



BODY COUNT

Catrina Calloway

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Chapter One

Dr. Marta Phillips squatted next to the body lying on the ground. Lifting the corpse's foot, she gently placed it in the palm of her hand. Using a scalpel, she cut away the dead man's small toe, placing it in a plastic bag.

"A couple of things happen when a body starts to decompose, James." She glanced at the young forensic student standing off to the side. He looked pale. "When someone dies, certain enzymes in the digestive system, receiving no sustenance, begin literally 'eating' a person. Tissue liquefies and you have what's known as putrefaction."

James turned away when she held up the bag containing the corpse's toe.

Then he threw up in the bushes nearby.

Marta rolled her eyes. "Make sure he's okay," she told one of the other students. Rising to her feet, she muttered, "God save me from over-eager young pups addicted to TV crime shows."

She put the bag containing the sample of human remains in a cooler then continued her lecture. "Respect the dead, and they'll in turn, reveal secrets to you that will be useful in solving crimes."

James turned around, wiping his mouth with a napkin. She nodded in his direction, pleased that he chose to stay.

"We have our work cut out for us today." She pointed at the two new bodies lying on the ground. "We need to catalog these cadavers, get tissue samples, take photos and place them in the open field beyond the farm, where they will decompose naturally. Then we can study them." She pointed at two young women. "Susan and Leila will take the photos and begin cataloging. We need to tag this corpse. James and Michael," she angled her head, "will take blood samples and some more tissue samples."

James managed a nod.

“I want to show you something.” She knelt by the body again and carefully turned the cadaver on its belly. “Look at the blood pooling on his back. That’s a sign that decomposition is already starting.” She rose to her feet again. “We’ll practice determining this man’s time of death by the evidence we see now, so let’s get started with our preliminary work.”

She noticed two of the other students standing off to the side, whispering, notebooks in their hands bearing the Long Island College of Forensic Studies logo. One girl kept shaking her head, her face drawn in tight lines. The other opened her notebook, jabbing her finger into the open page.

“I’ll be right back.” Marta told her students. You all get started on your assignment.”

She walked over to the two young women. “What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Susan and I went out into the field and counted the bodies.”

Marta raised a brow. “And?”

“We did it three times, and we only counted twenty bodies.”

Marta blew out a breath. “You’re sure?”

The other girl nodded. “We’re positive.”

Marta’s heart raced. It was the second time in the past two months that bodies were missing.

“All right, make sure you log that in your notes.”

Susan shook her head. “Who could possibly want these bodies?”

Marta shrugged. “Someone who wants the organs. There’s a huge black market for that. She placed a finger against her jaw, furrowing her brow. “But I can’t imagine why anyone would want those organs, after the body starts decomposing. It just doesn’t make sense.”

Marta walked away, her jaw set and her mind filled with determination—and worry. If she didn’t find the corpse thief, Dr. Timothy Clayton, Long Island College’s president, would shut down her body farm. She was fast becoming the laughing stock of LIC’s faculty. Her colleagues gave her the name, ‘Misplaced Marta,’ sneering behind her back each time they got word that another cadaver disappeared from the body farm.

“Dr. Phillips, are we still going to do the memorial service tonight?”

She glanced at James. Placing a hand on his shoulder, she replied. “Yes, we are. The deceased were once living, breathing human beings with hopes, dreams, and thoughts. We owe it to them to commemorate the gift they’ve given the science of forensics.”

He nodded. “I’m glad we are. I’ll be there.” He gazed at his fellow students. “So will everyone else.”

“Good. Now, get back to work. I’m pleased you decided to stay, James.”

He shrugged. “I always said I wanted to be a forensic scientist, I just didn’t think it would be so...”

She raised a brow. “Gruesome? Horrible?” Marta shook her head. “Think of what you’re doing for science, for humanity. We’ve solved many difficult crimes with the discoveries we make here.”

He smiled. “I-I’ll try to remember that.”

James walked away.

But not before Marta saw his face.

He still looked too damned pale.

