



BLOOD CLAIM:
PRELUDE
SELENA ILLYRIA

Loose Id

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Blood Claim: Prelude

Selena Illyria

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Dedication

To Morgan, Thank You. :). Dove Chocy Toast!

Chapter One

Kit shivered and looked around the frozen landscape that was the garden outside the inn. Her staff was currently putting up Valentine's Day decorations -- multicolored hearts and cupids. They had no guests, but that didn't stop Kit from wanting to give the place a romantic feel.

"Explain to me again why the hell we're decorating when we have no guests?" Jessye asked. Kit glanced over to see her blood mother carving a slice off an apple and popping the piece into her mouth.

"Because I want things to look cozy and romantic. Besides, this gives me an opportunity to try different looks for the inn. Knowing what looks good could help a lot with getting more guests. We post the pictures on the Web site and voilà! We have an instant postcard to send. Make sense?" Kit reached over and took a slice of apple before Jessye could eat it.

"You sure it has nothing to do with Meathead?"

Kit whirled around, her mood spoiled. "Don't call him that."

“Uh-huh. Come on, Kit. He’s hardly been around these last few months, and I haven’t been traumatized in ages by you two running around the inn playing your dirty version of hide-and-seek.”

Kit walked up the cobblestone path leading to the back entrance of the inn. She hunched her shoulders and bowed her head. *He’s been busy*, she told herself. *He’s had a lot to do as a clan chief; that’s why he hasn’t been with me these past few months.*

Jessye trailed after her. “Come on; tell me what’s going on. You two having problems?” She placed a hand on Kit’s shoulder.

Tears welled up inside her at the gesture. She didn’t want to tell her blood mother how lonely she felt or how worried she was. Rysen had been spending a lot of time at the vampyre court. Decadence and eroticism ruled, clothing was optional, and sex was everywhere. What if he got drawn back into that life?

Kit broke down and sighed. “The high king has him on a short leash. I just miss him.” They stopped walking, and Kit let out another shuddering sigh.

“He’s a big boy; I’m sure he can keep his dick in his pants.”

“I can’t... I don’t want to think... I just need him to tell me where we stand, that’s all.” Kit turned away. She tried to push down the fears that threatened to overwhelm her.

“You sure?” Jessye pressed.

“Positive.” Kit didn’t want to discuss everything she was feeling with Jessye. Her blood mother had never liked Rysen to begin with. Any advice would include her leaving Rysen, something Kit didn’t want to do. She wanted to talk to him, connect with him again. He was her mate, and yet she couldn’t reach him, not even mentally; he had blocked out her mind completely.

I miss him so much.

“Let’s go inside. It’s freezing, and I need some coffee and to change into something cozy and warm.” Kit grabbed Jessye’s hand and led her inside the inn.

* * * * *

Rysen trudged into the inn, exhausted. He was tired and horny. He thanked the Maker that Severin was busy with mate problems; otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to slip away. Clumping up the stairs, Rysen headed for his study. He needed to make sure that there was nothing on his calendar that needed attention. He planned to keep Kit in bed for several weeks, and if there was an emergency, they were going to have to drag him from the room kicking and screaming.

He walked into his slice of peace, and a smile spread across his face. She had added a few of her own touches around the room, from the paintings, to the pillows, to the candles, to some of the chairs. He couldn't wait to make love to her in this room again.

His cock hardened and pressed against the fly of his pants. He made his way farther into the room and looked around for any more of her little touches. Once he was done, he headed over to his desk, shrugging out of his coat along the way. He quickly sifted through the bills and letters on the table, and then glanced up at the calendar. The fourteenth was circled in red. It took him a second to remember why that date had been marked. He swore.

The anniversary of her induction into vampyre society was coming up. That was the first time they'd made love. Or rather, the first time she'd made love to "Sen." Rysen chuckled. He caught sight of a picture of Kit and Jessye on his desk, and his mind traveled back to that day, over a hundred years ago.

Chapter Two

Over a hundred years ago...

Rysen stood on the edge of the ballroom, his gaze roaming over the vast space. Occasionally, he nodded to those he recognized, but his attention remained fastened to the doorway. He saw Jessye enter the room, a petite woman on her arm. The woman's long brown hair was twisted in an elaborate bun with curling tendrils framing her face. His heart skipped a beat, his breath caught in his throat, and his cock hardened. His hands clenched and unclenched, itching to take the young vampyre in his arms.

Kit. Her name whispered in his mind. His eyes took in the exposed mocha skin of her arms. Her bodice hugged her curves, pushing up her cleavage, and the sight made his mouth water. He longed to see her in his bed, naked and aroused, legs spread, exposing the slick petals of her pussy to his hungry gaze.

"Rysen? Are you all right?"

He didn't turn toward the voice. Instead, he kept his gaze squarely on Kit. "What?"

"Sire? I'm sorry, but you were staring at Jessye's blood daughter. People are whispering."

Rysen turned toward the voice, looking down at Karella, his second-in-command. "I don't care. I will have her."

"She has just been introduced to vampyre society. You must wait the requisite six months before you can declare your suit."

Rysen turned away, growling in displeasure. *Six months is too long. I must have her now.*

Rysen strode toward Jessye and Kit. He refused to bow to convention.

"Sire? Where are you going?" Karella called out. Rysen didn't turn around to answer. Instead, he wove through the crowd until he was a foot away from Jessye and her blood daughter. Jessye turned toward him. A flash of annoyance crossed her face before she schooled her features into a calm veneer.

She curtsied to Rysen and turned Kit toward Lord Blyder to her left. "My lord, may I present my blood daughter, Kit."

Rysen watched as Kit curtsied to Lord Blyder.

"Charmed to meet you, my dear." Lord Blyder bowed and then rose slowly, a grin on his face. "Welcome to our world."

"A pleasure to meet you, my lord," Kit replied. Her voice was like velvet running over Rysen's skin. The sound wrapped around his cock and made it twitch. He groaned inwardly.

Blyder laughed. "Now, now, no convention. Please, call me Blyder."

"Blyder," Kit repeated, a smile curving her lips, her dark brown eyes sparkling in delight.

A shiver ran up Rysen's spine. His stomach clenched as heat flooded his body. *By the Maker, I wish she would call me by my name.*

Blyder chuckled as he beckoned Rysen forward. "Ah, Rysen, good to see you. There is someone you should meet. Please, come join us. Meet Jessye's new blood daughter. Kit and

Jacynda do shame many of the women here, don't you think? Why, my son, Broder would be perfect for one of them. I think he's quite sweet on Jacynda."

Rysen joined the group. He bent down and took Kit's hand, then swept his lips over the silken flesh.

"A pleasure to meet you, Kit," he murmured. His mouth hovered over her hand, and he fought the urge to kiss his way up her arm.

Someone snorted, and Rysen reluctantly glanced up to see Jessye rolling her eyes. He ignored her.

"A pleasure to meet you, my lord," Kit said softly, her eyelids lowered. She gazed at him through a fan of dark lashes. He smiled at her, showing a bit of fang.

"Ah, Lord Wesley, please come meet my blood daughter, Kit. Excuse us, my lords." Jessye pulled Kit's hand out of Rysen's grip and led her away.

Rysen listened to Blyder rattle on about his son while he tracked Kit's movements around the room. By the end of the night, he'd devised a plan to get to know Kit a bit better, and to get her free of Jessye's watchful gaze.

* * * * *

The night was over and Kit was exhausted. She and Jessye made their way outside to wait for the carriage that would take them back to their clan's compound.

"Kit, I must warn you," Jessye said. "Steer clear of Rysen. He's nothing but trouble. He's quite the whore." Jessye's gaze bore into her. It was as if Jessye were trying to brand her words onto Kit with just her eyes.

Kit bowed her head, dejected, and answered softly, "Yes, Jessye."

She pushed back the disappointment that had risen up at her blood mother's words. She had thought Rysen was beautiful with his long, inky black hair and violet eyes. He was sinfully sexy, dressed all in black. There was something about him that called to her. Not

wanting to upset Jessye, she hadn't mentioned her attraction to him. That she would keep to herself.

"After the six-month period, around Valentine's Day, you shall be thrown a great ball where suitors will be given the opportunity to present themselves. We shall find a suitable consort for you." Jessye's tone had started out icy but warmed up at the end. "Your happiness is very important to me."

"Will Lord Ryu have a say?" Kit knew next to nothing about the head of their clan, having only met him twice.

"He is involved in many things, but he'll leave the decision up to us. Mostly you," Jessye replied.

Kit tried to push away the thought of Rysen presenting himself as one of her suitors.

"Come along, here is our carriage."

Before climbing into the carriage, Kit looked back at the large mansion, her mind going back to the feel of Rysen's lips on the back of her hand. A flush of heat ran through her and she shivered. Sighing, she got in and didn't look back.

Rysen stepped out of the shadows and watched the carriage drive off. "Run, run, darling. You will be mine come Valentine's Day."

Chapter Three

Six months later, Valentine's Day...

Kit stared at the white and silver wonderland around her. She whirled around, staring up at the large tree made entirely of white roses, the very top brushing the circular skylight. Silver ornaments winked in the golden light of thousands of candles spread out around the large foyer.

"I never get tired of Valentine's Day decorations." Jessye came down the large stairway. "I would have gone with the lovely deep colors you like, but you also love winter and snow, so I figured, why not white and silver to celebrate your first Valentine's Day with us? Besides, we need some joy around here."

Kit's joyful mood dampened. "There will be no joy for quite a while until Lord Ryu returns. So, yes, let's leave up the decorations until we grow tired of them." Kit looked down.

"Cheer up, Kit. We'll find a way around Ryu's disappearance. Tomorrow we can start looking for ways to survive without our leader. This is your induction; let us enjoy it." Jessye placed a hand on Kit's shoulder, smiling softly at her. Kit nodded. She didn't want to disappoint her blood mother.

I just hope that Rysen will be here.

Smoothing out the skirt of her silver and white dress, Kit took one last look at herself in the full-length mirror in the entry. She loved the white silk with silver ribbon lacing up the front. The full white skirt flowed to the ground, skimming across the floor like a cloud. Silver ribbon decorated the hem. Her hair was done in an elaborate bun, silver ribbon threaded through and mixed in with the curls framing her face. She reached up and pulled down a curl, giggling as she watched it bounce back up into place. Joy replaced the sadness.

“You look beautiful,” a rough voice whispered near her ear. Kit gasped and took a step back. Next to her stood a tall, masked man dressed all in white. His ink black hair was slicked back and the white mask covered half his face. The eyes slits had sheer fabric over them, so she couldn’t see the color of the irises looking back at her. Rysen?

Her gaze lowered and she curtsied. Heart hammering against her rib cage, she tried to remember to breathe. The roughened voice reminded her of Rysen, but she couldn’t be sure. She hadn’t seen him in months. Suitors had come and gone from the mountainside fortress, but not one of them had been Rysen. It had disappointed her at first, and her blood mother’s warnings only made her feel as if that night at her introduction had been a fluke. He’d just been his usual charming self.

