, Dennis. Dennis,

focus."

"I'm sorry." It was just that he was so incredibly beautiful. "I...really don't know, but I think we should discuss it? What do you think?"

He didn't reply.

"You owe me."

"Do I?" He tilted his head. It seemed human enough but it wasn't. It was very mechanical in some way, as if vampires had to make an effort to imitate human gestures. "How do you figure?"

"I can't have sex for three weeks."

"Poor baby," he said then he actually smiled. It transformed his entire face, made him look almost celestial, when Dennis knew he was anything but.

"You find that amusing?" Dennis scoffed, relaxing a bit since he did get a smile out of him. He tried to sound stern.

"Yes, Dennis, I do. Three weeks is not so long. I dare say you'll survive it." He started to walk away from the bar.

"Maybe not to you," Dennis placed a hand on his muscled forearm.

Thiago paused, his eyes moving to the hand.

It was a clear signal. Dennis removed it. "One date?"

"I have to go."

"Just to talk? I'll beg, if you want me to."

"Beg? Why?"

"I can't stop thinking about you."



"That's not good."

Dennis shrugged. "Depends on how you look at it. When are you off?"

"Never off," he replied.

"That's not true. After work tonight. We could just talk outside for awhile."

He looked at him for a moment. "We'll see."

Dennis gushed with pleasure. "Really?"

"I said, we'll see," he repeated, walked away.

\* \* \* \*

Rory was exhausted. He'd processed ten men and turned away four, one freaked out and had to be thrown out by Frankie. He was actually grateful to have Frankie near by when that happened. "Thanks for that," he said.

"That's what I'm here for."

"I'm going out back for some air," Rory told him. "If you need me, let me know."

"No more will be processed tonight. We're fully booked. You can relax for at least a half hour. Then head to the recovery room. There'll be a few in there to check over before they're released."

"Okay," Rory said and headed straight through the door to the kitchen and out the back.

It was a cool night, which was great, because it was hot as hell in that club, in spite of the air conditioning. He assumed that vamps didn't need

air conditioning and Rory doubted that they could really judge how hot it felt to the mortals. He'd mention it to Frankie when he went back in.

He was thinking about that sex scene on stage, the reaction of the crowd. He could hear them chanting, even when he was in the screening room with the door closed. He couldn't help be reminded of the kinds of crowds you got at the extreme-sports arena. Only there, they screamed, "Kill him...kill him..." He shuddered, glancing around at all the staff-owned vehicles. Blane had a Mercedes. He could afford one. He was obviously making a fortune off this place. A lot of vampires were now becoming prominent businessmen.

Suddenly he glanced up at the moon and noticed that a lone figure was leaning on the railing of the balcony right above him. He was naked except for a pair of loose-fitting jeans and his long, dark hair blew softly back from his face. He was staring straight ahead, silent, appearing to be deep in thought. Rory said his name in his mind. *Carden*.

Suddenly Carden glanced down at him. He lifted a hand, but he didn't say anything.

Rory nodded at him, tensing. There was something very haunting about him and it wasn't just that he was the most beautiful vision of manhood he'd ever seen. He didn't seem quite real.

"Oh, but I am," he said softly. His voice was deep and silky and it carried down to him on the breeze.

"I ah...beg your pardon?" Rory looked up at him.

"I am real."

"Oh," Rory cleared his throat. "I'm not sure how to respond to that." Jesus. It appeared that he'd read his mind. That felt weird.

"You don't have to respond. How's your first night been?"

"Busy."

"Um. Well, don't worry about Blane. He's nasty with everyone. Don't take it personally."

Rory's mouth hung open. Carden knew he'd been upstairs, outside his door. Oh my god.

"It's okay," Carden said. "No harm done. Eclipse does cater to some eccentric clientele."

"I...it's none of my business," Rory muttered. "I mean, I was told that you weren't subject to...your clients sign disclaimers and everything so they're not—."

He was looking down at him, his eyes luminous in the moonlight. He didn't comment.

"I should go in now," Rory said. In spite of the cool air, suddenly, he felt warm, almost feverish.

"Goodnight, Rory," he inclined his head.

Rory mumbled something similar and yanked the door open. For a second, he stood in the

kitchen. Some heavy rock music bombarded his ears, but in spite of its heavy assault, it didn't take away the music of Carden's deep, seductive, voice. *Good night, Rory.* A shiver suddenly ran up his spine. He shook the sensation away, his mouth dry. Tomorrow night, he was going to wear his cross under his shirt.

\* \* \* \*

Thiago walked out onto the graveled parking lot. He studied Dennis from a distance. Dennis was silhouetted in the moonlight, but Thiago didn't really need any illumination to be to see him. He had no idea why he decided to come outside to check and see if Dennis was still here. It made no sense. He didn't even like mortals. He didn't trust them. Unless it was one of their baser instincts, like lust, you could never figure out what their motives were. The fact that they were horny was always clear enough, although their specific desires were sometimes hard to fathom. Humans were a bit weird about that, ashamed sometimes of what they needed. Anyway, they were far too complicated for him.

But Dennis didn't want him for sex tonight. He wasn't allowed to have any. *So what in hell does he want me for?*

Thiago came closer. Dennis had no idea of his

silent approach. He paused, studied him some more. Dennis wasn't particularly beautiful for a mortal. Oh, he was handsome enough, great body, thick, dark hair, pretty eyes, but he wasn't what one would consider a smooth operator. He was a little unsure of himself and right now, he seemed rather anxious. But there was something that made Thiago want to get closer and it had nothing to do with the rich blood that was running through his veins, although that was forever and always alluring. It was something else and it was driving him crazy trying to figure it out. "Hello, Dennis," he said suddenly.

Dennis jumped, placing a hand on his chest. "Holy crap."

"This your car?"

"Yes. Thiago." He smiled. "You came. I wasn't sure that...if..."

Um, that smile, that made him beautiful. "You talk too much, you know that?"

"I do? I'm sorry, Mr. strong, silent god."

"I'm not a god," he corrected, quite sincere.

"You are to me."

Thiago studied the car. "This is a vintage Mustang."

"Yes. You like cars?"

"Vamps are obsessed with cars."

"I didn't know that."

"Okay, so, what do you want with me exactly?"

"Boy, you come right to the chase, don't you?"

Thiago waited.

"I just want to be your friend."

There was perspiration on his forehead. Thiago narrowed his eyes. "You're a vamp hag?"

"A what?"

"Humans who love to be buddies with vampires. I'm no one's pet. Thanks anyway." He turned around and started walking back toward the club.

"No, no," Dennis protested, running to catch up to him, "no. I mean...I like you. I think we could be...I mean, I want to be friends."

Dennis was standing in front of him now, looking quite desperate. He was a few inches shorter than he was and Thiago looked down into his eyes. "I don't understand. I understand you wanting to fuck me, but I—"

"Haven't you ever had a friend? Don't vampires have friends? I mean other than those hag people you mentioned?"

"I suppose."

"Okay," Dennis heaved a sigh, "you're going to make this difficult, aren't you? I want to make you fall in love in me. There? Happy? How stupid do I feel right now?"

Thiago stood there stunned. He wasn't sure what to say. Finally, he said. "I don't know how stupid you feel, Dennis."

Dennis laughed out loud.

"Love? What does that mean?"

Dennis kicked at the gravel. "This is impossible. If you don't even know what it means...I mean...you vampires, if you're going to integrate, you're going to have to figure out what it means to be...to have emotions and stuff."

"You think we don't have emotions?"

"I don't know. The word love kind of stumped you there, Thiago."

He laughed now, just the expression on Dennis' face. It was hilarious. "You could do stand up."

"Great," Dennis slapped his forehead. "Perfect. I talk about love and he thinks I'm funny."

Thiago studied him calmly for a moment. "So, why were you in my head anyway?"

"I don't know. Maybe it was you. I don't have that kind of power."

"You mean I did it?"

"Yes."

"Impossible."

"Well, I sure as hell didn't do it. I don't know how. Look, forget that for now. Come for a ride with me in the car. You said vamps like cars, right?" He looked hopeful.

Thiago smiled faintly. "You're treating me like a child, Dennis, trying to seduce me with your car."

"Is it working?"

Thiago glanced back at the car. "Yeah, it is. I want to drive."

Dennis threw him the keys. "Go for it. But remember, Thiago, I'm fragile."

"Right," he grinned and walked over to the car.

\* \* \* \*

Shawn sat munching on a peanut butter sandwich. When that huge vampire guard walked into the kitchen, Shawn waved the sandwich at him. "Want some?"

"Get that out of my face," he retorted.

Shawn howled with laughter. He loved to plague these big goons. They couldn't do anything about it and it eased the boredom.

Shawn finished the rest of his sandwich and wiped the crumbs off his mouth. He glanced around the kitchen. The place was a dump. The least Blane could have done was spring for a nice condo somewhere. It wasn't as if he didn't have the bucks. Shawn stood and went to the window, looking out at some imaginary field filled with violet flowers. Well, at least he got to beautify the outside.

He glanced at the living room. The television was on low, that ugly vamp watching some mindless sitcom on television. He thought about going in and watching it with him then changed



his mind. He'd have to pass the bedroom and he didn't want to. He didn't want to see Danny again.

They'd all been friends once. Now it seemed a lifetime ago, although it couldn't have been more than twenty years. Both he and Danny had been in love with Carden. What was he saying? Everyone who set eyes on Carden, fell in love with him. He was beautiful, both inside and out. But those who pined for him, pined in vain because he was fiercely devoted to Danny. Shawn never understood their relationship. It was clear that although Carden loved Danny, he was never passionately in love with him. Carden gave Danny everything, even his special blood which had masked the symptoms of HIV for years. When the blood stopped working, Danny took it as a sign, saying it was time to let the disease take its natural course. And eventually, not even the doctor-prescribed meds were working anymore. Carden had had a hard time accepting that, but he did when he realized that's what Danny really wanted. Shawn was sure that if Danny had asked him, Carden would have given him the gift. But Danny never wanted that.

For years, Carden and Danny had lived like a normal couple. Danny did his volunteer work at the AIDS center. Carden painted, played music and wrote. They travelled the world together and had many dear friends.

For a long time, Shawn had been one of those friends. He found solace in the company of Carden and Danny. And Carden had revealed his true existence to Shawn, after he discovered that Shawn practiced witchcraft, using it only for good. It didn't take him long to fall madly in love with Carden. He was so beautiful, not to mention gifted. His feelings for Carden put a strain on their friendship, although Danny was certainly more tolerant of them than Carden. When he turned thirty, he began to feel his mortality, especially when he walked into the gay clubs and was passed by for younger guys. Carden was enraged when he asked him for the gift. He outright refused. Shawn accused him of selfishness, demanding to know why he wouldn't share this gift with one of his closest friends. It became an open wound between them and eventually it destroyed their friendship.

He never wanted to hurt Danny and he certainly never wanted to hurt Carden. But he resented Carden's selfishness. Carden was unique. Last tallied, there were only six purebloods left in existence. Many of them had been sacrificed for their precious blood. Those crazy millionaires would never gain immortality by drinking Carden's blood. You had to be bitten and drained and then fed. The average vampire could possibly complete the transformation but it was risky.

There were many cases of it going bad and now the government forbid them from making more, afraid that the world would become over run with vampires. After all, everyone wanted to live forever.

But transformation by a pureblood was complete. Not only would you live forever, but your youth would regenerate, not like with the regular vamps, where you'd always look the age you were turned. You'd also be blessed with some special powers, like tolerance to the sunlight and mindreading abilities. Imagine reading minds. He'd be rich, have everything he ever wanted. And if Carden transformed him, he'd be tied to him in some way. To live forever with Carden at his side would be heaven. Blane had promised him that Carden would be made to give him what he wanted more than anything, but Shawn suspected that Blane wanted Carden for himself. Well, he'd get his immortality first and deal with the second issue later.