* * * *

Day turned to dusk as Marta, her students, and a handful of others, stood near the entrance to the open field where the decomposing bodies rested. The autumn sun sank in the sky, a fiery orange ball lowering on the horizon as Marta spoke.

“...and so we commemorate these people who have given their bodies over to our cause. Once they walked the earth—their lives filled with hopes, dreams, and promises. We thank them, and guard them,” she took a deep breath, “and honor their memory and gift of their bodies.”

Some people in the crowd nodded, others murmured ‘amen.’

Marta swallowed hard against the emotion welling inside her.

Who took the bodies and why?

She’d said she would guard them...

Some goddamned protector she turned out to be!

At the conclusion of the service, the crowd dispersed.

Susan walked beside Marta as they made their way back to the lab set up in the old farmhouse.

“Are you going to the Halloween party tonight, Dr. Phillips?”

Marta shook her head. “I don’t think so. I’ve got some work to finish up in the lab.”

Susan grabbed Marta’s hand. “You’re worried about the bodies, aren’t you?”

“I don’t want to see the body farm shut down.”

Susan gave Marta’s hand a squeeze then released her. “What do the police say?”

Marta sighed. “Not a whole lot, I’m afraid. So far, they haven’t come up with any leads.”

At the entrance to the lab, Marta said, “You go and have a good time. I’ll see all of you back here tomorrow.”

Susan gave her a small smile. “All right, Dr. Phillips. Good night and...Happy Halloween.”

“Same to you,” Marta replied, her voice soft.

She unlocked the front door and entered the lab. All was quiet.

After hanging her jacket on the coat rack, Marta walked into her office and shut the door.

Damn but there had to be something she could do!

She sat down in a chair behind her desk, leaning forward, placing her arms on top of the desk. Her head pillowed on her arms she thought...and thought...

Her eyes opened wide.

Marta sprang up from the chair and sailed out the door.

Entering a small room off the kitchen, she stopped in front of the gun case filled with hunting rifles left there by the former owners.

Marta opened the case, and reached inside for a rifle. She’d spent her childhood living on a farm in upstate New York, and learned how to use a rifle early on.

Marta filled the rifle cartridge with bullets and snapped it closed.

Gun in-hand, she walked out of the room. She stopped for a few seconds in the hallway and grabbed her jacket, then flew out the door and down the steps, heading toward the open field and the bodies.

The police may not have answers as to why her corpses had gone missing, but Marta wouldn't leave that field until *she* did.

* * * *

“Le condamner! Will you finish already? We don't have all night, Hugh.”

Maximillian Effroi's eyes darted over the open field, fear clogging his throat. His cousin, Hugh, glanced upwards, his dark eyes bright, their red centers glowing. Blood dripped down his chin, landing on the snow-white shirt visible beneath his long, leather coat. He shuddered, closing his eyes, tipping his head back while blood trickled down his throat.

Maximillian growled low, hauling Hugh to his feet. “We will get caught if you don't stop now,” he urged, his upper teeth connecting with the two pointy incisors in his lower jaw. They receded, their sharp points visible at the top of his gums.

Hugh swayed, his eyes rolling back in his head.

“Enfer! What is wrong with you?” Maximillian gripped Hugh's shoulders, giving them a shake.

“Desole, cousin, but I am so weak.”

Maximillian could barely hear him. Grabbing Hugh's arm he led him onto the side of the road, where they trekked back to the old gristmill on the other side of the farm.

“One body—one is all we can have, Hugh. Why must you have two?”

Hugh gave him a lopsided smile. “I am hungrier lately. Must be all that jogging in the morning.”

Maximillian grunted, supporting Hugh's weight as they marched down the road, the only light coming from the full moon above.

“We do all that jogging and whatever else we have to do,” Maximillian waved a hand through the air, “so we will fit in.”

Hugh swayed. Maximillian caught him and pushed him forward.

“Easy, man. Stay on your feet, only a little further.”

“Everyone in this country is...how you say...?”

“Nuts?”

Hugh's lips lifted in a lopsided smile. “Exactly. They move too fast; they must learn to slow down.”