That hadn’t stopped the erotic dreams of him or the longing to see him and hear his voice again. She looked up at the masked stranger, and her hopes grew, but only a bit. “Thank you, my lord.”

“Please, formality is useless here. I wish to get to know you better. Call me Sen.”

Sen? As in *Rysen*? She resisted the urge to smile widely. Instead, she calmly replied, “As you wish, Sen.”

His mouth curled into a smile. “My name sounds lovely on your lips.”

Her face flushed with heat. She wasn’t sure what to say. Luckily, Jessye arrived.

“Ah, welcome, my lord...?”

“Sen. I am new to this country. I heard that there was a party in honor of this lovely youngling. I felt it good manners to present her with a gift, a token from my people.”

He bowed low toward Jessye, and Kit saw that his long black hair was pulled back into a queue, secured by a white band. Aha! She bit back a grin. It is Rysen!

“Thank you, Lord...Sen. What an unusual name. Where are you from?” Jessye asked.

“I am from a small clan from eastern Europe. We wish to negotiate with your high king for entrance into this wonderful society. Perhaps you, Lady...?”

“Jessye.”

“...Lady Jessye, perhaps you could introduce me to the other heads of clan?”

“Allow me, Jessye,” Kit interjected quickly, not wanting Jessye to send him away with someone else. “I see Lord Mayson is here. Didn’t you wish to speak to him about something?”

Jessye opened her mouth to reply, but Kit grabbed Sen’s hand and led him away. “Come, Lord Sen, I shall introduce you to Lord Blyder and his son, Broder.”

Jessye called after them, but Kit ignored her, knowing she’d catch hell later. She giggled, feeling mischievous.

Sen leaned down. His moist breath tickled her ear. “Put your arm through mine.”

She did as he asked and savored the feel of his warmth against the cool, bare skin of her arm.

“That was very naughty of you back there. Your blood mother will most definitely not be happy with you.” He chuckled, a lovely rough sound that sent a wave of warmth rushing through her.

“I never said she was my blood mother.”

“It needn’t be said. She is very protective of you, which is very understandable. I would be too. Being a part of vampyre society can be quite dangerous. You must always make the right choices, especially in a mate. Do you have someone in mind?”

She sighed heavily. Inside she was giggling. She just knew it was Rysen, but in order to prove it, she would have to get him alone. "If you must know, I am quite interested in someone. But I doubt he is interested in me. He has not come to see me once since we've been introduced." She steered him around the ballroom, nodding to various people.

"Then he is either a fool, very shy, or he feels that he doesn't have a chance in winning your affections." They stopped before the large tree made of roses, and he turned his body toward her. "You are, after all, a very beautiful woman."

His breath tickled her ear. The warmth of his body and the spiciness of his scent surrounded her, making her feel light-headed.

"Thank you. I would like to get to know you better, Sen. I think you will be a wonderful friend to me."

He nodded his head and smiled. "I look forward to it."

She sighed heavily, looking around.

"What is wrong, darling?"

"As lovely as this all is, I don't like parties. Or the fact that there are suitors here trying to win me over with charming and witty words. Can you help me escape, Sen?" She looked up at him, smiling, hoping he would take the bait.

"But of course. Come with me."

She held back a laugh as he took the lead, guiding her around people until they reached a side door. Sen paused to look around, then pushed open the door and pulled her outside.

The door shut quietly behind them. Kit took a deep breath of cold, crisp air. A full moon hung high up in the sky, and stars sparkled and danced against a blue-black velvet backdrop. Wisps of clouds floated by. "What a beautiful night."

Sen bent down to murmur softly near her ear, "With a beautiful woman."

Glancing down, she smiled softly at the sight of her hand clasped in his. Warmth spread up her arm at the contact.

“Ready to go, darling?”

Kit shivered at the way he said *darling*. It weighed heavy with emotion she couldn’t identify. Looking up at his covered eyes, she could feel the heat in his gaze. Please, let this be Rysen.

Nodding, she smiled up at him. “Very ready.”

Sen led her toward the space where the carriages were parked. They paused to nod to a newcomer.

“Ah, Lord Sen, you’ve made it here in one piece I see. Are you leaving? I was going to introduce you to the rest of the hierarchy.”

Kit’s jaw dropped. Lord Cable, the brother of Severin, the high king, stood near an elaborate gold and white carriage.

“Lord Cable, so good to see you. I’m afraid I won’t be staying. I have a very pressing matter to attend to.” Kit felt Sen’s gaze on her. Heat rose in her cheeks.

Cable’s eyes darted toward Kit and back to Sen. He nodded his head. “I see. Well, another time then. Have a good night, you two.” The powerful vampyre stopped and bowed to Kit. Rising, he looked over at Sen and grinned, then turned his back on them and headed toward the house.

“Come, darling, let’s go to my carriage.” Sen grabbed her hand and led her to the parking area.

It took a moment for Kit to recover from her shock. Lord Sen? Disappointment warred with excitement. Examining the situation with great sadness, she felt the fantasy of being with Rysen begin to crumble. He hadn’t come to the ball, nor had he even sent a gift. Jessye’s words about him echoed in her head.

In all her life, she’d had only one other lover. She wasn’t sure how to read Rysen. Pushing away the confusion and dissatisfaction, Kit looked up at Sen. Eyeing him now, she saw him in a different light, a more exciting glow. He was charismatic and fun, and most of

all, he was actually interested in her. He didn't seem to bow to decorum like the other men she had met. Kit's disappointment was replaced by anticipation of the adventure that surely awaited her.

They walked toward a large black carriage with two beautiful white horses harnessed in silver. "It's beautiful."

"I'm pleased you like it." He stepped up and opened the door, revealing plump leather seats and the soft, golden glow of a candle in a sconce.

"How lovely," she murmured. Sen took her hand and helped her up into the carriage. Settling on one of the overstuffed seats, she gazed around, awed. Never in her life had she been in something so decadent. Her hands ran over the warm, butter-soft leather. The door slammed shut, and Sen seated himself across from her. "Ready for some fun, my darling?"

She grinned up at him as her heart pounded and her body flushed with heat. Her skin was tight, anticipation singing in her veins. "Very ready, Sen."

* * * * *

Any minute now, Rysen's heart was going to burst through his chest. Never in his life had he waited so long to go after a woman or been so afraid of the consequences. His spies had reported her every movement, every like and dislike. He knew practically everything about her, and yet it wasn't enough. He wanted the woman herself to tell him all her secrets. Kit was a decadent treat he couldn't wait to taste and savor.

There was an innocence and purity about her. He wanted to be careful, to hold his darker tastes back. Tonight he would seduce her, show her the delights that he, and only he, could offer her.

"So tell me, Sen, what do you have planned for me tonight? It is traditional to give the newly inducted a gift after six months of being part of vampyre society." There was heat in her dark brown eyes. Her gaze stoked the fire burning within him.

The carriage felt too small, the enclosed space was like a furnace. He swallowed as his cock twitched. "I have several things planned to help you celebrate your induction. You just have to trust me. Can you do that?"

He waited for her response, excitement pumping through his veins. The games were really about to begin.

"Yes, I can do that. Could you please take off the mask?" She gave him a hopeful look and he shifted in his seat, the leather creaking with his movement.

He smiled at her and shook his head.

"I wish to see your face. I wish to know what you look like."

He shook his head again. "No. This is part of the present I give to you. Tonight, you must trust me. Do you trust me?"

He watched her face. Emotions moved and swirled in her eyes, but he saw no doubts or hesitations, much to his relief. He had to play his part, and he would play it in full tonight.

"All right. I trust you, Sen. I put myself in your hands." She leaned forward, giving him the perfect view of her cleavage. "Now give me my present."

He swallowed. His plan was now tilting on its axis as she stared up at him. "Present?"

Kit nodded. "Present. I want my present now. Make me forget about what I have to go back to when morning comes. I don't want to think about suitors or men who may or may not be interested in me."

Rysen felt his control slipping from his hands as he gazed into her eyes. He needed to regain his composure fast. "I promise you, I will make you forget every last one of them."

He brought his head down until their lips were only a few millimeters apart. "First, I plan on kissing you slowly. If you'll allow me, I plan on undressing you, exploring this beautiful body with my mouth and hands. Do you like the sound of that?"

He waited for her answer. His heart was pounding so hard he was afraid it would burst through his rib cage. He had to tread slowly. Rysen was very sure she had never experienced

anyone like him. He didn't want to scare her or make her uncomfortable. Besides, he was in enough trouble as it was with Jessye.

Ignoring the demand of his body to close the distance and kiss her, drag her toward him, and feel her curves against him, Rysen watched her reaction to his words. His cock and fangs throbbed with need. He didn't want to just taste her blood; he wanted to fuck her until she screamed. Clearing his thoughts, he took in a deep breath and waited for her response.

It didn't take long. She brought her face closer to his and brushed her lips against his, once, twice, three times. The slight contact fired his blood. Growling, he took hold of her head and held it still. He kissed her with passion, nipping her bottom lip and sucking the plump flesh into his mouth.

His fangs burst forth, pain shot through his mouth, but he didn't care; the thudding of his heart against his rib cage, the silken feel of her hair against his palms, the light vanilla scent of her were all he knew. Rysen bit down, his fangs sank into her lip, and her blood spilled into his mouth.

In the back of his mind he cautioned himself not to take too much of her blood, only a small taste. Too much would bind them together. He didn't want that just yet. Closing his eyes, he lost himself in the salty, sweet taste of her. Inhaling deeply, he let himself drown in the musky perfume of her arousal.

Her soft cry made his groin tighten. His heart pounded against his chest as need surged through his veins. He sucked harder, drinking more of her blood into his mouth. The fiery liquid rushed over his taste buds. The sweet elixir was the thing that broke him.

He growled again. He used his vampyric quickness and strength to push her against the opposite seat. His body pressed hers into the cushions. Her hands clutched his biceps, her nails dug into the silk-covered flesh. That was all it took to regain his control. Swearing, he pulled back. He licked the last drop of her blood off his lips and bowed his head. "I'm sorry, Kit. I truly am. I lost myself."

“Did I tell you to stop?” Her eyes flashed, glittering dangerously. She leaned forward, grabbed him by the lapels of his jacket, and pulled him to her.

Her strength surprised him. Then all his thoughts scattered when her breasts pressed against his chest.

He groaned. “I need to see you. I need to taste you.”

She let go of his lapels and untied the ribbon of her corset. He watched her hands deftly undo the silken strips, pulling the sides of the corset apart to reveal a camisole underneath. He let out a sound of frustration. “You women have far too much underclothing for my liking.”

Brushing aside her hands, he grabbed the delicate material and ripped it.

She gasped and then giggled. “You’re very eager, aren’t you?”

“To see and taste you? Yes, I’m more than eager.” He pushed the sides of the corset and camisole farther apart, exposing her small, high breasts. In the soft, golden light, her skin glowed. Her dark chocolate nipples beckoned to him. He lowered his head, swirling just the tip of his tongue around one dark brown areola. She squirmed underneath him; her hips ground against his. Her movements fanned the fire roaring through him. He could just imagine what it would be like to feel her body move underneath him as they made love.