Shawn walked into the living room. The shield that he'd put up around this location prevented Carden from sensing Danny. And so far, it had worked. He knew that because he was still breathing. He hadn't gone into this knowing the risks. If Carden could get to them, they'd all be in the ground. Blane was getting richer and richer off those nutty millionaires and banking on the

possibility that Carden would eventually join him in business, perhaps even making more purebloods to work for him.

Pausing suddenly outside the room, he listened to Danny's labored breathing. The oxygen mask lay near his hand. He was being stubborn about keeping that on. Shawn sighed and walked into the room. "Danny," he said, "you need to keep the mask on." He reached out to pick it up, but Danny grabbed his hand, his grip remarkably strong for someone who was dying. "Leave it," he hissed. "Stay away from me."

"Come on, Danny. I'm concerned about you. I—"

"You're concerned about yourself. It's the way it's always been," he said weakly, his eyes filled with pain. "If you want to do something for me, let me die. Pull these tubes out of me..."

"Come on, Danny," he said, swallowing. "Don't you want to see Carden again?"

"Not if it means you're going to use him. He won't give you what you want, ever."

"You'd rather he be selling his ass to those rich old men?"

Danny closed his eyes. "He'll kill you one day. Do you know how easy it would be? He could kill you with his thoughts."

"Oh, I know that. But he has you to think about."

"All those years meant nothing to you. He was your friend. You turned your back on him. It hurt him. It hurt him to think that all those years you were just using him..." he struggled for breath.

"Relax, Danny, don't strain." He had to walk out of the room now. He forced back the tears. He wasn't going to let Danny get to him. That was the past. He was fifty years old now. Men in the gay bars wouldn't even look at him. Soon, he'd be really old, his life over, alone. No, he wanted to live forever. He wanted to be young and beautiful. He wanted to have beautiful young men at his feet. Carden could give him that. He *would* give him that.

\* \* \* \*

Rory awoke at three the following afternoon. He got up, made some coffee and noticed that his answering machine was flashing. He switched it on. It was Jack. "Hey, Rory, just calling to say sorry I couldn't get back to Eclipse last night, hope everything went all right. What are you doing for dinner? Maybe I can make it up to you, take you out somewhere special before we head over to the club. Call me."

Rory slouched onto the kitchen chair with his coffee, noticing his plants needed watering. As the fog cleared from his brain, he thought of Carden

standing on that balcony last night. He could hear his voice, soft and male, so seductive.

When the doorbell rang, he slopped his coffee all down the front of his faded football jersey. Thankfully, his coffee was cold. He hadn't realized that he'd been holding the cup in his hand without drinking from it for the last half hour. The doorbell rang again. "Coming," he called out. He wiped at his jersey and darted down the hallway to the front door.

It was Dennis. He didn't speak. He just brushed past Rory and walked straight into the kitchen. This was their usual place to talk. He plunked down on a chair, staring down at his lap.

"Hello, Dennis," Rory said in an exaggerated tone. "Come in, take a load off. How are you doing today?"

"Rory," he said suddenly. The tone of his voice sobered Rory immediately.

"Are you all right? Did he bite you?" Rory immediately started checking Dennis' neck for the signs.

Dennis slapped his hand away. "Stop it. He didn't bite me. He just drove my car like a maniac and gave me a big speech about how love was the invention of poets."

"Ah. So, it didn't go well?" Rory walked over to the counter and poured himself more coffee. "Want some?"

Dennis shook his head. "I'm not going to say it didn't go well. It was wonderful really. Every second I'm in his presence feels like a dream. I think he thinks I'm a kook."

"You *are* a kook." Rory sat back down with his coffee.

"Thanks."

"It's only a first date, right?"

"I doubt there's going to be a second."

"Did you ask him?"

"I hinted."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, don't count on it."

"He's not for you."

"But he is. He just doesn't know it yet. And you don't know how tough it was not to...you know...I wanted him so much, it hurt. And he knew it."

"Dennis?"

"Yeah?"

"Can vampires read minds?"

"They're not supposed to be able to read the minds of humans, but I believe they have a telekinetic link with other vampires. Why? You having dirty thoughts about vampires and you don't want them to know?"

"No," he laughed. "It's nothing like that. What do you know about purebloods?"

"You mean vampires born?"

"Yeah."

"They're extinct."

"No, they're not extinct. Carden is a pureblood."

"Who's Carden?"

"Oh, that's right. You were with your Thiago when he came downstairs and dazzled everyone. He's a pureblood, only services very special clients. I don't really have anything to do with him, but last night, I believe he read my mind."

"Let's Google them," Dennis said, pulling out his Blackberry.

"No, that's okay, I don't..."

Dennis was focused on his Blackberry. "So," he said absently, keying in something, "if you're not supposed to have anything to do with this Carden, what were you doing with him exactly?"

"I wasn't *with* him."

"Oh, listen," he said, "okay, pureblood vampires...says here they're pretty much extinct. Only a few said to exist today and then there's a whole lot of historic explanation for that...something to do with witches and such...blah...blah...blah. Okay, it is said they are extremely beautiful. Their beauty has been proclaimed throughout the ages. They hypnotized their victims with their exotic sexuality. Born from vampire mothers and vampire fathers, they were rare because many babies from these unions didn't



survive the birth. That's why those who did were special, extra strong. They have the ability to blend with humans, yet have greater powers than ordinary vamps whom are born mortal, then turned. Okay, direct quote here, *Purebloods were sought for their power to transform mortals into immortals, while at the same time reversing the aging process, usually leaving the newly turned vampire eternally at the prime of their lives.*"

"God. Anything about reading minds?"

"Ah, I'm skimming here. Wait...yeah, here it is. Purebloods are natural telepaths. They can read the minds of mortals and immortals alike but only if they feel a..."

"Feel a what?"

"Feel a connection."

"He's not connected to me." Rory stood up. "What else does it say?"

"Ah, not much. That's it. I can go to another site if you want."

Rory shook his head. He left the kitchen. Dennis followed. "What are you doing?"

Rory opened the small box on his dresser and took out his gold cross.

"Whoa, what's that? Is that your cross?"

Rory put it around his neck and fastened it from behind.

"You haven't worn that since you were in fourth grade."

"I'm wearing it now."

"Why? Does this Carden scare you? Do you think he's dangerous?"

Rory looked at his friend. "I don't know. I'm not taking any chances. What in hell is he doing reading my mind? And he's...I don't...I feel funny when he's around, like I'm on drugs or something."

"Maybe you like him?" Dennis grinned.

"I told you, I'll never get involved with one of those, no matter how great the sex is supposed to be. And if you were smart, you'd forget about your vampire, too."

"I can't," Dennis said. "I'm in it up to my neck now." He laughed when he saw Rory's expression. "I need your help. Suggest something that he might like to do?"

"Bathe in a river of blood?"

"Cute. Please?"

"Okay, I'll think about it tonight, maybe ask around. I'll let you know if I have any suggestions, okay?"

"Thanks. See you later."

"You're not going there again tonight, are you?"

"Of course," he said, heading toward the door, "got to see my baby." He opened it and then called over his shoulder. "Your sweetie is here!"

Rory groaned as Dennis got into his car and he

saw Jack walking up the path.

"You don't look happy to see me," Jack said, glancing back at Dennis who was driving away.

"Oh, I am happy to see you, it's just Dennis. He's driving me nuts with his vampire."

"What vampire?" Jack came in and closed the door.

"Thiago. Dennis is in love."

"Oh," he laughed, "half the guys at Eclipse are in love with that one. He doesn't like mortals."

"That's what I told him."

"He'll get over it."

"No," Rory said, "I don't think he will."

Jack walked in, then paused and looked at him. "That serious?"

Rory nodded.

"I wish you'd get that hung up on me," he murmured, pulling him closer and kissing him gently on the mouth.

Rory laughed. "Keep kissing me and maybe I will."

Jack looked down into his eyes. "That sounds like an invitation."

"Oh, it is," Rory grinned.

Jack grabbed Rory's sweatshirt and lifted it up over his head. "Hey, what's this?" he asked, throwing the sweatshirt onto the back of the sofa and fingering the cross hanging around Rory's neck.

"Protection."

"Protection from what?"

"Vampires, especially ones who can read your thoughts."

"What are you talking about?" he laughed.

"Nothing," Rory shook his head and reached for Jack's pants. "Ignore me." He took down his pants and sank to his knees in front of him. With both hands, he kneaded his thighs for a moment breathing in the scent of sex and sweat. He licked the length of his shaft. "Um, you taste good."

Jack placed a hand in Rory's hair. He shuffled his feet a bit, trying to disentangle himself from his shoes and pants.

Rory laughed. "Oh no, you don't." He jumped up and pulled Jack around, tipping him over the sofa.

Jack let out a shout. Rory had him on his back, his groin slanted upwards so that he had complete access to his cock and his balls and even his ass.

"Now I got you."

"Looks like it."

Rory stroked his cock a few minutes then went to work on it with his lips and his tongue, massaging his balls at the same time between his fingers. He brought Jack to the edge. He was gasping, struggling to sit upright with no hopes of actually achieving it. Rory spread his legs wider, twirling the tip of his finger between Jack's ass

cheeks, watching him squirm. "I want you to fuck me, Jack." Rory danced back away from him and raced to the bedroom.

A few seconds later after Jack had managed to right himself, he appeared breathless, hard and looking for satisfaction. Rory looked at him standing there, his chest heaving, his hair in disarray. He threw some condoms and lube at him.

Jack laughed out loud, leaning down to pick up one then the other. "You're insane," he accused, chuckling.

Rory turned around on the bed, displaying his ass. He wiggled it a little then went down on all fours. "Come on, baby, give it to me."

Jack was behind him now, opening him up with the lube, kissing his back, reaching between his legs to fondle his cock. Rory heard him rip the condom open, turned to watch as he rolled it on and he smacked his lips. Jack was hung and he knew exactly what to do with that equipment. He was ruggedly handsome, nicely muscled and basically a pretty nice guy. So why was he thinking of Carden standing on that balcony last night, looking so...alone?

*Goodnight, Rory.*

"Get out of my head," he muttered.

Jack seized hold of Rory's hips and pushed his cock up inside of him. "Um, yeah. Very nice."

Rory didn't realize how much he wanted it until Jack stepped up the pace and Rory grabbed onto the headboard. Heaven. This was Bliss. Images of Thiago, his cock bound, hands tied, swam in Rory's head. Beautiful, shiny, muscular body, perfect, oh so perfect and face like an angel with sad eyes. *Carden*. The vampire on stage was not Thiago. It was Carden.

Rory came with a shudder and a long groan, which sounded more like agony than ecstasy. He let his head droop for a moment, sweat running down his face and his chest.

Jack held onto him, kissing the back of his neck, one hand moving slowly over his chest. Rory reared back into him, turning his head to kiss him in one long, sensuous kiss.

A while later, they lay side by side and Jack made some crack about not getting any dinner. Rory volunteered to make omelets and toast.

Jack placed a hand under his head. "Sound's great. We have time to shower, eat and get to work."

"You're staying with me tonight at work?"

Jack reached out and touched his cheek. "I will for a while, but I can't all night. I have to check on a few other clubs."

"It's okay," Rory said, getting out of bed, "I got the hang of it. I'm going to shower. You can go after me while I'm making supper."

“Okay, but I owe you a dinner.”

“This was much better,” Rory called out, heading for the bathroom.

Jack laughed in return, calling back, “You bet your ass it was.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

Blane surveyed the room from the center of the stage. He needed to enlarge this place. It was getting to the point where they had to turn people away at the door, some stupid fire law about how many bleeders they could have in the place at a time. He glanced over at the bar and noticed that Silk was cutting lemon slices at the bar. Thiago and Suede were sitting across from him playing the slot machine.

"Where are the others?" Blane boomed, stepping off the stage and approaching the bar.