Maximillian shook his head. "It is not our job to teach them anything. Our job is to blend in and stay as far in the background as possible."

Hugh released a sigh. "I am sick and tired of hiding, of this life."

"You think I'm not?" Maximillian raised a brow, wincing when several twigs snapped beneath his booted feet. He had hoped to be quiet, but the autumn leaves and stray branches made that impossible.

"I must sit, cousin." Hugh made his way through the trees and found a log. Easing his tall frame onto it, he said. "I-I don't feel well."

"It is because you drank too much blood tonight! You are too full."

Hugh cradled his head in his hands. "I can't do this." Gazing up at Hugh, he said, "Go on without me."

"The hell I will." Maximillian sat down next to him.

He hated the way Hugh looked. Pale. Sweaty.

Hugh leaned back against a tree and shut his eyes.

Maximillian heard a loud click. Swiveling his head, his eyes lit upon the tall figure of a woman, a rifle in her hands.

"Stay where you are and don't move!" Her hands shook as she aimed the rifle at them.

She took a step toward both men. Maximillian rose to his full height, watching her, the rifle aimed at his chest. For one crazy second, with the moonlight glinting off her pale hair, he swore she resembled a tall Viking maiden of long ago.

He also thought she'd fit nicely against him, her head barely skimming the top of his shoulder.

Sacre bleu!

What a spectacular build—wide hips, ample breasts...

His dick responded by jutting out from between his legs, and he struggled to control the wayward response. Desire for a full-figured woman had gotten him and Hugh into this centuries-old mess in the first place.

As she neared, he could see her face.

Beautiful! She had wide, generous mouth, ripe for kissing, and big blue eyes.

A man could get lost in those eyes...

So could a monster.

He shook his head to clear it of his crazy thoughts, gazing down at the barrel of the rifle.

“What are you doing on my land?”

Think...think!

He opted for the truth. “My name is Maximillian Effroi, and this is my cousin Hugh.”

She glanced at Hugh, slumped against the tree.

“What’s wrong with him?” She narrowed her eyes, keeping the gun trained on Maximillian.

“We were taking a walk when he suddenly fell ill.”

“This is private land, owned and operated by the Long Island College of Forensic Science.”

“Huh?”

“Private. As in, not yours. *Get it?*”

Hugh moaned, placing his hands around his stomach.

Maximillian ran a hand through his hair, his gut clenching. “My cousin is ill. He needs help.” He glanced at the badge dangling from her neck. “You’re a doctor?”

She nodded then cocked the rifle. “And you and your...*cousin* are trespassers and body snatchers.”

He growled low in his throat, his patience stretched thin. The woman’s big blue eyes opened wide when his fangs rose up from his bottom gums. She lowered the gun, her hands shaking violently.

It was all the distraction Maximillian needed.

Wrenching the gun from her hands, he tossed it away. She stepped back, panic and fear marring her lovely oval face. Then she tripped, tumbling to the ground. She scrambled to her feet, but he grabbed her sweater, yanking her backward, her bottom connecting with his groin.

As soon as her bottom cheeks brushed his cock, Maximillian was lost in a haze of lust. He had to stop himself from reaching down and caressing her backside.

Hugh groaned in pain.

She squirmed in Maximillian's arms, but he held her fast, his nose buried in her long, blonde hair. She smelled like flowers—a whole field full of wildflowers...

Hugh's eyes opened.

She gasped when his irises turned a brilliant red, his fangs rising up in his mouth.

"What are you?" She glanced back at Maximillian, her face as white as a sheet.

He whispered in her ear, his nose brushing her lobe. Maximillian felt her shudder.

"I will explain everything to you, *cherie*, after you help my cousin."

She lifted her nose in the air, but her body shook. "Like hell I will."

He tugged her closer...and closer still. "Please," he implored. "We mean you no harm."

"Hah!" She struggled, but he held her fast. "I know what this is. One of those crazy Halloween stunts the kids pull so they can post the video on the Internet."

"This is no joke, doctor."

She shook her head and sighed. "You and your buddy obviously drank too much at the Halloween party tonight."