He pulled his head back and blew, watching the tip tighten. Again, he circled the turgid peak before taking it between his teeth and sucking it into his mouth. Her moan inflamed him further. He ground his hips against her, but the friction was not enough. His cock pressed against his breeches, needing to be released.

He scraped a fang over her nipple. She gasped and shuddered beneath him. He transferred his attention to the other nipple. She buried her fingers into his hair, nails scraping his scalp as she held his head against her breast. Arching her back, she ground her hips harder against his. She moaned his name, and that nearly broke him.

The carriage rolled to a stop, and a moment later, there came a tap on the door. Releasing her nipple with a soft *pop*, he kissed his way upward until he reached her lips. He pressed his mouth to hers softly, then shrugged out of his jacket and handed it to her. "Put this on. I don't want anyone to see your beautiful breasts but me."

She laughed. "Possessive, aren't we?"

"You don't know how much. Now hurry," he murmured. "I need you, and I can smell the intoxicating scent of your arousal."

She took his coat and pulled it on, then buttoned it up with deft fingers. He pushed open the door and got out before turning and helping her down from the carriage. In the dim light of the carriage house, he could see her hair was mussed. The silver ribbon was threatening to escape, weaving through the waves and curls that fell around her shoulders. He reached out and tucked a few strands behind her ear, letting his fingers run over the delicate strands.

Rysen watched her body shudder, and smiled. Whatever happened this night, he knew this would bind them together. She had mesmerized him, intoxicated him, and he didn't want to let go of her. But he had to remain in control. If what he had heard was true, and Ryu really had abandoned his clan, it could lead to an alliance between their two houses, despite Jessye's obvious dislike of him. Rysen wanted Kit to be his consort. He couldn't picture anyone else at his side but her.

Kit looked up at him, a question in her eyes. "Are you going to stand there and let me freeze?" Her lips curved into a smile, and for a moment, he was caught off guard. "If you're not careful, I shall need help warming up."

Reaching out, he cupped her cheek, and she turned toward his touch. He brushed his thumb over her plump lower lip. The flesh looked bruised. He preened at that. *I will be her lover. No one else will be with her.*

His stomach dropped at the thought, and a shiver raced up his spine. It felt almost as if someone were walking on his grave. Ignoring the sensation, he trailed his hand down, caressing her neck and shoulder, and let it glide down her arm to take hold of her hand. Their fingers threaded together. The feeling seemed honest and right, as if the world had fallen into place. Home.

“Come, darling; let’s go inside so I can warm you up properly.” His voice was surprisingly hoarse with emotion. He started to turn away and head to the door when she tugged on his arm.

“Is something wrong?” she asked.

He raised an eyebrow rose in question. “No, why?”

“Something happened between us, something I can’t name.” Her face scrunched in concentration.

“I’m not sure what you mean.” He knew he was lying, but to tell her what was on his mind would scare them both.

He turned and led her toward the door. Inside, the golden glow of the wall sconces led him upstairs and to his bedroom. He pushed open the door, pulled her inside, and then tugged her against his body. Using his mind, he closed the door and then wrapped his arms around her. “Ready for your presents?”

With a thought, he lit the room. Candles flared to life and bathed them in a soft, warm light. She gasped and looked around her. Rose petals and candles were everywhere. Her eyes wide, she looked up at him. “Is this all for me?”

Chapter Four

Kit was amazed. Never had she thought a man capable of such romance. Roses were everywhere, giving off the most heavenly floral scent. The colors of the silken petals varied, some even blue.

“You did this for me? I love roses. I have always wanted roses. This is just beautiful.”

His lips curved into a smile that held both pleasure and a darker aspect she couldn't put her finger on. It made her shiver.

“You deserve nothing but the best. It is, after all, your induction into vampyre society, as well as Valentine's Day.” His gaze roamed around the room and landed back on Kit.

“How did you know I'd come with you?” She tilted her head to the side, studying him.

He shrugged. “I had a feeling you and I would hit it off.”

“It is beautiful! Although, I must say, you were being a bit presumptuous. We just met.”

He laughed. “Perhaps. But it's not as beautiful as you.”

She shook her head, curls bouncing from the movement. “Nothing is as beautiful as this.”

It was a cornucopia of color and scent. Turning to look up at him, she smiled. He brought his head down, smashing his lips against hers. The kiss was passionate, violent, dominating, overwhelming. She was pulled under by the feelings that he poured into that kiss.

He pulled back, breathing harshly. "You are beautiful. Don't ever deny such a thing in my presence." His voice was an animalistic growl that sent fingers of fear trailing up her spine. "Do you understand me?"

She nodded slowly. "Yes."

"Good. Now undress for me." He stepped back and walked to the bed, then sat down on the edge, eyes focused on her.

She wished he weren't wearing that mask. Squashing her discontent, she undid the buttons of his jacket and shrugged it off along with her corset. Moving slowly, she reached behind her and undid the hook and eye clasps of her skirt, the openings popping as each was freed. She did a shimmy, and the skirt slipped from her hips to expose her petticoat.

Sen growled and stood up. For a second, she thought she had done something wrong. Licking her lips, she watched nervously as he approached her.

"Too many underthings. When you're mine, I'll burn all these damn things." He reached down and ripped the petticoat. Her heart hammered in her chest; her breathing came out in short puffs. Her skin was tight and hot, her stomach clenched in anticipation. Her sex was heavy and slick from need. Sen shoved the ruined petticoat down, and she stood before him in nothing but a garter belt, stockings, and slippers.

"Oh fuck." His eyes widened.

She wasn't sure what he meant by that. Despite not seeing his eyes, she felt his gaze burning into her.

“On the bed, now, and spread your legs wide. I need to eat you.” The harshness of his tone caused her to rush forward, pausing only to extricate her foot from the petticoat and kick off her slippers.

The bed was massive. It seemed to go on forever. The bedspread was the softest fur she had ever felt. She kept crawling forward until she got to the head of the bed. When she turned around and lay down on her back, spreading her legs wide, the sight that met her eyes caused her breath to stall and her heart to stop and then continue.

He was completely nude except for the mask. Her eyes were glued to his shaft, which he was now stroking. His cock was thick, roped with veins and flushed pink, the crown ruddy, the slit already leaking a single crystalline drop. Her cunt contracted, clit throbbing as her stomach tightened further. She felt light-headed.

Never had she seen someone so beautiful. He was perfectly muscled, his skin fair but not pale, his legs and arms not too hairy. *After him, how can I possibly think of being with anyone else?* The thought both sobered and scared her. They hadn’t even had sex yet, and Sen had ruined her for other men with the sight of his body alone.

The white mask only added to his mystery. She wanted to see his glorious, long black hair flowing loose. She wanted to bury her hands in it and feel the silk against her skin as he kissed his way down her body. “Unbind your hair. I want to see it free.”

He didn’t stop stroking his cock. With his free hand, he reached up and pulled the band holding his hair back. The white slip of silk floated to the ground as his hair flowed around him. He looked like a fallen angel come to seduce her. And seduce her he had. His image made her think of the man who haunted her desires.

“Rysen.” The name slipped out in a whisper, but he had heard it.

He released his shaft and walked toward the bed. “I am not Rysen. You shall be punished until you can remember my name is Sen.”

She shivered and her pussy tingled at the threat. “I apologize, Sen.”

“Too late, darling; the damage is done.” He climbed onto the bed, crawling toward her like a predator on the prowl.

By the Maker, he is beautiful.

He moved up her body until he covered her completely. He lowered his head, balancing on his hands. His lips brushed hers. The touches were light and teasing. She needed more. Opening her mouth, Kit ran the tip of her tongue along first his bottom lip, then the top, before it slipped into his mouth.

She took her time exploring every aspect of his mouth from the roof to his teeth. He pulled his head back and took a breath. She moaned at the loss, wanting his touch. Brushing her hair away from her face, he bent his head and kissed her again, this time with more passion and force. She reached up her hands, taking hold of his sides and urging him down. He didn’t move. She jerked her head back. “Please, I need to feel your body against mine.”

“No.” He took her bottom lip, teeth and fangs scraping the plump, sensitive flesh, causing her to cry out. A rush of pleasure washed over her body and her back bowed. He released her lip and began kissing his way down, tracing her jaw and then down her neck, running the tip of his tongue over her jugular vein. She moaned.

“Mine, darling, all mine. Always.” He spoke the words with his lips sliding down her neck. Sen kissed her shoulder before placing nips down her arm. Little fires broke out over her skin where he bit. Her pussy clenched, moisture trickled out of her entrance as her clit pulsed with the need for release.

She slid a hand between them, only to have something stop her. Her palm couldn’t move down any farther. Her arm moved back to her side, and her other was pinned to the bed by an invisible pressure.

“What is going on?” Kit demanded.

“I call the shots and you shall be punished. You can’t touch me, nor can you relieve the ache between those beautiful thighs of yours. I’m going to wind you up until you can’t take

it, until you scream for me. Until you are as on fire for me as I am for you.” He flicked the tips of her fingers with gentle brushes. He moved over her, his hair flowing over her skin like a silken blanket. The gentle touch only increased the fire within her.

“Ry --” She caught herself. “Sen, please, let me touch you.”

“You almost called me Rysen, didn’t you, darling? At least you caught yourself. But you still need to be punished.” His warm breath flowed over her skin with each word, increasing her arousal. Her nipples were aching points. Her sex throbbed, clit pulsing with need. He stoked the fire with each brush, kiss, flick of his tongue and touch of his hair. She had never thought hair could be used to arouse, and yet he did. She watched helplessly as he swirled his tongue around her navel before moving downward, placing whispers of kisses on her bare mound. Kit’s legs were spread wider by invisible hands.

“So beautiful, so slick with need for me. Your pussy is mine tonight. I’m going to make you scream for me.” The first touch of his tongue on her nether lips made her cry out. Her hips bucked in response. He took his time running up one side and down the other slowly, as if there was nowhere else he’d rather be. She watched him lower his body to the mattress. He inhaled her private scent deeply. “So rich and delicious. So intoxicatingly perfect. Has a man ever tasted you here, darling?”

“Yes,” she answered.

“Not like I will.” Sen parted her thick nether lips to reveal her clit. She tried to move her body forward, aching for his mouth on the engorged pearl.

“Please, Sen, please.”

“What is it that you want me to do, Kit? Do you want me to eat you?” Sen moved his head closer; the first touch of his tongue to the tip of her clit made her jump. Electricity sparked through her body from that tiny touch. It wasn’t enough. He began to circle the bud slowly as she struggled against the invisible bonds. She needed more of his touch, more of his mouth. He was killing her slowly.

“Eat me, yes, please, eat me.”

He stopped teasing her. Chuckling darkly, he nipped her clit gently before taking the bud into his mouth, flicking it before holding it down with his tongue.