Thiago ignored him, which was typical. He was a strange one. Blane didn't trust him. He didn't talk a lot and it was really tough to get a handle on what he was thinking. He was great with the clients though, they loved him. He was hot and had absolutely no inhibitions. He would have loved to have tried him on for size, but Thiago had never given him the time of day.

"Just waking up," Suede said, his chin resting



on Thiago's shoulder as he watched the machine. Suede was rather sweet but very naïve. He was perfect and he was young when he was turned, no more than eighteen. It was a great way to get around the law, seventy-two years old, but eternally an adolescent. The dirty, old bleeders loved his ass, round, firm little globes and Blane had had it every chance he got. In fact, he had the taste for it at the moment.

When the door opened, Blane took a step back, even though the sun had been down for about an hour.

Carden strolled in, removing his sunglasses. He looked at Blane then headed for the stairs. Punishing Suede's little ass would have to wait for later.

"Have a nice walk?" Blane demanded.

Thiago and Suede got up abruptly and left the bar, disappearing through the door by the stage. Silk quickly scooped up all his lemons and leaned back a little, absently wiping a glass.

"Yes," Carden said lightly, "and tomorrow, why don't you join me? How about noon?"

"Very funny. Did you find something you lost?"

Carden's eyes darkened.

Blane put up his hands. "No offence."

"Don't play too much with me, Blane. You'll lose."

"I'd love to play with you, Carden." He blew him a kiss. "Anytime."

"When is this going to end?"

"It will end when you agree to join me."

"I'm not interested in joining you in any capacity."

"Don't you want to see Danny before the end?" He actually tried to infuse compassion into his voice. It was rough.

Carden nodded.

"I'll take you to him. All you have to do is promise to stay with me."

"As your business partner, Blane, or in your bed?"

"Would either be so bad?"

"So in order to see Danny again before he dies, I have to become your slave."

"Not my slave, my lover, my companion, my –  
"

"It's not going to happen. I'll find Danny before he dies. On my own."

"No, you won't," Blane hollered. "You can't. You never will, so you might as well do what the fuck I tell you. I warn you, Carden, I'll make him suffer if you leave me."

"I'm not going anywhere, Blane. I'm holding you to your word. You won't hurt him as long as I keep placating your weirdo patrons."

"Agreed. But I could let you see him, hold his

hand in his last moments...that's what he really wants, Carden. All you'd have to do is—"

"No," he said. "You'd have to destroy me first."

"I wonder how one goes about destroying a pureblood," Blane sneered.

"Why don't you come over here and try," he invited, meeting his gaze.

Blane felt his knees go weak for minute. Something spun in his head. His felt his blood start to boil. He clutched his head. "Carden, stop this. Stop it now, or Danny will pay."

Immediately it stopped. Carden gave him an innocent look. "What, Blane? Don't feel well?" He laughed and headed up the stairs.

"Devon MacBride is here tonight," he called after him. "You'd better be ready." He waited for a reply, but all he got was the slamming of the door in the hallway upstairs.

Blane glanced over at Silk who looked rather amused. When he noticed Blane glaring at him, he quickly went back to fiddling with his lemon slices.

Blane was just about to go upstairs to his office when Thornton walked in accompanied by that new inspector. "Good evening, Blane," he nodded at him.

"Thornton," Blane nodded back. "And Rory, isn't it?" He managed to smile at him, his head still throbbing.

Rory seemed to be surprised by his overture.

"Ah," Blane said, "I was a little too hard on you last night. Let me apologize. I didn't mean to be rude."

"That's okay," Rory said. "I was a little lost."

"Yes, well," he said, "Eclipse isn't always a good place to get lost in. But now you know, right?"

He nodded. "Oh and Mr...ah...Blane, I was wondering if you couldn't turn up the air conditioning tonight. It's a little hot in here for the humans."

"Of course. I'll tell Frankie. Thornton, is everything all right? Nothing you need to see me about?"

"No," he said. "You'll have a good report this month."

"Splendid," he rubbed his hands together.

\* \* \* \*

When Blane had disappeared up the stairs, Rory turned and gave Jack a puzzled look. "He can be strange."

"Um," Jack nodded, raising a hand to Silk.

"Hey, Silk," Rory said, looking at him. He walked over to the bar. Now was as good a time as any. "Can you tell me about Thiago?"

"I thought I did that."

"No, about what he likes."

"Likes?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, if a guy was trying to say...woo him, what would appeal to him?"

"Woo him? Thiago?" He started to laugh. "You got to be kidding."

Jack was listening with amusement.

"Give me an example of what he likes."

"Ah, let's see. He likes sex, blood and..."

"Other than that," Rory clicked his tongue.

"He likes cars."

"What else?"

"Ah, I don't know, ah...playing cards. He likes poker and hearts."

"Cards?" Rory's eyes widened.

Jack was laughing hard now.

Rory shot him a look.

Suddenly, the subject of the conversation appeared.

Thiago looked at Silk. "I'm thirsty, got any warm ones?"

"In the stock room and how can you drink that stuff warm?"

"Better than cold, it makes it taste like cows' blood."

"Been drinking cows blood recently, Thi?" Silk sniggered.

"Shaaatup," he said, reaching over to slap the top of Silk's head. He paused for a second to look

at Rory. "Where's your sidekick?"

"He'll be in later," Rory said. "Did you have fun last night?"

He shrugged. "It was okay."

That was it. He walked off in the other direction, causing Silk to break into hysterical laughter.

Rory shook his head. "You're no help," he told him.

Jack was on his cell phone now, never a good sign. When he started telling him there was a problem, Rory waved him out the door, "Go, go, it's okay. Got an hour before the club opens anyway, I'm going to go over some of the records from last night. Any chance you'll get back here later?"

"I don't know, the boss says the records are all screwed up. I think I'm going to have to let that guy go and take over that place until I can get a replacement. Sorry," he said. He kissed Rory on top of his head and left.

Rory sighed and walked into the screening room. He sat down at the desk and turned on the computer. He needed to reorganize the files and put the data in the right places. If he had a bit of time, maybe he could work on his book. He had it on a key in his pocket.

\* \* \* \*

Carden stalked around his room like a panther in a cage. He had already practically scouted every place that he and Danny had ever frequented. And today, he discovered that he was going around in circles. He felt the anger grow inside of him. It wasn't good. Blane would not reduce him to an animal, but earlier, he'd felt Blane's blood boil in his veins and he'd enjoyed it. He was feeling out of sorts with Danny. Danny had always grounded him somehow.

Suddenly, his keen hearing picked up some noise. It was the sound of someone humming, the nurse bringing towels to the recovery room. It was a lullaby and he remembered hearing it as a child, long ago. *How do I know this tune?*

He left the room and walked down the hallway to the other wing. The song got louder. He closed his eyes, swayed a little, losing himself for a moment. His mother had been rocking him in a little bed, singing that song when the mob had come. He opened his eyes just as the nurse came back out of the room.

He didn't know this nurse, hadn't realized that the nurse was a vampire. The nurse took a step back, bowed his head. "Carden," he said softly. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"Where did you hear that song?"

He looked up at him. "It comes from the one

who made me."

"The one who made you? It is forbidden and you're new. Who made you? Who is your sire?"

"I'm his sire," a voice replied.

Carden knew that voice well. He turned around and looked at him as the nurse hustled off. "Where did you hear that song?"

"Your mother sang it to you, didn't she?" He was leaning on the railing, arms folded across his chest.

"What do you know of my mother?"

"Beautiful. And deadly. She took out many before they finally hunted her down and chopped off her head. And your father...a brave soul, he was half-mad when they walled him up in that tower. It was a tragic love story."

Carden shook his head. "How do you know all this?"

"I've heard the stories. Anyway, it doesn't matter now. It's a shame how many of you were condemned to death. Crazy mortals had no idea what they had in their hands. You were lucky to have been spared, Carden."

"You are forbidden from making vampires," he said between clenched teeth.

"We needed a new nurse. He's a nurse. You going to tell on me?"

"Where did you hear that song?"

"I told you. I know your history, Carden. I've



made it my business to know everything about you. It's a nice song, a Celtic lullaby, I believe. Do you know it in Gaelic?"

"What do you want, Blane?" He was growing weary of the conversation.

"I came to tell you that Danny doesn't have very long, maybe hours."

"Take me to him now," Carden demanded.

Blane folded his arms across his chest. "Join me and I will."

"No," he said between clenched teeth. "You bastard." He wasn't sure what possessed him, but suddenly he wanted to tear Blane apart. He made a lunge for him, grabbing him around the neck. Both of them went flying over the railing, falling on one of the tables below and breaking it into pieces.

Rory came running out of the screening room when he heard the crash. Silk, Suede, Thiago and two other vampires stood around, frozen to the spot, as Carden held Blane up by the throat in one hand. He shook him like one would shake a useless old rag. Blane struggled without success to free himself.

"I should kill you now," Carden growled up at him, his voice no longer sounding human. "I should kill you and put you out of your misery. If Danny dies alone, without me, the moment he's in the ground, I'll tear you apart." A huge growl

came from deep in Carden's chest.

Frankie came running now. He jumped on Carden. Carden shook him off and backhanded him so hard that Frankie skyrocketed in the air and careened across the room, landing on the stage. He didn't move.

Rory gripped the bar. It was spellbinding to witness that kind of power. He'd never seen anything like it. None of the others moved or made a sound, then without warning, Carden dropped Blane onto the floor like a bag of potatoes. He turned around and scanned the faces of the others, his eyes filled with fury, blazing what could only be described as unrestrained rage. "Anyone else want to try?"

No one moved.

Blane swore, holding his throat and struggling to sit upright. "You'll pay for this, Carden," he croaked.

Carden turned on the step and looked at him, then he presented him with his middle finger and continued on up the stairs.

Blane was pissed. He got to his feet and pointed an accusatory finger at the others. "Cowards! Someone pick Frankie up off the fucking stage. This place is going to open in fifteen minutes. Clean up this mess."

No one spoke. They just began cleaning up. Rory's gaze went to the staircase.

Carden didn't turn around from where he stood on the balcony when Blane entered his room. "You're pushing your luck," he said without intonation.

"I figured I take a chance. Just don't throw us over the railing again. Why didn't you just finish the job? You had the chance."

"I'm not a killer."

"If you want to be with Danny, all you have to do is—"

"Yes," he said.

"What?"

He turned and looked at him. "I said, yes. Now, take me to him."

"After you service your client."

"He could be dead by then. You let me see him now and I'll come back and do as you ask. Please, Blane, don't let Danny die alone."

"I must have your oath as a pureblood."

"Yes, yes. You have it."

"And you'll do whatever I want?"

"Within reason."

"I want you, Carden."

He nodded, turning away. "All right. I'm yours."

"I'll make you a partner here at the club."

"I don't want to be a partner in your cesspool. I'll service the nut jobs and fuck you. That's enough, isn't it?" He felt as if everything had been

drained from him. His spirit was gone. He couldn't hold out any longer. Danny was dying.

"Yes. We have an agreement."

He turned around. "Show me where he is."

Blane nodded. "Come."

\* \* \* \*

Rory's head was spinning. It had been a strange night, first that thing with Carden and Blane. It had shaken him. It was tough to erase those images from his mind. Now, this Devon MacBride fellow had arrived and he was really being a pain. Silk was trying to placate him with drinks on the house, but all he wanted was to see Carden and he wanted to see Carden now. "And where in hell is Blane anyway?"

Silk had wandered off to serve a customer down at the other end of the bar and was ignoring him. He was already pretty drunk and was becoming more belligerent by the moment.

Thiago arrived at the bar with his tray to be refilled and MacBride reached over and slapped him on the ass.

Rory winced as Thiago slowly turned his head and looked at the man in the blue suit. "Did you just grab my ass?"

"It's a pretty nice ass. I'm here for Carden," MacBride slurred, "but if he doesn't show up

soon, I might just settle for you. You got teeth?"