"Oh we drank all right, just not what you're thinking. We..."

"Come on." She shrugged away from him and walked toward Hugh. "Let's get your friend to the lab. He can sleep it off there."

Maximillian felt the tension drain from his body while he assisted her in getting Hugh to his feet.

Maybe there was some good left in the world, after all.

One good woman, that's all it would take...

* * * *

"How much did he have?" Marta asked the tall, dark-haired man as they laid the other man on the couch in the little room off her lab.

"You mean, blood?"

She rolled her eyes, but inside, she felt like a big bowl of wiggly Jell-O. Leaning over, she smelled the man's breath.

Strange...he didn't smell like liquor.

"Okay, we'll play it *your* way. Yes, *blood*. How much did he drink?"

If these guys wanted her to play along with their ridiculous Halloween prank, so be it.

It was probably some frat-boy hazing ritual.

She glanced at the tall, dark haired man. Her heart did a funny little flutter as she watched him, his long, sculpted face etched with lines of worry.

She had a thing for tall men.

The one on the couch groaned. He opened his hazel eyes and looked into hers. Then he reached up and grabbed her face between his two large hands, and kissed the breath from her body.

Marta almost sank to the floor when his mouth connected with hers. It felt like a hot, fiery brand. A thousand kisses rolled into that one, single caress of her lips.

Her breasts felt heavy, her nipples peaking when the tip of his tongue trailed across her lower lip.

Her clit responded, too. When her panties grew damp, she squirmed on the couch next to him.

“Corinne, *magnifique!*” He cried. “Where have you been, you naughty girl?”

Okay, so...these pranksters were tall, handsome and...

French.

Anyone could put on a French accent.

“*Comment je vous ai manqué! Et Maximilien, trop. Nous aspirons pour votre beau corps chaud la nuit. Il est tellement froid maintenant ... si froid ...*”

She had enough high school and college French to know that he was saying something about her body.

Her beautiful, warm body...

This prank was getting way out of hand.

Marta could not, however, remove her eyes from his face. His coloring was lighter than his dark handsome friend's was, and...

Her eyes widened when the remaining color drained from his golden features. He moaned, his head slumping to the side.

“All right. What happened to him? Why is he so pale?”

Mr. Tall Dark and Handsome folded his massive arms across a very nice, wide chest.

He glanced at her badge. "That is what I need you to tell me, Dr. Phillips."

Grabbing a stethoscope from a nearby table, she opened Hugh's nicely tailored white shirt and placed the end of the stethoscope on his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

Lub dub...lub dub.

A sheen of perspiration lined his face.

"Has he been like this long?"

Darkly handsome approached. A tingle ran up her spine.

"He has fed too much tonight."

Marta sighed. "More like drank."

"Drank. Fed. What does it matter? Just...help him."

She nodded. "Okay. This will be our little secret."

Maximillian's eyes lit up.

"I won't tell Dr. Clayton, and your friend can sleep it off here."

Maximillian sank into a chair.

"Je vous remercie, Cherie. Je vous promets que vous ne regretterez pas.

Rolling her eyes, she replied. "On the contrary, I have a feeling I'm going to regret it big time."

* * * *

Minutes later, Marta tried to wake Hugh. He didn't budge.

"Will you bleed him?"

She glanced at Maximillian and snorted. "We may be out in the boondocks here, but we're certainly not in the dark ages."

Maximillian slumped into a chair. "Then what will you do?"

Hugh opened his eyes and gave her a lopsided grin.

He resembled a naughty boy.

Cripes, she was really losing it.

Maximillian raised one dark brow. "That is what the last doctor did. Took his blood. You should, too, and you will see that we are not...how do you say...normal?"

They're probably gay. All the good-looking men are gay.

Damn but her thoughts were straying.

“Fine.” She nodded, noticing that Hugh’s face didn’t appear so ashen. Maybe the effects of the alcohol were starting to wear off. “I’ll play along. If you want me to take a sample of his blood, I will.”