Her orgasm twisted inside of her, tightly drawing her closer to the cliff. Suck, flick, press, repeat. She was drawn so tight. Her aching channel clenching on nothing, moisture slipped from her cunt over her anus. He nipped her clit before biting the aching nub. She cried out as a small tremor rushed over her. He tried it again and another vibration ran through her. Sen released her clit, turning to nibble and suck her pussy lips one at a time as he moved lower. He traced the petals of her labia before rimming her entrance.

Her body quivered with anticipation. Kit waited for his next move. Sweat slipped over her body. She was on fire, burning up from his teasing. He thrust his tongue into her sopping center and she cried out. Her vaginal muscles clenched. She tried to hold on to his tongue, keep him inside of her in some way, but to no avail. Pulling his head back, he replaced his tongue with one finger. He fucked her in slow, teasing strokes, driving her further to the brink. While he did that, he took her clit back into his mouth, nibbling and flicking the aching bud.

She was going insane, burning up with desire and need. “Sen, please, please, please, make love to me. I can’t take this torture anymore.”

He released her clit. “Do you want me to fuck you? Is that what you need?”

Sen kissed his way to her inner thigh, nipping her lightly. She shuddered. Kit had heard others talking about what it was like when a vampyre bit you there, sinking their fangs into the vein that ran along the inside of your thigh. Would he?

“Say it, Kit. Tell me what you want, darling,” Sen murmured.

“I want you to --” Kit hesitated to use the word *fuck*. “I want you to make love to me.”

He placed a kiss on the inside of her thigh and blew out a breath. “My beautiful, pure angel, so sweet and innocent. You shall have what you wish, what you desire.”

He withdrew his finger from her cunt and rose up on his knees. She watched as he slipped the digit into his mouth, sucking it clean of her juices. "Delicious."

Sen got on all fours and crawled up her body. His skin brushed hers, inflaming her. He lowered his weight, not completely onto her. She felt his cock slide over her stomach. She moaned, wanting him inside of her. "Taste yourself on my tongue, darling."

He gave her a soft, passionate kiss. She could taste the tangy saltiness of her juices. The kiss became more passionate, possessive, and dominating. Kit felt the heat of his body leave and pressure at the entrance to her core. As they kissed, he thrust forward. Pain burst over her as he stretched her walls. Tears leaked out of the corners of her eyes. He swallowed her exclamation with his kiss. A wave of pleasure washed over her when she felt something pinching her nipples. He withdrew and thrust forward again, going deeper inside of her.

The pain turned into a dull ache. He pulled back and pushed forward. He drew his head back. Despite his still having the mask on, she knew she was staring into his eyes. In her mind, purple depths were looking back at her, their color darkening to indigo. Her gaze never left his as he withdrew and thrust into her, increasing his strokes, slowly building up the speed. He rose up, balancing on his hands, and she looked down between their bodies to watch him withdraw and thrust forward.

The sight made her moan.

"Watch me as I fuck you. Watch us as we come together."

She watched him sink into her and pull back over and over again, his cock slick with her juices. The pressure on one of her hands disappeared, and she looked up at him. "Touch yourself as I fuck you."

He increased the speed of his strokes. Sen began to pound into her hard, hitting her cervix. Shards of pain mingled and combined with the pleasure building up inside of her. She did as he demanded, sliding her free hand between their sweat-slickened bodies, delving

between her pussy lips to find her clit. She rubbed the nub hard, faster and faster. Her orgasm climbed higher and higher, twisting tighter and tighter.

“That’s it, darling, push yourself over the edge. Come for me. I want to watch you break apart,” he urged, voice a gruff growl.

Their flesh slapped together. Each time he thrust forward, he hit her hand. That helped push her forward. She watched him sink into her. Kit’s hand moved faster and faster between her legs. She glanced up into his covered eyes and shattered.

Rysen, she cried out in her mind as she came. Her lips parted and a scream burst forth. Fire washed over her body. Her limbs shook; her walls quivered around his cock and then clamped down. He fucked her through her orgasm. She felt him expand within her before his cock twitched and he let out an animalistic sound that sent a shiver down her spine. He spurted his seed deep within her. Sen bent his head down, mouth open, and bit her shoulder. She screamed, coming again, and another wave of heat ran over her. Her body shook. Each tug of his lips on the wound caused a miniorgasm to erupt.

His thrusts slowed. Sen lapped at the wounds on her shoulder, sending more shivers through her. Lifting up her free arm, she wound it around his waist and stroked his sweat-slicked back. His head came up and he kissed her. She tasted the saltiness of her own blood on his lips. Sen pulled back and rolled off her. The pressure on her other hand melted away. Turning her head, she watched his chest move up and down as his breath came out in harsh pants. “We rest now, and later, we do this all over again.”

* * * * *

Long after Kit had fallen asleep, Rysen stayed awake swearing and calling himself all kinds of stupid. Looking over at her sleeping form, he sighed. He didn’t want to let her go.

Shaking his head, he sat up and threw his legs over the side of the bed. He padded over the carpet of rose petals and out of the room, then into his study. He poured himself a finger of whiskey. Pulling back a curtain, he took in the moon high in the sky, stars twinkling

against an indigo backdrop, and snow covering the grounds of his own mountain retreat. He drank and thought and drank some more. He felt nothing but contentment. Usually, when he began to feel some connection to another person, he felt the need to bolt. In that moment, after making love to Kit, he felt nothing but peace.

When morning came and Kit had bathed, he ordered the carriage and they made their way back to her clan's compound. Her head rested on his shoulder, and her eyes drifted closed every few seconds. She was exhausted, and he didn't blame her. He had kept her up nearly all night making love to her. He'd memorized every dip, curve, rise, and fall of her body. He knew every inch of her, knew what she liked, what gave her intense pleasure, and what she hated.

Her innocence in the ways of sex pleased him. Her beauty left him breathless. Her bright, joyful spirit left him awed. He loved everything about her, right down to her feistiness. She was his perfect match in every way, and it scared him. His tastes in the bedroom could run darker than what he had shown her last night. He knew he had a need for control that could even irritate him. Right now, he still had on the mask from last night. Despite his skin itching from the dried sweat underneath, he refused to take it off.

He wouldn't reveal himself as her lover just yet. He had plans to make, more information to gather, before making his move. When he finally had her, it would be on his terms and she would have a say in it.

As the carriage pulled up at the gate, he gave her one last lingering kiss that tugged at his heart. Rysen watched her walk through the gates of the compound with an angry-looking Jessye waiting at the front door. Rysen got out of the carriage. As soon as Kit was inside, he focused his attention on her blood mother, his inky black hair blowing around his face, his eyes, behind the opaque fabric of the eye slits, flashing a warning to the vampyre not to hurt Kit.

Jessye rolled her eyes and shook her head. In a flash, she was before him. "I know it's you, Rysen. You may have fooled Kit, but not me. Stay away from her. She is too innocent

for the likes of you. Don't think I haven't heard the whispers of your bedroom play. If you so much as left a bruise, I will kill you."

"She will be mine whether you like it or not. She is mine." Rysen's tone was firm.

Jessye's power lashed out. Pain burst over his cheek as his head whipped to the side. "She is not yours yet. Nor will she ever be."

"Careful what you say," Rysen warned. He took off the mask and slowly turned his head, looking Jessye in the eye. "I have heard whispers, as well. You may need me in the future."

"Don't you dare use Kit as a bargaining chip in all this."

"She is not a bargaining chip. She will come to me freely of her own will. As for my help, all I ask is that you stop looking down on me as if I am trash under your shoe. I am the third highest-ranking vampyre under the king, third in line for the high king's throne. I am not to be dismissed so easily." Rysen waited for her to say otherwise. Instead, Jessye snorted in response.

She turned and vanished from sight, only to appear at the door of the mansion. They faced off again, staring at each other from across the courtyard. Jessye folded her arms and Rysen remained where he was, back straight, head held high, wind blowing his hair out away from his face. His eyes glittered with banked fire. "Kit is mine whether you like it or not. No one can keep us apart." He bowed at the waist, turned, and disappeared.

Chapter Five

Present Day...

Rysen glanced at the calendar and began to pace. He had three days to organize a surprise, and he didn't know where to begin.

He paused at a window and drew back the curtains. So much had happened in the last few months. They needed time to relax and shake off the stress. What they needed was time alone, just the two of them.

He withdrew his hand and let the curtain fall back in place. Rysen began to pace again, his mind turning over every scenario he could think of. Sen. His body tightened as he remembered the very first time he and Kit had made love. She hadn't known Sen was he at the time. She still didn't. He grinned as a plan began to form in his mind.

He sent a mental call for Karella to come to him. She appeared in the room in the blink of an eye.

"Call the florist, have the house opened up and cleaned. The carriage has to be cleaned and sent here."

"Planning something, sire?"

“A surprise for Kit. Complete with roses. Not just roses, I’ll go even further.”

He looked toward the phone and didn’t move. Anticipation and fear ran through him as doubts began to surface. “What if she doesn’t like it? I’ve already claimed her as my mate. Going through this could be seen as redundant. Maybe I should be more creative. Think of something else, something more romantic. What do other men do with their mates? What is considered romantic these days?”

“For the love of the Maker, just dial the fucking phone.”

Rysen turned to see Jessye leaning in the doorway. She cut off a slice of apple and popped it into her mouth, then chewed slowly. “Look, just make the arrangements or have elf girl do it. What you want to do is fine. She’ll love it.”

He just stared at Jessye, not moving. “Why are you helping me?”

“I’m not helping you. I’m helping Kit. You two haven’t been together in months and she’s feeling the effects. I don’t like seeing my blood daughter doubt herself because of you. You need to tell her how you feel, reconnect with her. And the Maker knows, I’d like to have this place empty for a couple of days. I’d like to do a few things for her while she’s away.” Jessye sliced off another piece of apple and slipped it into her mouth.

“You won’t be returning to my brother?” He tilted his head to the side. Ever since Syrus had claimed Jessye under the Blood Claim law, she’d been bouncing between Syrus’s safe houses and the inn. It was odd to think of her not with him.

She rolled her eyes. “No, I need a break from him. He’s been a bit obsessive lately.”

Rysen studied her. Jessye actually looked annoyed. “What’s going on, Jessye? Is my brother getting out of control? Do you need me to step in?” Rysen would put his plans on hold if his brother needed to be dragged back into line.

Jessye snorted. “As if you could control your brother. It’s nothing I can’t handle.” She paused, conflict written on her face. “What was Sabella like?” she asked softly.

“Truth be told, I don’t know much about her. My family spent more time with her than I did. I managed my father’s various businesses, so I was traveling. What I do know is she was a very sweet woman, full of fire.”

He paused, chuckling at a memory that had surfaced. “I remember, once, I had returned to the family home. I was really young, about twenty-five, I believe. Still mortal and naive in the ways of the world. I was sick and Sabella was taking care of me. Poor woman, I can be quite a handful when I’m sick. She had just baked a pie. My brother wanted a piece. He didn’t care that it had just come out of the oven, so he did what any idiot would do. He stole it. Burned his hands, permanently scarring them. Sabella found out, chased him down, and beat him with a wooden spoon. Never in my life have I laughed so hard. After she was done, she told him he could have the pie. By then it was too late. He wasn’t hungry anymore and he was in too much pain.”