Thiago suddenly opened up his jaw and displayed his sharp fangs, causing MacBride to almost fall off his bar stool. "Okay, okay, I see them."

"Glad to know it," he said, "better see 'em than feel 'em."

Silk started filling up his tray.

"Want me to take care of this guy for you?" Thiago asked.

Silk shook his head. "Blane would kill you."

"Not scared of Blane," he said, taking the tray and walking off again.

He walked off with his tray filled and headed to one of the tables.

Rory wanted to laugh, but he held a straight face as MacBride looked over at him and shook his head. "Haughty vampires, can you believe it?"

Rory shrugged.

Suddenly Frankie appeared. "Mr. MacBride, I want to apologise for making you wait. Something came up, but Blane and Carden will be back soon. Blane told me that you will be offered extra time with Carden tonight."

He nodded. "All night. I want all night with that sexy hunk."

"Well, I can't guarantee that, but we'll do all we can to reimburse you for your troubles."

\* \* \* \*

Dennis walked into Eclipse and immediately spotted Rory at the bar. He came over and slapped him on the arm. "Hey."

"Hey yourself," Rory stepped away from the scene. "I thought you'd be in earlier."

"I slept for a bit. If I'm going to stay up all night with Thiago, I have to sleep sometime."

"Oh. I found out some info for you."

"Yeah, what?" Dennis said enthusiastically.

"He likes to play cards."

"Cards?" Dennis' face fell. "Cards?"

"Poker, hearts."

"Cards?"

Rory laughed. "Sorry. And he likes cars."

"I know about the cars. He likes to drive them fast, too...damn. My life flashed before my eyes last night. I could take him to a car show, but I don't think there are any going on in the middle of the night."

"Sorry, oops, got to go, incoming," Rory said, his gaze going to the door.

"You make it sound like a war zone," Dennis laughed.

Rory nodded. "Just about. Have fun. Your sweetie is around here somewhere."

Dennis walked into the larger room, checking out what was happening on the stage. Some guy

was being bitten by two vampires. They were all naked, all buff and it looked like blood running down the guy's chest. "Think its real," a voice said in his ear.

He jumped, smiling when he saw it was Thiago. "No," he hit him playfully, "and don't do that."

"Turn you on?"

"No, you turn me on."

"Too bad you can't do anything about that," he stuck his tongue out at him and walked away.

Dennis smiled a dazed smile then spotting a vacant seat, he went to sit down. He might as well enjoy the show as Thiago didn't get off for another two hours.

\* \* \* \*

The minute Carden saw Shawn, he knew. He didn't say anything to him. Now was not the time. He just glared at him. *Thanks, you pathetic fuck for keeping me from Danny.* He turned and looked at Blane. "Leave us. All of you get out." He could hear Danny's laboured breathing coming from down the hall, could hear the way his heart was struggling to beat. It wouldn't be long now. Danny had been waiting for him, hanging on until he got there. He knew he'd come. He knew he'd find a way and he had, even though he'd had to make a bargain with the devil to do it.

He waited until he knew the place was empty, then he walked into the room. He swallowed his pain. He wouldn't let Danny see him cry.

"Carden?"

He approached the bed. He leaned down and pressed his forehead to his. "Everything's all right now, baby. I'm here."

\* \* \* \*

Suede kept teasing him about Dennis and it was getting really old. Last night they'd spent some time together and really, it didn't accomplish much. They didn't fuck. They hardly talked. Thiago did give him his low down on love however, figuring that would be enough to turn Dennis off. These humans were always going on about this love stuff and personally, he'd seen most of it end up in shit, broken hearts and broken noses, petty jealousy, and pain. It wasn't for him. Sex, lust, the whole nine yards, fine, love, no thanks. Besides, hell, he didn't even like humans. So, he'd made a connection with one, had some sex he truly got off on for a change, didn't mean he had to marry him, did it?

"Looks like your honey bunny is trying to signal you to his table," Suede mocked, bumping him with his hip.

"He is not my —" Thiago gritted his teeth, "I'm



not even going to say that. But I am going to say this, stop it before I kick your ass all the way back to Sweden or wherever it is you're from."

Suede laughed and headed back to the bar.

Thiago walked over to Dennis. "Okay, you're going to have to cut this shit out."

"What shit?"

"Hanging out here and mooning all over me."

"I'm not the only one, Thiago, look around."

"You know what I mean," he leaned his head down.

Dennis reached up and touched his cheek. "Yeah," he said softly, "I heard your speech on love last night, remember? Can you tell me more about that tonight?"

"You're impossible," he shook his head. "What do you want?"

"Besides you, just a Coke. I need to stay alert since I'm going to be up all night again."

Thiago pointed at him. "I'm not meeting you tonight."

"You're so cute when you do that."

Thiago growled in frustration.

"Besides, we haven't figured out who's been messing with whose mind yet."

"I give up," Thiago said, shaking his head. He walked to the bar to get Dennis' Coke. Okay, he'd meet him tonight, but this was the last time. This was beginning to feel irritatingly like dating.

\* \* \* \*

Carden pulled Danny closer to his body. Danny's head was pressed to his chest and Carden stroked his hair gently. He had sung his favorite song *Danny Boy* to him a few times now. It seemed to soothe him, even make his breathing less laboured. Carden wanted to speak, tell him how much he loved him, how much these years had meant to him, but right now, he wasn't able to. His eyes were filled with tears and as much as he tried to swallow them, he couldn't. One had spilt onto his cheek. He raised a hand and wiped it away absently.

"You have given me everything," he whispered, kissing the top of Danny's head.

He was surprised to hear Danny reply. He thought he didn't have the strength, but then Danny had always surprised him. "No," he replied, "you have given me everything...your friendship, your blood and the most incredible sex. I have no regrets. The only thing I prayed for was to have you here with me in the end, to see your beautiful face and I got my wish. I knew if I held on long enough, you'd come. I have everything now."

Carden pulled him closer, wanting to keep him there safe in his arms forever.

Danny lifted his head and Carden kissed his mouth passionately.

"Thanks for not making it one of those...death kisses."

Carden laughed until his laughter turned into a sob. "I was never a death-kiss kind of guy."

"Only a vampire could say that."

"I suppose so."

"You don't need me, Carden."

"Yes, I do."

"No. You never needed me. You are not like the rest of them."

"I'll always need you, baby." He kissed him again, this time tenderly.

Danny lowered his head onto his chest again. He didn't speak anymore after that and ten minutes later, he took his ragged last breath.

Carden held onto to him, rocking him like a parent might rock a child in the silent room, softly humming *Danny Boy*.

When Blane appeared, Carden laid Danny gently on his back. He got off the bed.

"I'm sorry," Blane said.

Carden sneered at him. "Don't even try."

"We'll give him the biggest funeral that money can buy. We'll..."

"I'll take care of that."

"Whatever you want. You have a client waiting for you."

"I need to make sure Danny's body is taken care of. When that's done, I'll leave, not before."

"It would be so easy —"

"No one touches him."

Blane shrugged. "You've lived among the bleeders too long."

Carden ignored him and reached for the phone. He glanced over to see Shawn looking teary eyed in the corner. "Oh please," he said, punching in the numbers.

"He was my friend too," Shawn threw back at him.

"Yeah," Carden replied, "emphasis is on was." The phone was ringing on the other end. Carden was still looking at Shawn. "What did he promise you, Shawn?"

Blane had left the apartment.

Shawn lifted his head. "You, Carden, he promised me you."

\* \* \* \*

"Well, that's the last of them. I just have to check on one guy up in recovery," Rory said to Frankie, glancing at the table where Dennis was still sitting.

"He's going to have to buy that table," Frankie snickered, walking away.

Rory nodded, heading for the staircase. Around him, the waiters were cleaning up, clearing the

tables. Silk was counting the cash.

Rory reached the top of the staircase and went to the recovery room. There was one very anxious guy in there waiting to get his release papers.

\* \* \* \*

Carden heaved MacBride over his shoulder and carried him into the bedroom. Blane came in behind him, panicking, muttering instructions. "He's going to be pissed in the morning," Blane fretted.

"Looks like he's not going to have to wait for morning," Carden replied.

"You know what I mean."

"We didn't pour the booze down his neck, he did," Carden said, dumping him on the bed.

"Carden," Blane said, looking at him, "you can sleep in my room tonight."

Carden sighed deeply. "You don't waste any time."

"We had an agreement."

"Danny has been dead less than two hours, can I have a reprieve tonight?"

Blane shrugged. "Fine," he said, "but I say get right back on the horse. Don't waste your time on mortals, they'll only go and die on yeah."

That was supposed to be Blane's idea of a joke. Carden turned his back. "I'd really like to be alone

now."

"Carden, alone is your middle name."

Carden looked at the snoring mortal passed out in his bed and groaned. He'd simply plant a suggestion in his mind, replete with all his most warped fantasies and MacBride would wake up thinking he'd had the greatest sex of his life. It wouldn't be the first time he'd done that.

He went to the window, looked out, felt for the first time in the last forty years of his existence, truly and profoundly, alone. What he had to look forward to was misery. Life with Blane. It didn't sound like any sitcom he'd ever seen. He was grateful for the abilities he had and he could use them on Blane, when he needed to. If he was careful, he'd never have to actually touch him. *How could I make love to something I truly despise?* And Shawn. He didn't even want to think about his betrayal. All he'd ever wanted was for Carden to make him immortal. He'd never cared about either one of them.

Suddenly, he turned away from the window. He heard something, a voice. It was a man's voice saying goodbye. *Rory*. He couldn't hear him speaking, but he could feel him. *Why am I feeling him?* He didn't even dare think about it. He left the room, walked down the hallway and there he was coming down the hallway. When Rory saw him, he froze. He was so frightened of him, but

Carden wasn't quite sure why. But suddenly, none of that mattered. He wanted Rory to talk to him, to be with him. He didn't want to be alone.

"Oh, ah, hello," Rory said, intending to walk on down the stairs.

"Wait," Carden said. "Why are you so afraid of me?"

"I'm not afraid of..." Rory shook his head. "I'm not afraid of you."

He moved closer. Rory stiffened, clutching the dirty towels he had in his hand. "Then why are you wearing this?" he asked, reaching out and scooping the gold chain out from under his t-shirt with one finger. Carden felt the cross between his fingers. "It's beautiful, real gold, a Celtic cross. Are you Irish?"

Rory didn't answer him.

Carden looked into his eyes, waiting for an answer.

Rory's mind screamed at him. *You are too beautiful for words.*

"Thank you," he said with a faint smile. "And you're beautiful as well."

Rory dropped the towel.

Carden released the cross.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Why am I doing what?"

"Tormenting me."

"I wasn't aware that I was. In what way?"

"Why do you talk to me?"

"Would you prefer if I don't?"

"Yes, actually," he said, nodding, but it wasn't convincing.

"Tonight, I'd appreciate having a mortal nearby." He lowered his head. He wasn't going to beg.

"A mortal? For what exactly?"

Carden raised his head. "To talk to."

Rory's mouth opened. He was stunned by the look in those eyes. There was pain, great pain. "I...I don't understand. Why me?"

"I don't know," he said. "It's your name I hear in my head and I know when you're near." He tried to smile. "Maybe it's the Celtic connection."

Rory almost choked. "I'm only Irish from way back."

"Me, too," he said.

"It's a joke, right?"

"Right," he nodded.

"It's late."

"I know. Maybe we could take a walk around the club, not far, just a few minutes."

Rory didn't think it was a very good idea to go walking around with a vampire in the dark.

"You can use your cross."

"Ha, ha, very funny."

Carden nodded. "Okay, maybe we can just talk on my balcony. That way you can holler for help



if—”

“Now, you’re making fun of me.”

“I am, a little bit. I apologize.”

“Okay, we’ll walk. Just let me take these towels downstairs. I’ll meet you out back.”