Rysen began laughing. When he was done, he had to wipe tears from his eyes. His lips were curved into a smile.

Jessye remained in the doorway, a pensive look on her face.

“Why do you ask?” He watched her face carefully, trying to gauge the reason for her curiosity.

“Sometimes he...sometimes he calls out for her in his sleep,” she said softly.

“Anyway, never mind. Forget I even said anything.” She looked at him, an emotional mask in place, and then turned and left the doorway.

Rysen heard her footsteps trailing down the hall. He was immobile for a few seconds. His thoughts drifted back to his brother and family. Once he had turned twenty-one, he began to travel, leaving his family for long periods. There was so much during that time that he never knew. So much he missed.

A sense of regret welled up inside of him. Sighing, his gaze drifted to the calendar. Now was not the time to dwell on the past. And he refused to miss anything.

Rysen strode across the room and picked up his address book. He flipped through it and found the entry he was looking for. He dialed, and after a minute, someone answered.

“Hello, yes. I’d like all of your roses, every color you have. Yes, I know it’s close to Valentine’s Day. Well, I’m willing to pay extra, but if you don’t want my money, I’ll go elsewhere. Yes, all the roses you have. I want them delivered to this address...”

He told them the address of his mountainside retreat and waited for them to finish writing it down.

“Yes, that’s all, no card. Just send them to Judith Alexis. She’ll know whom they’re from. Tell her they’re for Valentine’s Day.”

He glanced up to see Kit standing in the doorway. Her mouth hung open, shock and hurt on her face.

“Kit, no, the flowers are not for her --”

She turned and walked away.

The person on the phone asked him a question and he swore. “Yes, overnight delivery. Look, I have to go. Thank you.” Rysen rushed after Kit. The last thing he wanted was Kit getting the wrong impression.

* * * * *

Kit strode down the hall, anger driving her steps.

His words echoed in her mind. It infuriated her that he would dare send flowers to his mistress while in *her* inn. She felt like a fool for having not seen the signs. He hadn’t touched her in months. He had gotten her to submit to him, and as soon as she was declared his consort, he got bored and found some else at court. She had heard tales of it happening all the time. She wanted to scream out her anger.

Slamming the door to her library, she used her mind and turned the lock. Fists clenched, she began to pace and called herself all kinds of names for falling for him.

She looked around. The room was done in old-world elegance. Every inch of it was a compromise between them. As soon as things had calmed down after Syrus's arrival a few months back, she'd taken a look around and found Rysen had imposed *his* decorating tastes on *her* inn. After months of work, arguments, and compromises, they'd come to an agreement both of them could live with. She'd been happy with the way things were going. And now this. She began to pace again, trying to calm her emotions. She heard something shatter behind her and glanced over her shoulder to find a vase had burst on a nearby table. Blowing out a breath, she closed her eyes and tried to regain control.

She felt Rysen behind her. His mind pressed against hers. Something else shattered and she let out a shriek of frustration.

"Kit, darling, let me explain," Rysen said.

"Get out! Get out of this room, and get the fuck out of my mind!"

"Kit, please, we need to talk." Rysen placed a hand on her shoulder.

"I can't be here right now." With those words, she used her mind to teleport out of the inn to her former clan's mountainside compound. She appeared in her old room. Relieved to see that nothing had changed, she fell onto her bed and tried to let the tension go.

"Kit, darling, please." Rysen's voice floated through the thick wood door. Sitting up, she searched under her pillow until she found what she was looking for. Her dagger. She unsheathed it, and, pricking her finger, she watched a drop of blood bead at the tip. Sliding off the bed awkwardly, she held her finger away from her body and made her way to the door. She touched the tip of her digit to a small pentagram carved into the wood and winced at the small pinch as the magickal protection symbol drew the blood out of the wound. Once the design was filled, it stopped tugging blood out of her finger. Dropping her hand away, she walked back to the bed and fell onto the mattress.

"Go away, Rysen, I don't want to talk to you right now." She was very pleased that she at least sounded calm. Now all she had to do was figure out what she wanted to do.

She blew out a breath, and her mind began to work.

“Kit?” Rysen stood right next to the bed.

“Fucking hell!”

“I am over two thousand years old. Those small protection symbols are useless against me.”

She scrambled off the bed and stood up to face him. “Don’t you understand that I don’t want to talk to you right now? Do I need to start telling you in various languages? Ugh. And please tell me why the hell you couldn’t just stay on the other side of the door?”

“I couldn’t have you angry at me when you’re wrong. It’s not what you think. I swear. Please, darling, believe me.”

She crossed her arms over her chest and glared at him. “I’m wrong? So what’s really going on here, Rysen? Hmmm? You’re sending a shop full of flowers to some woman named Judith for Valentine’s Day. What the fuck am I supposed to think? You haven’t touched me in months. You don’t even call, and you haven’t contacted me via telepathy, so tell me, what the hell am I missing?”

Kit put her hands on her hips and stared at him, waiting for a sign of guilt, remorse, anything.

“I know, I’ve been horrible at communicating, and I haven’t been at the inn in months. I’ve been very busy keeping the peace between Severin and my brother, you know that.” Rysen walked up to her and placed his hands on her shoulders, his eyes pleading with her to understand.

She shrugged off his hands and stepped back, only to fall on the bed. He took advantage of that moment by covering her body with his. “Listen to me, feel my emotions for you; open yourself to me and know the truth.”

She struggled underneath him. “Get off me, damn it. Rysen, I’m warning you.”

"Listen to me. I am not cheating on you." He rolled his hips, brushing his erection against her stomach. Heat flared in her body in response to her mate's need. A spicy scent filled the air and she swore. "Get off me."

"You need me." A musky scent mingled with the spiciness in the air. His eyes flashed to neon yellow. His hands came up to hold her shoulders down, pinning her to the mattress. "My mate, my beautiful mate, how I need to fuck you."

"Get the fuck off me!" Kit screamed. She managed to squeeze her hands between them and place them against his chest. She shoved him so hard he hit the ceiling.

Rysen landed on his feet before the bed and growled.

"You want to play rough, darling, so be it." He shrugged out of his jacket and pulled up his shirt.

"What are you doing?" she demanded as she pushed herself off the bed.

"If I have to fight you to get you to listen, so be it. I repeat: I am not cheating on you."

"Liar." Dropping her mental shields, she pushed her mind against his, shoving her way in, poking around to find the truth. She was only there a second before he shoved her out. "You're hiding something from me. If I have to beat your ass to get the truth, I will."

She shrugged out of her coat and then came at him. She threw a punch, only to have it blocked. He vanished from her line of sight, and she swore as she whirled around. He pushed her into a wall and pressed his body against hers.

"I love you and only you."

"Prove it. Let me into your mind," Kit challenged.

"I can't." Rysen shook his head.

"Then you're up shit creek, aren't you?" She placed her hands on his chest and shoved, trying to push him away with no success.

"I have other ways to prove my love to you." He grabbed her waist and turned her. His fingers dug into her denim-covered hips.

“I doubt wanting to fuck me will prove anything.”

Rysen guided them to the bed and pushed her down.

“It’s not just that. I don’t just want to fuck you. I want to reconnect with you.” He brought his head down, taking her lips in a possessive, dominating kiss. She tried to shove him away, but he refused to let go of her hips. Kit turned her head away, only to have him kiss her cheek and start a path of fire along her jawline and down her neck. She felt her body being sucked backward, the room becoming fuzzy as her vision blurred.

Kit found they were in a bedroom that looked vaguely familiar. Rysen let go of her hips and scrambled off her.

“Welcome to my Valentine’s Day surprise for you.”

“Rysen, where the fuck are we?”

“It’s early and nothing is set up, but damn it, you pushed me to do this.” Rysen let out a sigh. “Come along, darling. I’m hungry and I need to eat. I’m sure the cook is going to kill us for arriving early.”

She remained on the bed, looking around, remembering another time with another man. Sen.

Chapter Six

Rysen stalked down the hall, annoyed that he'd had to rush his plans. They'd arrived at least a day early. He just knew that she would figure out where they were.

Judith came out of a room and stopped short when she saw him. Her eyes widened. Gray hair escaped a messy topknot and tendrils framed her face. She tucked a few behind her ear and curtsied. "Your lordship, you're early."

"Are the flowers here?"

"Yes, sir, just arrived. Are you all right? Are you hungry?"

"Fine. Make sure my consort has a room prepared for her. I'm going back to the inn to gather some clothes for us. If she asks, tell her we're guests of Lord Sen, do you understand?"

Judith nodded and curtsied. "Yes, sir."

With his mind, Rysen brought himself to the inn and their bedroom. He began packing their bags, trying to figure out what to bring.

"So, where's Kit?" Jessye asked from the doorway. She sliced off a piece of apple and put it in her mouth.

“She’s at my mountainside retreat. What’s up with you and apples? Trying to keep the doctor away?” Rysen put some sex toys in his suitcase and tried to decide what lingerie to bring for Kit.

“I just have a craving for apples, that’s all.”

Rysen’s eyebrow rose and he looked up at Jessye. “How long have you had these cravings? Are they just for apples?”

Jessye stared at him. “Why do you ask?”

“When’s the last time you’ve had sex? Did you consummate the Blood Claim with my brother?” Rysen met her gaze with a hard stare of his own, looking over her body, even sniffing the air.

“What’s up with the interrogation, vampyre? What are you thinking?” Jessye pushed off from the doorway.

Rysen used his mind to rush forward, stopping just short of her. “It’s been a few months since the Claim was declared. I thought you two had had sex. You need to seal the declaration. If it’s not sealed within a year, you are freed from him, but any powers that you may have gotten with the Claim leave you. You become weaker.”

Fear entered Jessye’s eyes. She licked her lips and turned her head away. “I’ll take care of things. Go be with Kit.”

“Jessye --”

“Does this affect Syrus?”

“Yes, it does. He needs the power he gets from you; otherwise, he becomes weak too. But not as weak as you do. He has other clans under his belt to draw power from. Jessye --”

“Go be with Kit. Don’t tell her...about this. She doesn’t need this in the back of her mind. She needs to be with you, to reconnect with you.”

“Jessye --”

“For fuck’s sake, go.” She pushed him away with the apple still in her hand, and turned, leaving the doorway. He watched her stomp down the hallway, head bowed.

Sighing, he turned and walked back to the suitcases and continued to pack. Once he was done, he used his mind to bring himself back to his mountainside retreat. He found Judith in the bedroom, sprinkling rose petals everywhere. She looked up, brushing back a few tendrils of gray hair. “Kit is in the Onyx suite. She is bathing.”

“Thank you. Once you’re done, could you put this away? I have to go join my mate.”

Judith smiled and bobbed her head. “Of course, sire. She is quite lovely. I remember her. She is Kit, from that night long ago.”

“Yes.” Rysen smiled softly. “She is my consort, my mate. I love her very much.”

Judith grinned. “I am very happy that you have found love, sire. You’ve been chasing her for quite some time.”

“I am glad too.” He turned and made his way down the hall to the Onyx suite. He opened the black metal door and stepped into the room. He undressed, left his clothes in a pile, and walked toward the bathroom.

Steam slipped out in curling tendrils from the slightly open door. Pushing it open, he found Kit soaking in a large bathtub surrounded by clouds of white bubbles.

Her hair was piled high atop her head. Dark brown curls framed her face. He drew in a breath, his cock hardened and twitched. “You look so beautiful.”

His tone was hushed in awe. There had been moments he would awaken alone at his room in Severin’s compound and think the time he’d spent with Kit had been a dream, that she hadn’t really become his mate. “I missed you so much. By the Maker, it was hard to stay away from you.”

He strode forward and stepped into the tub. Her gaze roamed over his body. “You have a lot to make up for.”

"I know I do. I shouldn't have stayed away from you for so long. It was stupid of me. I'm sorry."

"Show me how sorry you are." She rested her head against the lip of the tub and watched him advance. Challenge sparked in her eyes.

"Tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it. I want to make it up to you. For every night I stayed away, I deserve to be punished. I shouldn't have done that." He waded toward her. Stopping before her, he watched her bring her arms up out of the water. Spreading them wide, she rested them on the sides of the tub.

Her full lips curved into a smile. "Did you jerk off when you were away from me?"

"Yes, almost every night," he murmured.

"Then I want to watch you stroke that beautiful cock for me. Show me how you jerked off while you were thinking of me. Tell me all the thoughts and fantasies that ran through your head as you touched yourself. I want to know all the details, Rysen. Show me how much you missed me."

He groaned. This had been one of his fantasies, showing her just how much he wanted her before she finally gave him permission to sink into her hot, tight pussy.

"And if you're a good boy, and if I'm impressed, I'll let you fuck me."

"You can't forgive me that easily." He took his cock in his hand, squeezing it gently.

"I didn't say I forgive you. I just said I'd let you fuck me." Her gaze lowered to his cock and he swallowed.

Need was riding him hard. He wanted to show her just how much he had missed her. The most important thing was for her to know the truth. "Kit, please, I need you to understand."

"Understand what? You cut off all communication with me. You didn't even send a message with Karella for me. Don't think I didn't know that you summoned her to you. I

could smell your scent on her when she returned.” Kit looked away, but not before he caught the hurt in her eyes.

“If I had contacted you, I would have called you to me, and then I would have been distracted. I can’t think clearly with you around, you know that.”

“No, I don’t know that, and those are just excuses. I’m your mate, damn it. I need to know what’s going on with you, how you are. I’m your damn consort, practically your wife. I’m not one of your servants that you can push away anytime you want. I was worried about you. About us.” Her voice was so soft it was almost a whisper. He could hear the pain in her words.

“I’m sorry. Severin was keeping me close.” He sighed. “There are no excuses. I was stupid and foolish. I know.”

“Did you cheat on me?” Kit looked at him now. He could see the pain in her eyes, the doubt. Anger rushed up inside him, mixing with the arousal. He wanted to lower himself down into the water and cover her body with his, pinning her with his weight to the tub as he declared his fidelity to her. Instead, he took a deep breath before speaking. “No, I didn’t cheat on you. I could never cheat on you.”

“The vampyre court --”

He cut her off. “I know what you’re going to say and I left that life behind me when I chose you as my consort.”

“Words. You were always good at talking.” Kit looked away from him again, and he let out a sigh.

“What do I have to do? I want you to believe me.”

“I don’t know,” she said softly. She looked up at him, pain in her eyes.

Rysen felt the bottom drop out of his world. He couldn’t live with the pain he’d caused her. After all the years he’d chased her, fought her, he finally had her, only to lose her. He couldn’t live with that thought.

Dropping down to his knees, water sloshing against the sides of the tub, he brought himself to eye level. "I love you, Kit, and I will do whatever it takes to prove that to you."

Silence fell between them. He remained kneeling, waiting for her to say something. His mind flashed back to their time at the inn before she had become his consort, when for a brief moment he handed control over to her.

He bowed his head in submission. Rysen relaxed, his shoulders slumping, heartbeat slowing. He ignored the throbbing of his cock.

"You are submitting to me?" She didn't sound surprised, just weary.

"Yes. I give you control over me."

* * * * *

Kit blinked and looked at him. His head was bowed, ink black hair hiding his features. For the second time he was submitting himself to her. She struggled with what to do. Her desire was threatening to overwhelm her, need thundered in her veins, and her palms itched to touch him. She wanted to kiss him so badly it actually hurt. It had been too long since she'd been with him. Taking in a breath, she closed her eyes and gained control of herself. She stood up, water sluicing down her body in rivulets, like a thousand small fingers running over her skin, inflaming her arousal.

She walked around the big tub, circling him slowly. Inhaling deeply, she could smell the musky scent of his needing time; his time to feed on blood and the sexual hunger that came with it was at the surface. She knew he was close to losing control.

"I can smell your needing time. You haven't fed that hunger for blood and sex yet, have you?"

"No, I waited to be with you again. I can sense you're in heating, you also haven't fed your hunger for sex and blood yet."

“Am I supposed to believe that you went to the vampyre court and didn’t once drink from or fuck anyone to satisfy your desire? A male’s needing time can be quite violent if not satisfied.”

“No. I would not do that to you.”

Dropping her mental shields, she let his emotions wash over her. She could taste his yearning for her. She also felt a sense of sorrow and regret.

“I am an open book to you. I can’t hide anything from you. Search my mind,” he said quietly.

She accepted that invitation and dived further into his mind. She closed her eyes and watched his life flash before her like a film. Kit could see his life as a child until he was turned. She felt his heartache and pain at losing his family. The loss he felt almost brought her to her knees. Shoving the memories and the feelings away, she poked around until she found something that interested her. Kit could see herself clearly, as a youngling, only twenty-three when she was turned. So new to the world of the vampyre. She was seeing herself through Rysen’s eyes.

Something’s not right. She was wearing a silver and white dress. Looking around the memory, she saw the tree made of white roses and the decorations. Understanding dawned on her. This was her induction, but Rysen hadn’t been there.

“Please, formality is useless here. I wish to get to know you better. Call me Sen.”

Kit stumbled out of his mind. Sen was Rysen? But Lord Cable had called Sen by name... She looked down at him, his head still bowed. She smiled as a wicked thought crossed her mind. Reaching out, she grabbed his hair and pulled his head back. “You submit completely to me? I am in control tonight, is that right?”

“Yes.”

Letting go of his hair, she walked around him until she stood before him, legs spread slightly apart. Looking down on him, she shook her head. Kit took in the broad shoulders,

the hard wall of his chest, and his long, lean arms, which disappeared into the water at the elbow. *So many nights I dreamed of being with him.* Kit dived into his mind again for just one more peek. She saw their night together, when he pretended to be Sen. She also saw his time at court, how agitated he was, how much he wanted to get home, and the many offers he'd brushed off for company in his bed.

What intrigued her more was what he had done before she became his mate. A scene played out of him with another woman. Kit felt the rush, the pain and pleasure as he came, crying out Kit's name. That wasn't the first time he'd cried out her name when satisfying the need with someone else. Her decision was made. She would be with him tonight, but first, he would have to work for it.

"Stand up. You will dry me off, massage lotion into my skin, and then dress me in my favorite baby-doll." She turned and stepped out of the tub and stopped. Kit waited for him to join her. It didn't take long before she felt the heat of his body behind her. Her body responded to his closeness, becoming tight. Her breasts felt full and ached for his hands on them. Her cunt contracted on air; her pussy tingled with awareness.

Closing her eyes, she waited for him to start drying her. Time seemed to slow. Anticipation ran through her veins, and she nearly cried out at the first touch of the towel against her skin. He moved in slow circles, rubbing the plush material slowly over her flesh.

"You are so beautiful, my darling." His fingertips brushed her shoulder lightly. That soft touch caused a trail of fire to slide along her skin. Her heartbeat stuttered and increased in pace.

"I am sorry. I know this is no excuse. I felt that if I had gone to see you, there would be no tearing me away. I needed to stay to get things done."

"That's no excuse for not contacting me via phone or messenger or telepathy," she pointed out.

“No, there is no excuse for cutting off all contact. I didn’t think. I knew that if I heard your voice, I would return home.”

“E-mail?”

“I didn’t think of that.” Regret hung heavy in his tone.

“And that’s why right now, you are at my mercy.” Kit tried not to smile.

“I am always at your mercy, my darling.”

She turned around and looked up at him.

He reached up and brushed his fingertips over her cheek. “All you have to do is ask and I would do it. If you wanted the moon, I would get it. If you needed the stars, I would bring them down. I would fetch it all for you. I love you. You own my heart, and where it goes, I go.”

Her breath caught in her throat; tears welled up in her eyes.

“Feel what I feel for you.” He dropped his shields completely and his thoughts and emotions rushed over her like a tide. Regret and love weighed heavily in the air. “My darling...”

His fingertips trailed down her neck over her bare shoulder. “I have been a fool. I hurt you and for that, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

His head came down. He brushed his lips against hers softly, once, twice, three times, before pressing his mouth against hers. Kit pulled her head back. “Just because I do this, doesn’t mean you’re off the hook. You’re still in trouble.”

“I will take any punishment you give me.”

“Good. Now continue drying me off.”

She turned around. He groaned and she grinned. The towel was pressed to her skin and continued to move slowly over her body in small circles. When he made it to her breasts, he brushed the towel over one nipple, blowing on the tightened peak. He moved to the other

peak and did the same thing. Shards of electricity shot straight to her clit. A soft cry fell from her lips.

He continued to dry her off, moving slowly down her body, peppering kisses over her skin as he went. Fire licked at her skin. The air became permeated with her musk as her arousal rose higher and higher. Power crackled in the air. Closing her eyes, she gained control of herself and sent one string of power toward him, aiming for his cock. She felt the string connect, wrapping around the thick shaft. He grunted softly. Focusing, she wrapped one more string around his cock. Then she concentrated on moving the strings up and down.

“Kit.” Her name was a soft growl.

She smiled but didn’t open her eyes. She had yet to master this ability with her eyes open.

“Kit, stop.”

“You don’t give the orders tonight, I do, remember? I’m in control.” She grinned.

“I’m already on the edge. Don’t make me come like this,” he pleaded.

Her eyebrow rose, but her eyes remained closed. “You did it to me. You used your power to push me over the edge. Why shouldn’t I do the same to you? Now, continue to dry me off.”

He blew out a breath and continued to move the towel down her body. He planted soft kisses over her stomach and mound. She widened her stance. He buried his head between her thighs, and his tongue slipped up one side of her pussy lips and down the other. She shivered, losing her concentration for a moment before continuing to stroke the strings up and down his cock. Reaching down, she buried her fingers in his hair, wrapped her fingers around the silken tresses, and pulled back. Brown eyes clashed with violet. “Did I say you could taste me?”