“Thank you.”

Rory gave him a strange look and ran downstairs. The place was almost empty. He checked his watch. It was almost three a.m. He walked through the kitchen and outside. Carden was waiting for him. As they began to walk, Carden kept a good distance from him. “We can just walk in the parking lot.”

“Okay,” Rory said. “Is something wrong? Is this related to what happened between you and the boss today?”

“Oh, you saw that, did you?”

Rory nodded.

“It frightened you.”

“It scared the shit out of me.”

“It wasn’t meant to be a public show.”

“Is that why you’re upset?”

“No. I lost someone I loved tonight and right now, it comforts me to be in the company of a mortal. That’s all.”

“I didn’t think you could lose a vampire.”

“He wasn’t a vampire.” He looked at Rory then away.

“Oh. You had a mortal friend.”

"He was my friend, yes and my lover. He died of AIDS."

"Oh." Rory swallowed. "I'm sorry."

Carden nodded. "He was my anchor. And now I feel like..." he paused.

Rory stopped walking. He almost reached out and touched him. "You feel like what?"

"Like I'm a little boat on the sea and the waves are threatening to...I miss him so much."

Rory felt his pain. He did reach out this time and touch his shoulder. "I'm sorry. All I can say is that it will probably get better in time."

He turned around, nodded. "Thank you. I didn't mean to burden you with this. It has nothing to do with you."

"You needed to share it and I was around, so..."

"No, it's not in my nature to share things like this." Carden came closer, causing Rory to stumble back.

Carden reached out and steadied him.

Rory's heart was racing, a combination of fear and excitement. He wanted Carden to kiss him. It was insane. His gaze focused in on those luscious lips of his and he imagined what that kiss would feel like.

And then, Carden took him into his arms, palms resting on Rory's hips. Without hesitating, his lips came down on his, sweet, sensuous,

intoxicating. Rory's mouth opened to his, his fingers digging into Carden's muscular biceps. Carden's tongue played around Rory's for a moment, then he withdrew by tasting each lip with his own, nibbling then gently as if he were sampling some rare delicacy. When he released him, he stepped back, a look of something resembling confusion on his exquisite face. "I don't know why I did that," he emitted an unenthusiastic laugh. "I guess I needed to connect."

Rory swallowed, his lips burning from that kiss. He was dazed. "You connected," Rory echoed.

"Let's go back. It's late."

Carden walked quickly. Rory had to struggle to keep up. Finally when they were at Rory's car, Carden stopped. He didn't look at him. "Thanks," he said. "I needed the distraction. If I can ever do anything to repay you for the time you have given me, please, tell me."

"It's only time," Rory replied. *A distraction? He kissed him like that and decided it was a distraction?*

"Yes, but to a mortal, time is a precious commodity," he was saying. "One should never squander it."

"I don't feel like I squandered it." He was speaking, but it didn't sound like he was. He was numb.

"Good."

Carden was about to leave him, but Rory wanted to prolong it, keep him beside him just another minute. "Were you together for a long time?" Rory asked, putting the key into the door of his car.

"Forty years." Carden looked at him now.

"That's a long time. You must have loved him a great deal."

He appeared to consider that for a moment. "I didn't love him in the way that I should have," he said, shaking his head, "only in the way that I was able to."

Rory narrowed his eyes. "You mean you couldn't love him like a mortal loves?"

"No," he said, "I mean I couldn't love him like a lover loves."

"I don't understand."

Carden touched his cheek for a second and smiled. "You don't have to. Goodnight, Rory."

"Goodnight, Carden," Rory replied.

Rory sat in his car for a long time before he started the engine. He felt as if he'd just awoken from a dream. *Carden was with a mortal for forty years? So, what is he doing here working for Blane?* He couldn't make much sense of anything he had been saying and as for that kiss, right now, that was making the least sense of all.

\* \* \* \*

He arrived home and found, to his shock Sola Barrera, widow of the fighter Libreto Barrera sitting on his doorstep.

Her face swollen with tears, the sight jerked Rory from his reverie and he ran right to her. He didn't even switch off the ignition.

"Sola! What's happened? Are the kids all right?" He couldn't imagine what might have brought her here. He had no idea she even knew where he lived.

"They are fine," she said, her brunette hair falling over her shoulders as she pressed her balled fists to her eyes. "I wish I was dead. Why did he leave me here?"

He ran back to the car and turned off the engine, palming the keys, feeling a fresh burst of guilt for hanging out with the very people who had caused her husband's death.

*Carden.*

No, he was different.

"I heard," she suddenly screamed, raising her face to Rory. "I know!"

## CHAPTER SIX

Rory pulled her to her feet and yanked her into his apartment. He boiled water, asking her if she wanted tea or coffee.

"I don't know who I am anymore..." Her face twisted in grief. "I want my family back."

Sola Barrera, in her courtship with Libreto, had been an Olympic volleyball champion. She and Libreto were supreme athletes and he fell in love with her the first time they played volleyball and she trounced him on the court. He told everyone the story. The pride, the passion for his woman were always evident. On his boxing shorts, unlike many fighters who sported well-paid ads, he had one name across the waistband, *Sola*. She was his sun, he was hers and she gave up professional sports to be wife, mother and his manager. The only reason she had not been ringside at the fight was that her father was dying in Panama and she chose to be with him.

In one night, this lovely, brave woman lost the

two most important men in her life.

"What have you heard exactly?" he asked her. He planned to tell her about the book, his research, but her response surprised him.

"I heard that Pinky Stevenson," she spat out the name like a sour berry, "Libreto's trainer, his cutman, his *friend*...a man who ate food at my table is now training his murderer."

Rory was stunned. He and Pinky had been at the hospital together. It was a tearful Pinky who called her and begged her to fly to Los Angeles. The fight promoters had arranged for a private jet from Panama, knowing her husband had no chance of survival. They kept him on life support so she could say goodbye and spend her husband's final, waning moments with him.

"I can't believe it," Rory said.

"You didn't know?" Her shocked eyes glittered with unshed tears.

"No...I haven't spoken to Pinky for..." *since I started working at the club.*

"So you didn't know that he is working for Kolin Karolyi? How can he do this?"

Rory tried to absorb the news. It made sense for Karolyi to take on Pinky since Pinky was a great trainer and first-rate cutman. It was his quick work in the ring that bought Libreto extra time...ah that was it. Pinky knew blood. He understood, being a longtime emergency room

surgeon, things that most people would never know.

"He's a traitor," Sola said.

"He must be getting a lot of money." Rory heard the water boiling and got up to turn off the kettle. She followed him into the kitchen. Outwardly, there wasn't much in his apartment to show off his heavily credentialed reporting career in Ultimate Fighting. On the fridge was a snapshot and Sola stood in front of it. It was a photo of Libreto, Pinky and Rory in the ring at Libreto's boxing gym in Panama.

"The three amigos." Sola smiled, her fingertip touching her husband's face. "He liked you, Rory."

"I liked him. Even though his driving terrified me."

She laughed then and he was delighted to see the smile back in her eyes. "He did everything fast and wild. Except when we were making love. I miss him so much."

Rory crossed the small space between them and put his arms around her. She was a tough, wonderful woman, but he was grateful even now that she had not been ringside when her warrior had fallen. She had seen the fight on tape, she had asked him many questions. She had demanded and got an official, state inquiry. Being there was something she could not have accepted, not the



brutality of the attack that still haunted him.

"I will talk to Pinky if you want, Sola."

She pulled back from him. "You...would do that?"

"I can try," he shrugged, "I don't know if he will listen."

"Who is this?" she indicated the only other photo on the fridge. It was his ex-lover, Brandon and he wasn't sure if Sola knew he was gay. Libreto had known and hadn't cared. Their friendship had just begun, renewing his respect and interest in the sport of Ultimate Fighting. And then, Libreto died.

"This is Brandon Fire, isn't it?"

"Yes."

She stared at the photo. *Brandon Fire*. He'd broken Rory's heart. Worse, he'd thrown a fight and Rory lost respect for the man and the sport.

"I heard he was fighting, that he got his license back," she said.

"Really?" This was news to Rory. "I hadn't heard."

"He's a very good fighter." She hesitated. "He is training again. I came here to look at a gym I am thinking of buying."

"Which one?"

"The old Hoover Street gym."

"Wow, I thought it had been condemned."

"It was. It's been fixed. Guy wants to sell it. I

was going to ask Pinky to help me run it. It was Libreto's wish that the children of the Latin immigrants here have a gym, that they would receive funding...everything he didn't get when he started out."

"That sounds just like Libreto," Rory grinned.

"Brandon was at the gym...only..." she looked at the photo again. "He doesn't look like this anymore."

No, Brandon Fire probably looked a lot worse. The fight he threw was a boxing legend. He had agreed to take a dive in exchange for going two easy rounds. Instead, his opponent hammered him for two rounds before Brandon found, as they say in the sport, a soft spot on the canvas and refused to get up.

He sustained brutal cuts over both eyes right to the brow bone and bad plastic surgery altered his Matinee-idol good looks. Being suspended for two years had embittered him. He had become *persona non grata* in the sport, but he and Rory had stayed together...for a while.

Brandon would always be his first love, but the love was gone. He couldn't hear his name without feeling a flicker of pain. He kept the photo on the fridge as a reminder that Brandon, like Libreto, was a victim of greed.

"Anyway, he was there," Sola was saying. "He's in good shape. He asked me to manage

him."

"Will you do it?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. I don't know anything anymore."

"How are the girls?" he asked.

Sola sighed and started crying again. "They cry for their papa. I know one day they must watch the fight, they already hear about it in school." Her eyes glittered with fury. "I can't keep the tape from them forever."

"I am so sorry."

"Don't be sorry. Talk to Pinky." She paused. "How is the book coming along?"

His smile for her was genuine. "It's good. I want you to know something." He blew out a breath. "I've had trouble getting to know the vamps, getting any information from them, especially about Karolyi. I got a job at the nightclub where he works as a bouncer. I felt the only way I—"

Her face darkened and for a second he thought she was going to deck him. "You are working for the enemy?"

He winced. "It's—"

She shook her head. "Pinky...you...I don't know why I thought you cared...that you want the truth out there. These vampires killed my husband and they want to kill us all!"

"Now wait—"

"No. No more waiting. I must do what I must do." She glared at him. "Don't call me again. Forget about me. Forget about my family." She ran down the hall and he followed her. "There are no good men left," she spat, slamming the door behind her.

\* \* \* \*

"Dennis," Thiago said, "I told you, you want to get rid of the hearts in your hand, not use them. Lower is better."

Dennis grinned at him from across the table. "What are you complaining about? You're winning every hand."

"It's not much of a challenge," he said.

"Well, I'm not much of a challenge where you're concerned. Anyway, the only heart I want is yours."

Thiago shook his head. He threw down the three of clubs. "Now, if you have a high heart, play it."

"Why?" Dennis muttered.

"To get rid of it. You don't want to have hearts in your hand."

"This is a stupid card game, you have to lose to win."

"Exactly."

"I'll tell you what," Dennis leaning across the

table and grabbed Thiago's forearm. "Let's make it interesting. Every time we lose, we have to take off something."

"Wrong game," he said.

"What are you, the game police?"

Thiago laughed. "Dennis, why am I at your house at four in the morning playing cards?"

"You like cards."

"Is this one of these dates again?"

"Kind of. Okay, let's play if we lose, the other one gets to say what you take off."

"Dennis, you'll be stark naked in twenty minutes tops."

Dennis laughed. "Well, you got nothing to worry about then. But let's change games."

Thiago lifted and eyebrow. "Why do I get the impression I'm being taken?"

Dennis laughed. "You'll just have to trust me."

"What game?"

"It's called Rummy. Know it?"

He shook his head.

Dennis smiled. "I'll show you how."

"Dennis, can I ask another stupid question before you play teacher?"