His eyes slid to a neon yellow color, the pupils a bright green. In the time it took her to blink, he was standing up. Kit straightened to her full height, waiting for his dominant personality to surface.

“Did I say you could stop?” She used the strings of power to squeeze his cock. His face contorted into a grimace, but he remained silent. His eyes returned to normal and he slowly sank down to his knees and began to dry her again.

“Good boy, Rysen.”

“I’m not a dog,” he growled.

“Watch your tone.” She squeezed his cock again before continuing to stroke his shaft with the strings. Kit felt a rush of power run through her, but in the back of her mind, she wanted to be at his mercy, have him take her up against the wall, on the floor of the bathroom, anywhere. The burning need inside her was controlled for now, but she knew sooner or later, the time would come when she would have to give him control.

For now, she wanted to play with him. “That’s enough. Now it’s time for the lotion.” She strode away, withdrawing the strings from his cock. Kit walked into the bedroom and lay down on the mattress, waiting for the real torture to begin. She wasn’t sure how long she could hold out with his hands on her body, stroking, rubbing, teasing her with his touch. Closing her eyes, she waited.

The bed dipped and she felt him moving toward her. Must remain calm, must not lose control. Her stomach tightened in anticipation. Sweat beaded her brow and her heart thudded against her rib cage. She forced herself not to grip the bed covers. Her breath halted when she felt the first brush of his fingertips over her back as he spread the cool lotion. He moved slowly. His callused hands ran over her skin, warming the flesh.

He gave her just the right amount of pressure, almost bordering on pain. Groaning, she arched her back toward his touch and spread her legs wide. Desire spiraled higher and higher. She was losing control just from his touch.

“Rysen,” she moaned.

His fingers traced her spine, delving between the cheeks of her ass. Then he withdrew them. She cried out when his hand came down, spanking her. As the sting faded, the warmth spread upward. The fever rose inside of her. Her hips rose and his hand came down, slapping her ass again. Dominance slipped away as she let him take control. His hand continued to move, over and over again, the pleasure and pain clashing, the need rising. Her juices coated her thighs, her pussy lips slick.

She was on the brink of coming and he hadn’t even entered her yet. As if reading her thoughts, he shoved two fingers inside her dripping cunt. She cried out. “I can’t help myself, darling. I need to fuck you. I need to be in control.” Rysen’s voice was gruff, almost animalistic. A shiver rushed up her spine. She spread her legs wider. Her heating time surged up within her, and she cried out, her back bowing. Her fingers clawed the bedspread. “Fuck me, Rysen. Take me now.”

Her chest began to heat as the mark he’d left when he’d claimed her came to life. The tattoo began to burn, fingers of fire spreading along her skin. She felt power surge upward inside her and she cried out. He withdrew his fingers. In the distance, she heard fabric tearing. He took hold of her hips and pulled her up until she was pressed facedown on the mattress, legs bent, ass in the air. Kit felt the pressure of his cockhead at her sopping entrance. With one thrust, he was inside of her, stretching her walls. She squeezed her inner walls around his cock, trying to draw him farther inside of her. Kit groaned when he withdrew only to slam into her again. His cockhead hit her cervix, sending shards of pain mixing with pleasure.

“Rysen.”

“You’re my mate, my love, my darling. I fuck only you. I love only you. There can never be anyone else for me. No one else.”

The tattoo on her chest began to burn hotter. She felt tendrils of power slip along her skin, wrapping around her nipples and clit. The invisible ropes squeezed the nubs. Bursts of heat went off in her body, and she cried out. Rysen withdrew from her. Hissing, she looked over her shoulder at him.

“On all fours, now,” he ordered.

He didn’t need to order her twice. He took hold of her hips again and thrust into her. He began to fuck her hard, his pace faster. The tendrils of power squeezed and tugged on her nipples and clit.

“Fuck me harder, Rysen.”

He withdrew and thrust into her slick channel, pounding her pussy harder and faster. “You’re mine, Kit. Always.”

Sweat slipped down her brow as her orgasm curled tighter and tighter within her. She was so close to coming. The tendril around her clit squeezed tight and she screamed. Kit climaxed hard. A rush of heat washed over her. She felt Rysen’s body pressing onto her back. His lips caressed her shoulder before she felt his fangs sink into the muscle.

Another orgasm washed over her. Each tug of his lips echoed on her clit, sending aftershocks ricocheting through her body. Her legs and arms shook. Kit’s muscles jumped and twitched. He didn’t stop fucking her. He thrust into her once, twice, three times, before he paused. His cock twitched inside her before he came on a roar.

Panting, he wrapped his arms around her waist and lay down on the bed, drawing her to him. He lowered his head, lapping the wound, setting off sparks of pleasure within her. He kissed her shoulder. “Let’s rest, darling. We have a lot to make up for.”

“No, you have a lot to make up for.”

He laughed and kissed her shoulder again. “Yes, I do.”

Sleep soon claimed her. When she woke up, the room was alight from the warm glow of a fire in the hearth and the candles burning in the wall sconces. She shoved the comforter off her body and looked around. Rysen was nowhere to be seen.

Kit groaned. "I was supposed to be in control. I wasn't supposed to let him fuck me."

Sighing, she closed her eyes and rolled onto her back.

"Darling, are you hungry?" Rysen's voice floated to her from the doorway. She opened one eye to find him dressed in black silk pajama bottoms and nothing else. Heat washed over her body and her pussy tingled. Her stomach rumbled.

"Yes. I am hungry." She closed her eyes, not wanting to watch him walk toward her.

"What's wrong?" The bed dipped and the scent of ginger-glazed ham drifted toward her. Letting out another sigh, she sat up, tugging the covers up to cover her bare breasts. He handed her a plate, which she took and began cutting her meat without looking at him.

"Kit, darling, what's wrong?"

"I shouldn't have allowed you take control. You were supposed to be punished. I wasn't supposed to have my ass spanked. I also wasn't supposed to be begging you to fuck me." She stabbed a piece of ham and put it in her mouth.

"Do you feel ashamed with what we did?" His tone was carefully neutral.

"No, I just wanted to be in control, not just give it away to you just because I love the way you touch me." She stabbed another piece of ham and put it in her mouth. She barely tasted the spices and sweetness.

"Darling, there's nothing wrong with that. I lose control when you touch me. Hell, you don't even have to touch me. Look at me, speak, whatever, and I want you."

"Rysen, you're used to being in control. I'm not. It's different for me."

"This doesn't make you weak."

"It's not about being weak; it's about being able to control myself. And I have a bone to pick with you." She looked up at him, and he put his plate down on the bed.

“Yes, darling?”

“You are Lord Sen, aren’t you? That was you that night at my induction. Don’t you dare lie to me; I saw into your mind. I know it was you.”

He grinned at her, showing straight white teeth and a bit of fang. She didn’t like that look. He held out a hand to her. “Come with me.”

“What are you up to?” She didn’t trust that smile of his. Something was up. Pushing back the cover, she slid out of bed and took his hand. Rysen stood up and led her out of the Onyx suite and to the bedroom they had teleported into just a few hours ago. The room was bathed in the soft glow of candles that covered every surface. Rose petals of every shade were scattered everywhere, including the bed, and there, standing next to the mattress, was Lord Sen, wearing the same silken pajama bottoms as Rysen. He also wore the same mask from all those years ago.

“What the fuck is going on?” Kit demanded.

Chapter Seven

Rysen grinned at the astonishment and confusion on her face. He knew Kit had seen into his mind, knew she would see what he had seen that night at her induction. In order to truly throw her off the trail, he would have to let her see Sen for herself. But the only person he would ever share Kit with was himself. No one else.

He watched the scene play out before him. Kit turned to him, confusion in her eyes. “What the fuck is going on, Rysen? Who is that?”

“I am Lord Sen. I am saddened that you forgot our one night of passion. I am more than willing to replay it for you. Your mate has suggested that tonight we give you an anniversary and Valentine’s Day you won’t soon forget.”

She looked at him, her eyes boring into his. “Rysen, what the hell is he talking about? Are you giving me away?”

The hurt in her gaze pained him. “No, darling, nothing like that. We will share you tonight.”

“And what if I don’t want to be shared?” She let go of his hand and crossed her arms over her chest, pushing up her breasts. His gaze dropped down and for a moment, he was distracted. He wanted to suck her nipples into his mouth while he fucked her yet again.

“Rysen, stop staring at my breasts and answer me.” Her power lashed out, slapping him on the chest. His eyes met hers. “I know it’s one of your desires, one you would never voice. I’ve been in your mind, darling. I know all of your needs and wants. I know you better than I know myself, and tonight, and only tonight, I will share you with Lord Sen. I know of the night you two spent together. I saw you leave. I should have said something, but sadly, I did not. I know you enjoyed your night with him. Now I will join you in bed with him.”

She opened her mouth and closed it. He smiled.

“You would never share me.”

“This is a one-time thing. It’s the anniversary of your induction into vampyre society. This is my gift to you for Valentine’s Day. Do you accept it?”

She looked conflicted. Rysen knew she would accept. He knew she had thought of Sen occasionally. It was one of her darkest desires, how could she say no? Tonight he would give her this fantasy on his own terms.

“Well, darling, do you accept my gift?” Rysen stepped away from her and pushed down his pajama bottoms. His cock sprang up, the shaft flushed pink, the cockhead ruddy. Sen did the same, and Rysen watched Kit look from him to Sen and back again. “I know you want to, darling.”

Talking hold of his cock, he began to stroke himself slowly. Sen did the same thing. Rysen could feel her indecision. “I promise you, this will not affect our relationship one bit. I don’t feel threatened by Sen in the least. You are mine. You will always be mine. We belong to each other.”

He made his way over to the bed and crawled onto the mattress. Sen followed. They both lay on the rose-strewn, silken covers and looked at her, both stroking their cocks.

Kit swallowed, her gaze moving between him and Sen.

“Come, darling, join us. Let us pleasure you.” Rysen grinned, watching her waver.

“We plan to fuck you until you scream. I want to fuck your sweet pussy again, and I know Sen wants to take that beautiful ass. Can you imagine it, darling? Can you picture it, me fucking your pussy and Sen taking you from behind? Can’t you just feel how stuffed you’ll be?” Rysen focused his power on her, using it to stroke her body, starting from her cheek, working it downward. He slid the power between her thighs, delving between her pussy lips to run over her clit. Kit’s hips bucked, and her mouth formed an O as her eyes widened. A soft cry fell from her lips. She began to tremble, her hands clenching at her sides. Dropping his shields, he could feel the pressure against her anus in echo of what she was going through. Quickly, he raised his shields and smiled.

“Don’t you want us to fuck you? We long to sink into your body, fuck you hard and fast, and then slow the pace. Can’t you feel two sets of fangs piercing your shoulder?” He used his power to stroke her clit. She moaned softly.

“Come, Kit, come to us. Let us fuck you. Let us pleasure you. Let us be with you,” Rysen urged. “Unless you want us to come to you?”

Rysen released his cock and got on his hands and knees, moving slowly down the bed. Sen was by his side. Rysen flexed his power again, pushing a shaft of power into her slick channel, slowly moving it in and then withdrawing it. Kit’s legs quivered, her eyes were glazed over. She was drowning in pleasure. Her musky scent permeated the air.

Rysen and Sen climbed off the bed and went to her, sandwiching Kit between them. Rysen’s hands went on Kit’s hips, while Sen’s went to her shoulders. Rysen dipped his head, bringing his lips close to her ear just as he rolled his hips against hers.

“Can you feel it, darling? You’re encased in our heat. Don’t you want to know what it would be like with us, tasting you, teasing you, fucking you?”

She moaned. Her body rolled and moved against them, mimicking the push and pull of lovers during sex.

“Do you want us, darling? Say it. Tell me you want us to fuck you.” Rysen inhaled deeply. “I can smell your sweet cream. I want to taste it, plunge my tongue deep into your pussy and lap it up. I want to feel your juices slip down my chin as I feast on you. Don’t you want to feel Sen stretching the walls of your ass? Or perhaps he should be tasting your sweet nipples? Hmm? What do you say, darling? Where should we start?”

She shivered against him.

“Tell me you want us.” He trailed the tips of his fangs down the column of her neck to scrap the bare skin of her shoulder. Opening his shields slightly, he felt Sen doing the same thing. She was getting double the pleasure and was on the verge of succumbing to the fantasy. Both he and Sen nipped her shoulder. Kit trembled.

“Please, Rysen. Please both of you fuck me.” Her voice came out in a shaky whisper.

“As you wish,” Rysen whispered against her skin. Stepping back, he crouched down and scooped her up in his arms as Sen walked around them and crawled onto the bed. He positioned himself against the pillows and spread his thighs wide. Leaning over, Sen grabbed a bottle of lube and condoms out of the nightstand. He ripped open the packet and sheathed his cock. He then squirted some lube on his hand and stroked his covered cock until it was slick, glistening in the warm candle glow.

Rysen looked down at Kit in his arms. Her eyes were glued to every movement Sen made. The musky scent of her arousal increased. He groaned. His fangs ached to sink into her body just as badly as his cock wanted to feel the tight, velvet sheath of her cunt. He placed her on the bed gently. “Go to him, sweetheart. Let him take your ass first before I sink into your pussy.”

He drew in a deep breath and watched her crawl to the head of the bed. Opening up a link between Sen and himself, he could see what was happening. Through Sen’s eyes, he watched as Kit parted her ass cheeks for him, revealing the pink rosebud of her anus. Biting his bottom lip, his fangs sinking into the plump flesh, he held back a groan as she lowered

herself onto Sen's shaft. He could feel an echo of the tightness of the walls of her back passage.

"Rysen." Her arms spread open for him. He joined the two on the bed and crawled toward them. They repositioned themselves until Rysen's cock was at the entrance of her slick pussy. With one thrust, he was inside her. Kit wrapped her legs around his waist, drawing him farther into her slick channel. He could feel the ridge of Sen's cock as he withdrew. Rysen slammed home just as Sen pulled back. Kit rocked back and forth between them. She wrapped her arms around his neck and buried a hand in his hair.

Urging his head down, she took a kiss from his lips. Her mind pressed against his. Pulling her head back, she brushed his hair out of his face. "Fuck me hard."

Kit was overwhelmed with sensation. Rysen had taken her ass before, and he'd used his power to fuck her pussy at the same time. But never in her life had she been fucked by two lovers at once. She pulled down Rysen's head again, taking another kiss. There were no words for what she felt at the moment. Kit couldn't believe that he was willingly sharing her with another man. She couldn't believe that he had found Sen. Scraping her fangs over his bottom lip, she felt him shiver. His hips moved, matching Sen's pace as they began to fuck her in unison.

Dropping her mental shields, she let him in.

"I can't believe you did this for me."

"I wanted to make this day special for you."

"It would have been special anyway, just being with you after being apart for so long."

He brought his head down and kissed her possessively. His lips trailed down from her mouth to her neck, tracing kisses on her shoulder before sinking his fangs into the muscle. Kit's body jerked as an orgasm took her by surprise. She screamed when Sen bit down on her other shoulder. Kit climaxed again. Each tug of their lips echoed to her clit; her vaginal walls quivered around Rysen's cock.

Both vampyres continued to fuck her, pounding her pussy and ass hard. She was drowning. Orgasm after orgasm rolled over her. She couldn't stop screaming. Her body shook, muscles twitching with each stroke of their cocks. Her nails dug into Rysen's back, piercing the flesh. She felt the hot slide of blood over her breast and down her back. Each tug of their lips made her come again. Light-headedness descended on her as they drank of her. Her heart pounded. Kit wasn't sure how much longer she could take this.

Rysen was the first to release her shoulder. He thrust into her once, twice, three times, before coming, coating her walls with his seed. Sen let go of her shoulder and came, crying out her name. Panting, her body slumping forward, she laid her head on Rysen's shoulder. She shivered from the sensation of lips brushing across her shoulder blades, and her vaginal walls rippled again around Rysen's cock.

"Thank you both for this evening. I will miss you, Kit," Sen murmured, panting softly.

"Thank you, Sen. Thank you, Rysen." Kit lifted her head to place a soft kiss over Rysen's pulse point. Darkness edged her vision as exhaustion took her, smiling and satisfied. Sleep followed.

* * * * *

Kit awoke and yawned. After stretching, she rolled onto her back. Sunlight poured into the long line of windows in the room. A fire blazed in the hearth. A glance around the room showed it was empty save for her. Rysen and Sen were nowhere to be seen. Glancing toward a nightstand, she saw the mask Sen had worn. Her mind traveled back to the night of her induction and then to last night. And it all fell into place.

"That son of a bitch." She scrambled out of bed and marched out of the room, looking for Rysen.

She found him in a large library, fully dressed, drinking tea in a wingback chair near a fire. He looked up just as she threw down the mask.

“I was right all those years ago. I knew it was you. You were clever, but you can’t fool me, not now. I’m your mate, you bastard. I know the feel of your mind and every inch of your body. Admit it; you created an illusion of yourself last night.”

“I --”

“Pick your words carefully. You still haven’t made up for not communicating with me while you were at court.”

Rysen sighed. “Come here, darling.”

She didn’t move, instead remained standing glaring down at him. “No, you still have explaining to do. You manipulated me. You deceived me, twice. Why didn’t you tell me you were Sen? ”

He sighed. “Fear and pride and stupidity. I’ve loved you for so long. When I met you at the ball disguised as Sen, I was desperate to be with you and not have Jessye interfere. Afterward, things got complicated.”

Rysen paused. Emotions flitted across his face so fast she couldn’t read them. He looked up at her, and sadness filled his eyes. “I couldn’t very well tell you that I was Sen after all we did that night. You would have been angry that I deceived you, and that would have driven you away. I didn’t want that. Then, after Jessye tried to bribe me into protecting her clan by offering you as my consort all those years ago, there was no way I could take you. I said a lot of hurtful things to you, and I did it to drive you away, but I just couldn’t let go.

“After you became my mate, things happened so fast with my brother, and then getting the call to court... I could have told you a thousand different times, but I didn’t. I let it slip through the cracks out of fear of how you would react. I knew you loved that night. I knew you...thought of it on occasion, of your night with Sen. I just didn’t want to risk angering you over this.”

He looked up at her, his eyes pleading with her to understand.

“You deceived me. Worse, you used my deepest fantasy to deceive me.”

“I used your deepest fantasy to try to please you.”

“So you did all this -- deceived me, fooled me, hurt me -- because of pride, fear, and insecurity? We have a lot of talking to do, and I mean a lot.”

He opened his arms and she sat down on his lap. She gave him a soft kiss on the lips and sighed. “I do want to say thank you for my present last night. You didn’t have to give me a ménage, but I did enjoy myself.” She gave him another kiss. “But I haven’t forgiven you yet.”

“I am sorry, darling. I truly am.” He reached up and brushed back her hair, tucking it behind her ear.

“I know you are. You just have to keep saying it.” Reaching over, she grabbed a slice of buttered toast and took a bite.

“There is another thing you and I have to discuss. There is nothing wrong with the way you feel about me and how you respond to me. Nothing at all.”

He placed a kiss on the top of her head. She felt a sense of calm but that didn’t drive away the struggle. “I know. It’s just --”

“You feel a sense of conflict with your independence. I understand. This will take some time for both of us to get used to. So how about we start getting used to things tonight? You get to tie me down and fuck me cross-eyed.”

“Mmm, that sounds lovely.” Her body became tight at the very thought of riding him. “How about we start now?”

She slid off his lap and stood up.

He grinned up at her, took her hand, and got out of the chair. “What a wonderful idea.”

She led him out of the room and into the Onyx suite, where she tied him down and fucked him until they both cried out.

* * * * *

Kit trudged into the inn. She was exhausted. As she walked up the steps, she noticed a large black carriage standing in the driveway. She did a double take and stopped to stare at it. "Rysen, your carriage is here."

She looked over her shoulder to find Rysen staring at the vehicle. "You better return it or put in the garage. We can decide what to do with it later."

Opening the front door, she walked into the hall and found Jessye at the front desk, on the phone. Jessye stopped and tilted her head to the side. "Well, you finally got some. Good for you."

She came around the desk and enveloped Kit in a big hug. "Did you talk to him? Tell him how you feel?"

"Yes. I did."

"Where is the numb nut?"

Kit shook her head. "Please don't call him that. He's outside dealing with the carriage that arrived."

"Ah, the big black monstrosity? I was thinking either we burn it, or we could use it for Valentine's Day next year. We could take guests for romantic rides over the grounds. The place is big enough."

Kit thought about that and smiled. "I love it. I'll go talk to him."

She turned to head outside when Jessye stopped her. "I'm going back to Syrus for a few days. I should be back soon."

"Everything okay?"

"It will be. We have a lot to talk about, he and I. Don't worry."

Kit smiled. "You're the strongest person I know. I don't need to worry. Although, I do have a question. Why do you smell like apples?"

Jessye shrugged. "Go talk to Rysen."

Kit felt a tendril of fear run up her spine but pushed it away. She turned and headed outside, feeling a sense of contentment with an edge of dread. A storm was coming. She just hoped that everyone would survive when it was over.

 THE END 

Selena Illyria

I/R Author Selena Illyria was born with an overactive imagination. She loves to write stories featuring futuristic cities that can only be imagined, visit island kingdoms of vampires/dragons, giggle with mischievous pixies, peek in on faeries looking for their mates, check up on the naughty staff of an exclusive academy, and sigh over how in love a powerful business exec is with his wife. She can't wait to write stories with her talented, creative and wonderful CPs, Celia Kyle and Shara Cooper.

When she's not writing, she loves to read books of many different genres. She also loves to watch some of her favorite movies (too many to be named) and television shows. She also loves to listen to some of her favorite musical artists. All of these things help inspire her to write.

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