"You can ask me anything, pretty baby."

He shook his head. "What's the point to getting naked if we can't have sex?"

"Well, we don't have to fuck. We could do other things. Give me credit with some

imagination.” Dennis ran his gaze over him. Thiago sat there, casually draped over the kitchen chair, his shirt opened, revealing his smooth, toned chest, concentrating on those damn cards and Dennis was dying. He didn’t give a shit who had a heart, a club or the stupid old Queen of spades. He wanted to throw him down on the floor and run his hands all over him. He’d been anticipating touching him all night, rationalizing how he could do everything but fuck and still not violate the medical advice he’d gotten.

Thiago was asking him questions about the game and he hadn’t heard a word. “You know,” Dennis said, getting up and pushing his chair back, “doctors don’t know everything.”

Thiago looked up at him. He shook his head. “Dennis. You’re not—”

“I want your cock. I want your cock so damn much, it hurts.” He walked over to Thiago and yanked him around on the chair. “Don’t say anything that is in your vampire nature to say.” He undid the button on his jeans and pulled down the zipper. “I don’t want to hear your theories on love. I don’t want to hear anything about cars or cards...” He knelt in between his legs and moaned. “Oh my God but you’re something.” He pressed his lips against his cock.

Thiago lifted his hips and pulled down the pants. “Here,” he said, “do what you want.”

Dennis pulled off Thiago's boots and the jeans. He wasn't wearing any underwear. He moved his hands up Thiago's legs and massaged his firm, muscled thighs. He took his cock in his hand and stroked it. "Heaven," Dennis breathed. The other hand navigated over the waves of Thiago's stomach to his chest. He swallowed his cock, as Thiago grabbed his free hand and moved it to his nipple. He let out a sound of pleasure when Dennis rubbed his thumb over it a few times.

A hand came down on Dennis' head encouraging him to swallow more cock. He spread his legs wider, lifting his hips against Dennis' face. God, it was the most erotic thing. Dennis came off his cock and took one of his balls into his mouth, the other hand, now sticky with Thiago's come, moved up between his ass cheeks. "What a great ass you have. Turn over."

Thiago rolled over in the chair. Dennis massaged his cock and inserted his finger into his ass. "More," Thiago grunted. "Fuck me with your fingers. Go on."

Dennis inserted two then three up to his knuckles. He began to thrust them in and out, still stroking Thiago's cock as he licked his lips, intoxicated by the movements of Thiago's gorgeous body. He began to masturbate him in earnest now, removing his fingers and using his tongue.

Thiago emitted some kind of sexy sound in his throat, not the sound a mortal makes for sure. He turned around and pulled Dennis up to his chest. His eyes glowed, his fangs elongated to his lips. Dennis was startled for a moment, but then Thiago bent his head down and he kissed him. The kiss was so sensuous. It left Dennis withering in his arms and was unable to move. He groaned into Thiago's lips, wrapped his arms around his torso and Thiago took him down on the floor and stripped off his pants. Dennis was smothered with his kisses, his flesh alive, on fire as Thiago licked and sucked him every way, finally lifting Dennis' legs up onto his strong shoulders and gazing down into his eyes. "Oh, fuck me," Dennis whispered. "I'm crazy in love with you."

Thiago kissed his mouth tenderly. "I can't. I want to but I can't. I don't want to hurt you."

"Hurt me, baby, hurt me," he pleaded.

"No, not tonight. Soon." He kissed his chest and moved down to lick the come off his cock. He lowered his legs. "I almost forgot."

Dennis groaned as Thiago stood up and moved over to where his pants were. "You're not leaving?"

"The sun's coming up."

"You can sleep here. I have blinds."

He glanced at him as he was doing up his pants. "Not tonight. Dennis, this is a bit crazy. I



need time to digest."

Dennis got to his feet. "Don't think about it. Just love me. It will all fall into place."

Thiago grabbed him and pulled him hard up against him. He kissed him again, passionately. "You're a crazy guy," he said, releasing him.

"I can get crazier, upstairs in the bedroom."

"Dennis, I..." He paused. "Rory's here."

"Rory?" Dennis made a face. "It's five in the bloody morning."

"He's outside."

Dennis peeked out the window. "Something must be wrong."

Thiago nodded. "Bye."

"Thiago," he moaned, following him to the door.

Thiago nodded at Rory on the way out and walked to his car.

Rory's eyes were wide. "Okay? What was that?"

"What is this? What are you doing here?"

"I need to talk."

"Jack?"

"No. Why are you naked?"

Dennis pulled on his pants. "None of your business."

"You didn't...you weren't supposed to..."

"I'm alive, aren't I, Mother? What is it? It's that club. If you want to quit...then..."

"Carden kissed me."

"Carden? Oh, the pureblood. Was it nice?"

"What in the hell do you mean, was it nice? He kissed me. And it was like nothing I've ever...and I don't know why he kissed me and I don't know..."

"Slow down," Dennis said. "He just came up to you and kissed you?"

"We were talking. He said he lost his lover, his mortal lover tonight. He wanted to talk to someone and we talked but then he kissed me."

"His mortal lover? He'd be a great one to talk to about..."

"Dennis, never mind Thiago for ten seconds. I'm really mystified. I wanted that kiss like I've never wanted any kiss in my life. It was magical, beyond words."

"So, what's the problem?"

"Two things. The widow Barrera came to see me."

"Oh no," Dennis groaned. "She heard you were working at the club?"

"She knows now. I told her."

"And let me guess, she threw a holy fit?"

"Yes."

"She's had a bad time, Rory. You know that. She'll get over it."

"Sola said that Pinky Stevenson is training Karolyi—"

"The man who killed her husband. Shit." Dennis looked at him, his gaze full of pity. "It's actually worse than that."

"Worse?"

Dennis bit his lip. "Nobody told me...I heard it."

"Heard *it*? Heard what?"

"In my sleep, I floated around and entered Thiago's room, only it wasn't his room. It was another one across the hall." He glanced at Rory. "Do you think that's...weird?"

Rory shook his head. "I hear Carden in my mind...I am aware of him, but wow...I think I'm jealous if you're actually seeing images and having actual experiences."

"It was my trump card with Thiago." Dennis grinned. "I'll make a decent card player yet. Anyway, I'm getting pretty good at the astral traveling..." he caught Rory's open-mouthed stare and continued, "Well, Blane and Karolyi, Pinky and a couple of other guys I don't know were talking about human blood and coagulation and being able to control it."

"Go on."

Dennis shrugged. "I...don't remember. They were talking about their patrons and helping them recover quicker. They said sometimes the cost of taking care of the bleeders is a pain..."

"God," Rory shook his head. "They're making

so much money and they're whining about taking care of the cash cows?"

"I guess. Then they started talking about the fight game. You know how much I *don't* love the sport. I forget what they said."

"You don't remember? Man, your brain flew out the window when you fell for Thiago."

Dennis laughed. He was obviously too happy to be insulted.

"Look who's talking. The first thing you told me when you got here was about your fabulous vampire kiss. The widow Barrera was an afterthought."

"She's not an afterthought." Rory frowned. "It's just..."

"Hmmm," Dennis said. "Yeah, I know."

Rory blew out a breath. "I never met anyone like Carden. He's weird. I mean, aside from the fact that I don't do vampires, Carden is very mysterious. I don't know whether he's a good guy or a bad guy. And he reads my mind."

"You told me that. And don't knock doing vampires until you've tried it. So, what do you want me to tell you?"

He shrugged. "It was probably only a fluke because he was hurting. Forty years he was with someone."

"Wow."

"I think I'll just keep my distance. Be nice but

avoid being alone with him."

Dennis looked at him. "But what if Carden, is the love of your life?"

"He's not the love of my life, Dennis," Rory snapped, "for God's sakes, he's a bloody vampire."

It might have been the late hour, but for some reason that suddenly sounded hilarious and they both burst out laughing.

\* \* \* \*

Rory stepped outside and took a deep breath. Just after six in the morning. He knew exactly where Pinky Stevenson would be. He'd be running around Silverlake, the same manmade lake Rory usually circled. Rory usually went later than Pinky. If he raced, he might still catch the guy. He zipped up his hooded sweater and jogged down the street.

His mind rambled over the discussion with Dennis. He wished Dennis had listened more closely to the blood discussion. It made sense that they would be trying to find a way to heal humans quicker, but why would Pink be there for such a discussion?

Rory found his thoughts drifting into a bad place. *What is Pinky up to?* He arrived at the entrance to the lake, just as Pinky was leaving.

Pinky Stevenson was an interesting guy. He was a big, muscular, red-haired, freckled guy who was, oddly, Jewish, but lived as an Irish Catholic and wore a crucifix. He had been married to the same woman since he was eighteen. They had eleven children, all sons and one of them always accompanied him on his travels. He was a loyal husband, but an absent one.

"Jesus H...as I live and breathe." Pinky stopped running, the two fighters accompanying him, slowing to a trot. In fact, the two young guys were jogging on the spot as Pinky hugged Rory.

"Hey, Pink," Rory said. "Got a few minutes?"

"No. I'm guarding this one, because he's in serious training and likes junk food and this one is my son and he can't be trusted, as the good Lord knows."

Rory opened his mouth to speak, but Pinky beckoned him. "Come home with us. We'll make tea and talk."

His car was still outside Dennis' place, but Rory jumped into Pinky's 1966 Dodge Dart. Most of it was painted primer gray and he and the fighters clung to the rusted tin roof in the back seat, which lurched like a cannonball as they tore along Silverlake Boulevard and onto Benton Way. Rory looked down and quickly closed his eyes. *My God...the rust has eaten away the floor. I can see the road underneath!*

Pinky parked in the driveway and the four men got out, Rory's legs still shaking.

He had a flashback to Libreto Barrera driving in Panama, driving on sidewalks and down a set of stone stairs to beat the traffic.

They all climbed the mountain of stairs leading to the art-deco house, one of several that marked Benton Way as a still-remarkable street and he turned and gazed at the view of Los Angeles. In the kitchen, Pinky's wife, Pamela, was finishing the cooking. She slapped platters containing slabs of grilled white fish, grilled chicken breasts, scrambled egg whites, green beans steamed in lemon juice and jugs of water onto the table.

She never remembered Rory, but Pamela never remembered any of the guys Pinky brought home. Three times a day, her table was filled with men and boys and she double-checked on Rory's request for coffee with her husband.

"Yes, he can have coffee. He's not in training," Pinky said, scooping a chicken breast onto Rory's plate. The fighters scarfed their food within seconds and after every last plate had been emptied, Pamela took the dishes into the kitchen. Rory say back as the table emptied of its people, too, and he felt Pinky's gentle nudge.

He followed him out to the backyard that had been covered over in latticework and shielded from the outside by sheets of Perspex to protect

Pinky's bizarre and persistent shrine to his twin obsessions, boxing and God. Framed boxing posters, heavy bags, speed bags and jump ropes vied for space with religious statues, including a massive outdoor fountain to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Religious artwork of famed martyrs burned in artist hells everywhere, capped by a huge, hideous piece of wood, stretching across the garage wall.

It had been carved into the Last Supper. A closer inspection revealed one of the disciple's cups had been half-chewed.

"My last kickboxing champion got hungry," Pinky said. Rory didn't know if he was joking but took his coffee cup to the white plastic picnic table, sitting opposite Pinky.

"You heard, didn't you?" Pinky took his ever-present but seldom lit Stogie out of his pocket and chewed the nub. He'd been a lifelong tobacco chewer and had to give it up due to illness. He was doing well with his cigar.

"Yes, I heard. May I ask why you're working for Karolyi?"

Pinky laughed, but it was an unpleasant sound. "I'm not working for Karolyi. I am working with the AVF —"

"AVF?" Rory tilted his head. "Lemme guess. The American Vampire Federation?"

Pinky nodded. "It's a new sanctioning body.



They're paying me beaucoup bucks to create a medicine to coagulate human blood."

Rory was surprised that Pinky was being so open about this.

"It works to everybody's benefit. We have cut medicines but nothing to staunch vascular bleeding. This way, the fighter has a strong chance of survival."

"And the fight can go on? You're kidding, right?"

Pinky grew angry then. "I am doing it so there are no more deaths."

"You're doing it to give blood sport a new, improved twist," Rory said, struggling to understand Pinky's true motives.

"Don't you judge me, you little punk." Pinky rose to his feet and Rory jumped to his. "You have no idea what these vamps are up to. They plan to control the human population with their teeth. Think about it. Sport is just the beginning. What's to stop them from using it in law enforcement? In business dealings? They grab a felon and bite and with the correct medicine...they can keep him alive...or not. This is a new frontier and you can bet, for the money they're paying me, I said yes. I won't have to travel as much, I can stay home more, actually see my kids, as opposed to getting texts from them."

"Pinky —"

"I'm not finished!" Pinky barked and Rory stared at him. The guy seemed positively unhinged. "I am working with Karolyi on a fight to test the first batch of medicine."

"Oh, my God. This is going to be like bull fighting but worse. The fighter might have a puncher's chance, but not really..."

"You might as well know," Pinky said, his tone icy, "his next opponent is Brandon Fire."

"Brandon...you're joking. He's coming off a long suspension and he's not physically ready for a fight like this."

"How would you know?" Pinky's gaze was disgusted. It shocked Rory to see so much hatred pouring out of the man he considered a friend. "You abandoned him like every other fucker in the world when he got suspended. You shunned him."

This was true. Rory had no defense for this.

"I think you'd better leave." Pinky jerked his thumb toward the front of the house. Rory nodded and turning, stumbled away from the backyard shrine.

He ran down the front steps and did not stop running until he reached Dennis' place.

\* \* \* \*

Shawn paced his attic room. He was tired of

waiting, tired of being fobbed off. He had no desire to keep Blane in control of *his* future, his destiny. He threw back the heavy muslin cover of the Italian marble cauldron and stared at its secret contents. He whispered at the liquid that stirred at the sound of his voice and he smiled. He was a scryer and his chosen medium was vampire blood. Female vampire blood. He'd had to kill and drain three of them to get the required amount and he kept it pure by consulting with the cauldron once a week.

"Show me Carden."

He waited for the liquid to settle and was surprised to see the image of the human, Rory.

He'd expected to see Carden. The blood thinned and he caught snatches of their conversations, though he could not hear their words. He could see their connection though and it surprised him. Danny was hardly gone and Carden was shopping for his next human bed buddy!

For a moment, remorse gripped him. *Danny...*they'd all been so close once. And now Carden would be the next vampire he would drain and use...after he was done with him, Shawn would have no more need of scrying. He would be able to see and read all thoughts. He sighed happily, watching Rory asleep at the wheel of his car...

\* \* \* \*

Rory opened his eyes and found himself slumped behind the wheel of his car. "Oh shit." He'd had the strange sensation of being immersed in liquid. It was horrible. He searched his pockets for his cell phone and noticed the time. Two o'clock. He'd been asleep for a few hours. He also had two messages. Both of them were from Jack. One was a, "where in hell are you message" and the other was, "I had to fire that guy's ass over here at the Sensation Club. He's a moron." Translation, Rory was on his own again tonight.

He pulled himself together and left Dennis' house. He needed to write today. He'd learned a lot about vampires already, but with all these new developments, it was changing his book every moment. He pinned the time lost in actual writing, but he tried to convince himself he was getting good information.

*Brandon...should I make contact with him? Convince him to drop the fight?*

*Oh, no...he stopped the car in the middle of the road. He understood in a moment of perfect clarity why Brandon took the fight. He would prove he had balls, or huevos, as the fighters liked to call them. Why would Brandon listen to me when things ended so badly between us? If anything,*

Brandon would be more determined than ever to prove himself.

*What if I offered to work with Brandon?*

A blast of a car horn shook him into moving forward. *Where would I find Brandon? What would I say?* He took a chance and dialed Sola's cell phone number.

"Sola. I want to help Brandon. He won't have a chance without us. Tell me where he is, how I can get in touch with him."

\* \* \* \*

Brandon Fire looked out of the grimy windows of his old carpet warehouse in downtown Los Angeles on the corner of Alameda and Main. He owned the entire building and lived on the top two floors, renting out the bottom two, for sky-high rents to selected tenants. Two designers, three artists and an accountant, who never used the building except as a mailing address.

He stared at the car circling his parking lot and his breath caught in his throat. He picked up his cell phone as it rang. Man, two years and Rory could still do it to him. He was not surprised, not really when his cell phone rang.

"Rory."

"How did you know it was me?" He watched Rory craning now, trying to figure out how

Brandon had seen him.

"Come through the entrance on Alameda. I'll click you in."

He watched Rory pull in and said, "Park anywhere you see white lines. Walk to the building, I'll buzz you in."

"I remember," Rory said.

"Yeah, I do too," Brandon said and ended the call. He waited for the familiar whine of the elevator and pressed the button to allow it to continue to the top floor. He watched Rory via closed-circuit camera. Man, he looked good. He was still hot and handsome. The elevator door wheezed open and Rory stepped out, flicking an appreciative glance at the walls.

"You did it. You finished it."

"I did." Brandon allowed himself a moment of triumphant glee. He had personally finished the formerly jagged brickwork to smooth perfection, glazing every last inch of wall and ceiling with Italian buttermilk wash.

"It's spectacular, Bran."

They both flinched at the familiarity. "How are you?" Brandon asked, unable to steal his gaze from Rory's face.

"I'm fine. You?"

"Sola called me. She said you'd be coming."

"So much for my surprise."

"The only surprise was you leaving me."

Brandon opened the fridge. "You still like Yoo Hoos?"

"I'm all about Yoo Hoos." Brandon's fingers shook as he reached in for a yellow bottle and handed it to him.

"You look great, really." Rory was eyeing him in the practiced way of those familiar with athletes' bodies.

"I feel good."

Rory snapped the cap of his bottle and glanced over Brandon's left shoulder. "What the...oh man...you did it. You built your own boxing gym. That looks like a regulation-size ring!"

"Yep." Brandon rocked on his feet. "Eighteen feet."

"Why were you over at Hoover Street training?" Rory seemed genuinely interested.

"I needed sparring. Have to go where the sparring partners are."

"That makes sense."

"So, are you in?" Brandon asked. Rory sipped his drink for a moment.

"Yeah, I'm in."

"Cool." Brandon couldn't think of anything else to say. He hadn't been prepared for the visit and all the pent-up anger and the abandoned love warred within him.

"I am so sorry, Bran. I know she died and I am so sorry. I couldn't face her funeral."

"Yeah." Brandon wished he had something stronger than chocolate milk in the house. "I throw the fucking fight and pay for all those medical tests and all the treatments and my baby dies anyway. Can only happen to a guy like me, right?" He glanced at the photo of his daughter, Daisy, the only ornamental gesture in the stark white confines of the loft.

"Don't say that. You tried everything."

"Yeah." Brandon felt the anger rising within him. He wanted to lash out. He wanted to hurt Rory, as much as he wanted the chance to love him again.

"I'm sorry," Rory said again and reached an arm across to Brandon's shoulder. Brandon reacted to the touch in a violent way.

"Don't do that."

"Sorry."

Brandon collected himself. He couldn't let on he hadn't seen that hand coming toward him. He could never let on that he was completely blind in his right eye. If they knew...if anybody found out, he'd never be allowed to fight. And he had to take this fight. He had no idea how he was going to pass his eye exam. *Man I have to pass it.*

"You okay?"

"Too many memories. If you're in, be at the gym day after tomorrow. I'm sparring again. You can work the corner." He paused. "You still got



your cornerman's license?"

"I kept it current."

"Good." Brandon was suddenly curious. "Why did you do that? Once we broke up you never used it again."

Rory smiled. "It got me into fights for free."

Brandon was disappointed by the answer. It was stupid to feel so hurt, so vulnerable after all this time.

"See you at the gym," he said.

Rory accepted the dismissal with a slight wave and took the elevator down again. All Brandon could think about was that there was a time when they were so anxious to have each other they usually fucked in that stupid piece of machinery the second they set foot in it.

\* \* \* \*

Rory drove down Alameda, across the steel bridge and parked when he was certain Brandon could no longer see him. *See him*. He was certain there was something off with Brandon's eyesight, though he couldn't be certain. He'd reacted to Rory's touch as if he hadn't seen that hand coming at him. His nerves felt jumbled. Hey, maybe that was it. He hadn't been alone with Brandon for almost two years.

*Why did I do this, offer to work his corner?*

*I owe him.*

Yes, he owed him, but he felt weird being around Brandon whose face had hardened with the accumulation of personal and professional losses. His warmth, his spark had gone. The warehouse loft felt weird without Daisy running around in it. He tried not to think about her. That sweet little girl...man...

*Carden.* His thoughts raced to the man whose kisses left his senses reeling still. He felt about Carden in a way he knew he never had with Brandon. It wasn't the same. He knew now that he would work with Brandon out of guilt, out of loyalty, out of a desire to make sure he wasn't injured beyond repair in the ring.

How would Carden react? He hoped his relationship with Carden would have nothing to do with the fight.

He drove to the club, marched upstairs and for the first time, he deliberately sought out Carden. He came out of his room as soon as Rory reached the top of the stairs. He just about knocked him over. He was wearing a dark blue suit and he looked good enough to eat, literally. Suddenly, Rory realized that he was probably doing funeral stuff. This could wait.

"No," he said, "it can't."

"Stop that," Rory pointed at him.

"Stop what?"

"Stop *that*."

"Oh, okay, I'm sorry. I know what you came up here to say and I agree."

"You do? You agree to what exactly?" God damn it, he was distracting. There should be a law against looking that good. It could be considered a work hazard, someone could fall down the stairs or something.

"Hold on to the railing," he smiled.

"You did it again. What are we agreeing to now?"

"The kiss was a mistake?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Yes, right, that's it." Rory nodded.

"Fine."

"Good," Rory said. "I got to...got to..."

"Go?"

"Yeah, that's it." He turned and walked to the top of the stairs.

"Watch your step," Carden commented.

"Are you trying to be funny?" Rory turned and looked at him.

"Actually, yes."

"Oh, okay, well, you're not, okay." Rory bounded down the stairs, Carden's husky laughter lingering in his ears. A few minutes later, Carden came down as well. He inclined his head to him and left by the front door.

"Visiting," Silk said, shattering Rory's trance.

"What?"

"One night of visiting, funeral is tomorrow."

"Did you know him?"

"No." Silk turned away.

Rory moved down the bar so that Silk was facing him again. "They were together a long time apparently. How come you didn't know him...this Danny?"

"Carden's only been here a few months and he and Danny were separated I guess. I don't know the story."

"Separated? That doesn't make sense."

"Hey," Silk said, "I see no evil, hear no evil."

Rory nodded and went off to the screening room to prepare for the night's onslaught.

\* \* \* \*

Shawn staggered into Eclipse around midnight. He'd been drinking since nine o'clock. It was now time to get laid. From the corner, Frankie was watching him out of one eye while dealing with two men at the door he was attempting to turn away due to lack of proper ID.

"Hello, Silk," he slurred, bumping into some red-headed preppie at the bar.

The bartender walked over to him. "You know me?"

"Yeah, I know you, but you don't know me.

There's lots of jokes about you and the Swede... Silk and Suede like raggedly Ann and Andy."

Silk reached a hand out and took Shawn by the shirt collar. He yanked him closer. "I don't like your jokes."

"Take your hands off me bloodsucker, or I'll turn you into a toad."

"What's the problem here?" Frankie asked, uncurling Silk's finger from Shawn's shirt. "Now, Silk, that's no way to treat a customer."

Silk walked away.

Frankie was looking at him now. "What are you doing here, Shawn?"

"Where's Blane?"

"Probably in his office."

"Buy me a drink, Frankie."

"Personally, I think you've had enough."

"Fine, I'll go and watch the show then. Any chance I'll get to see Carden strutting naked up there on that stage?"

"In your dreams," he snorted.

"Yeah, in yours too Frankenstein and everybody else's." Shawn grabbed a glass of beer that was sitting on the bar and walked off toward the stage.

Two well-hung vampires were getting it on heavy duty, one of them a hot Brazilian number who looked too wild for his own good. Some angelic-look-boy top was spread out on a rack, the

macho-looking one was rubbing him all over with oil, preparing his ass for some serious rutting. "Um. Yeah, I'll have that," he murmured, sipping his beer. He sauntered back over to where Frankie was standing near the door. "Where's the inspector in this joint?"

"In the screening room," Frankie hooked a thumb behind him. "You up to get your ass punished tonight, Shawn?"

"I want that hot Brazilian number up there to punish my ass."

"Doesn't work that way," Frankie told him, "You can't reserve."

"The hell I can't," he said, "Blane owes me. And you can tell him I'm here to collect in more ways than one."

\* \* \* \*

"I want that bitchen Brazilian hunk that's out there on the stage."

Rory looked up from the computer screen in surprise. A middle-aged man stood there, obviously pissed assed drunk. "I'm sorry?"

"You heard me. That big hunk on the stage, who is he?"

"Thiago?"

"Whatever. Book me."

"He's done for the night. In fact, it's a little late,

although there might be one..."

"I don't want anyone else unless you can get me Carden."

Rory's eyes widened. "Carden? Carden doesn't do...I mean, he's not..."

"Oh, I know," he slurred, "Mr. Pureblood wouldn't think of lowering themselves to fuck the common man."

Rory began to look past him to see if Frankie was nearby. He didn't like the vibes he was getting from this one at all.

"Mr. High and Mighty Pureblood. If he hadn't of been so selfish, he might have saved Danny and then he wouldn't have been there tonight, moping around that funeral parlor."

"You were with Carden tonight at the funeral home?"

"Yeah, what's it to you anyway? Just do what you're paid for, hook me up with that..."

"You got a problem, Rory?" Thiago filled the doorway suddenly, his head almost touching the top.

Rory breathed a sigh of relief. "I tried to tell this gentleman that you weren't available tonight, but he's, ah...quite insistent."

"Oh really? Is that so?" Thiago was looking at Shawn intensely.

"Well, hello there, you big fuck machine," Shawn murmured, "I'm looking for some hot

action tonight. You up to it honey?"

"Hell, yes, I'm up to it, *honey*, but you sure as hell aren't. I'm not available and neither is anyone else. And if you don't remove yourself from this office now, I'll remove you." Thiago's expression never altered.

Shawn shrugged. "You don't know what you're missing."

Thiago stood aside and allowed Shawn to pass.

"Thank you," Rory mouthed.

Thiago inclined his head and left as well.

A few minutes later when Rory was standing in the hallway, he saw Blane take Shawn by the arm and lead him upstairs. "Who is that guy?" Rory asked Silk, who was now busy wiping down the bar as the last of the patrons drifted out.

"He's a witch," a voice said suddenly from behind him.

Rory turned around, surprised to see Carden standing there. He still had the blue pants on with the light blue shirt, but his jacket and tie were gone.

"Witch?" Rory laughed.

"He's dangerous. Stay away from him."

"You can't be serious."

"I know him. I've known him for a long time."

"So now witches are out of the closet as well. Next thing we know, we'll have witches demanding equal rights."



"That's not funny," Carden said.

"You're right," he nodded. "It's not. It's just all this craziness. I'm just starting to get used to vampires and now witches."

"There are a lot of things out there you know nothing about." He accepted the synthetic blood Silk handed him. "You're better off." He turned around and headed toward the door.

"Hey, ah..." Rory called, "where you going?"

"For a walk. Want to come?"

Rory looked hesitant. "I don't know," he laughed.

"How about if I promise not to kiss you?" he said without looking back.

He was already out the door before Rory snapped back to reality and followed him.

As soon as Rory was outside, Carden slowed his pace. Rory fell into step beside him and they walked along the quiet sidewalk, traffic almost nonexistent. "So, care to enlighten me anymore about this Shawn witch fellow?"

"No."

"Okay. Why did you ask me to come with you tonight?"

"Why did you come?"

"No fair, I asked you first?"

"You looked like you needed some air and I did promise not to kiss you again."

"Yes, whew," he said, but his voice was

shaking. "I mean without the kissing, we could be friends, I suppose."

"You don't like vampires. Why would you want to be my friend?"

"Do you like humans? Most vampires don't."

"I'm not like most vampires."

"Are you reading my mind right now?"

"No."

"You can just turn it off and on?"

"Sometimes."

They turned the corner. Rory began to get a little nervous. They'd gone far further than he expected.

"We'll turn back now," Carden said. "We can cut down this alley. It's a short cut."

"It's kind of dark," Rory said.

Carden looked at him and smiled. "You're not afraid to be with me, are you?"

"More afraid of you," he laughed nervously.

"Far enough, but." He held up the bottle he was sipping. "I'm not hungry."

Rory followed him into the alley, sticking close to his heels. It was dark, which wasn't a problem for Carden, but it was a challenge to navigate for a human. At one point, Carden stopped short and Rory went right into him, smashing into his hard body and having to grab onto him to keep himself from falling on his face.

"Are you all right?" Carden asked him.

*What in hell am I doing out here in a dark alley with a vampire?* “No,” he snapped, “I’m not. Why in hell would you take me here? I can’t see and...”

Carden grabbed his hand. “Don’t worry. I’ll lead you out. See, there’s a streetlight straight ahead.”

Rory’s hand was gripped tightly in his and when they came out of the alley, Carden didn’t let it go. He held it almost the entire way back. In the parking lot, he released it. “I’m sorry, Rory,” he said. “You didn’t enjoy that.”

“Well,” Rory laughed uneasily, “at least you kept your word and didn’t try to kiss me?”

“Disappointed?”

Carden was looking down at him with those eyes, those eyes that damn near put him under his spell each time he found himself looking into them. “Don’t, Carden,” he said weakly. “It’s not fair.”

He tilted his head, all that long, silky black hair of his falling to one side. “What’s not fair, Rory, that I want to kiss you, or that you want to kiss me back?”

Rory reached up and touched his cheek. He trailed his fingers down his jaw. Perfect. He was perfect. That mouth of his called out for his kiss. There was no way to stop it. He placed his hands on both sides of Carden’s face and pulled his mouth down on his. Carden gave him a ghost of a

kiss, teasing his senses, then pulling back. Rory pulled his face closer again, this time, crushing his mouth against his, propelling Carden backwards until his back was against the wall of the building. He was playing with fire and he knew it as he reached up with his hand and undid the buttons on his blue shirt. The kissing persisted, Carden's mouth tasting his in a variety of different ways, slowly, thoroughly, neither lazy, nor frantic.

Rory pressed his palms against Carden's naked chest. His skin was smooth yet cool, but not cold. He did it more to keep a space between their bodies than anything, or at least that's what he told himself. Carden's knee moved in between his thighs, a foot hooking around his lower leg, pulling their groins closer, his hands moved down Rory's ribcage to his hips but no further.

The kisses had grown messy now, lips smacking in gulps. Carden's mouth was devouring his and Rory felt Carden's nipples harden under his fingers. Rory removed one hand and placed it in his hair, winding it around his fingers, it eliminated the barrier and Carden grabbed his ass with both hands and yanked him closer, turning him around and pressing him against the wall. Carden groaned, his hand reaching under Rory's t-shirt, caressing his skin. There were sounds coming from both of them that sounded animalistic and it echoed around them in

the dark as Rory reached for the zipper on Carden's pants. He wanted to touch him. He wanted to crawl inside his skin and die there.

Then a hand shot out and halted the progress of his. Rory was trembling all over, his cock rubbing uncomfortably against the material of his jeans. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't speak. *Why?*

Carden stepped back. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I'm sorry, Rory. I...it's the grief. I wasn't thinking. I..."

Rory reached out for him again. "It's just sex right," he said. "God, I want you now, right or wrong, I feel as if I have to have you. Please, Carden."

He shook his head. "I won't trouble you anymore."

Rory closed his eyes. He squeezed his aching cock, taking some time to recover. No, there was no way he was getting away with that.

\* \* \* \*

Shawn stared into the mirrored blood image of the Carden's encounter with Rory. He was intrigued by the passion, the eroticism of the encounter between the human and the pureblood vampire. He was convinced they would finish what they started. He stirred the liquid and watched the image reform.

Ah, a bedroom, Carden's bedroom no doubt. This was the perfect time when Carden was distracted, to take him by surprise.

*Take him.*

Shawn laughed out loud, ecstatic that immortality, eternal perfection was now within reach.

\* \* \* \*

Carden went up to his room, grateful that Blane wasn't around to harass him. He'd asked Blane to give him a few nights off, at least until the funeral was over. He stripped off his clothes and lay down on the bed, leaving the balcony doors open. The light breeze helped to soothe the fever he'd worked himself into with Rory. *What in hell was I thinking?* He couldn't drag Rory into all this mess. He was tied to Blane now, at least until he could find a way to bring him down. There were others here, their throats under Blane's foot. He wasn't sure how he was controlling them, but he was, Thiago and Suede. And now Blane was turning mortals, like with that nurse. Blane was going to bring them all down if someone didn't stop him.

Rory was a distraction, but if Blane suspected there was anything between them, he wouldn't hesitate to kill Rory. He knew that as sure as he knew now that Blane had something to do with

the death of his parents.

*Rory.* He'd really wanted him tonight. And he couldn't remember the last time he had wanted someone like that. What he couldn't figure out was Rory himself. He didn't appear to even like vampires. He knew Rory was frightened of him, didn't trust him. *So what is drawing Rory to me?* He surmised that it was purely sexual. Maybe they needed one night to do everything they wanted and get it out of their system.

Carden ran his hand over his chest, down to his cock. He licked his lips, thinking of how badly he'd like the chance to give Rory the sex of his life, to truly possess him, make Rory his, for one night. Just one night was all he asked. He stroked his cock slowly, closed his eyes.

\* \* \* \*

Silk gave Rory the strangest look when he walked back into the club. "Forgot to lock the back door," Rory told him.

"Was just getting to it," he said. "I thought you'd gone home."

"On my way, forgot something in recovery," he called out, heading up the staircase.

\* \* \* \*

Carden picked up his head as he heard the footsteps. He reared up on his elbows, his eyes widening as he saw Rory walk into his room. Rory stripped off his t-shirt, kicked off his shoes and undid his jeans, pulling them off hastily, his gaze focused on Carden's naked body laying on the bed, his erection clearly profiled in the moonlight.

"Rory, no," Carden whispered.

Rory walked over to the bed, swallowing hard. His gaze moved down over Carden's body. "You're so beautiful. It's not possible I want you like this, but I do. I ache all over. Fuck me," he urged. "Oh Carden, fuck me."



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

A. J. Llewellyn lives in California, but dreams of living in Hawaii. Frequent trips to all the islands, bags of Kona coffee in his fridge and a healthy collection of Hawaiian records keep this writer refueled. A. J. loves male/male erotica, has a passion for all animals (especially the dog, the cat and the turtle). A. J. believes that love is a song best sung out loud.

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I write not only for my own pleasure, but for the pleasure of my readers. I can't remember a time in my life when I haven't written and told stories. When I'm not writing, I'm dreaming about writing, doing something wild and adventurous, or trying to make the world a better and more open minded place to live in. I adore beautiful men, and I know I'm not alone in this! Eroticism between consenting adults, in all its many forms is the icing on the cake of life!

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