Grabbing a needle from the cabinet, she rolled up Hugh’s sleeve and tied a thin rubber tube around his upper arm. Finding a ready vein, she inserted the tip of the needle, jabbing it into his arm.

“Ow!” he groaned. His hazel eyes darkened to a deep green. Growling low in his throat, he pulled her onto the couch next to him. Wrapping an arm around her neck, he tugged her down until they were nose-to-nose. “You will pay for that, *médecin*.”

He released his grip.

Marta swore she could feel the energy drain from his body when his head slumped back onto the cushion.

“Just let her do it, Hugh. She will see for herself.”

From the corner of her eye, she noticed Maximillian’s face, how it clouded with anger. He rose to his feet and paced. Running a hand through his hair, he said, “You have one of those machines? A microscope?”

Marta rolled her eyes.

He was by her side in a flash.

“You roll your eyes at me again, *cherie*, and I may have to seek revenge.” He tipped her head back with one, long finger placed under her chin.

Marta felt his touch clear down to her toes.

Sandwiched between these two gorgeous hunks dressed in their long, black coats, dark leather pants, elegant white shirts and black leather boots, her hormones responded, making her clit pulse.

Staring directly into Maximillian’s almost-black eyes, she replied, “I could call the police and have the two of you arrested for trespassing and body snatching.”

“We took no bodies!” Maximillian said through gritted teeth.

“Let me up.” She shoved him away.

He relented, moving so that she could rise to her feet, a tube of Hugh’s blood in her hand.

Maximillian followed her to the counter laden with lab equipment. His eyes lit up when he noticed a hand floating in a jar of clear liquid.

She snorted. "Most people would be repulsed."

"Hugh and I are not most people, *cherie*. Go on, place that blood sample in your machine and you will see what I mean."

She lifted her eyes for a second then went back to preparing the slide for the microscope.

Maximillian crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the counter. "Don't try it."

"What?" She asked, placing the small piece of glass containing Hugh's blood on the microscope's flat stage, clipping the specimen glass in place so it wouldn't slide.

"Don't roll those *beaux yeux bleus* at me again," he said softly, his dark eyes bright. "You have no idea what I would like to do."

He took a step closer. He smelled of the night, of the damp earth, a heady musky aroma. Marta's French kicked in again, realizing that he said her eyes were blue and...

Beautiful.

She didn't know how she managed to remain erect.

Leaning over the microscope, she looked into the eyepiece lens. Focusing on the sample of blood, she frowned. Adjusting the magnification, she looked at the smear of Hugh's blood again...

Her eyes widened.

"Ah!" Maximillian nodded. "So you see it, too. I knew you would."

She bent over the microscope again.

"Th-is is impossible." Her voice shook. "His blood cells are mutated. I-I've never seen anything like this before. They are continually splitting, growing and..." She frowned and sat back on the seat. Then she glanced at Hugh. His eyes were closed.

"He said he was hungrier."

Marta shot Maximillian a look. "No wonder. His blood cells are dividing and growing at a rate I've never seen."

"He feeds constantly."

She almost rolled her eyes, but remembered Maximillian's threat.

“He shouldn’t drink alcohol. Your friend could be a diabetic. It’s as if he’s not getting enough sucrose in his blood cells, and too much sugar in the blood is not good.”

Maximillian raised both brows. “It is not for want of *sucré*, Marta.”

Her name rolled off his lips.

Nice lips, she thought. Full. Generous.

Stop!

“Then what?”

Maximillian shook his head. “He needs more blood.”

* * * *

“Look,” she backed away from Maximillian, her knees hitting the couch where Hugh rested, his face pale. “I-I’ve had just about enough. The joke is getting stale.”

Maximillian approached, his stance wide and purposeful. “It is no joke, *cherie*. We must get Hugh back out to that field and find a body for him to feed on.”

She held up a hand. “Enough! Stop it already. I’m not taking you back out to that field.” Marta’s legs felt shaky. “Get out of here. Take your cousin a-and go.”

“We go nowhere without you. And we can’t waste anymore time.” Maximillian’s voice held a desperate note. “I have thought about what you said. We get Hugh more blood now, and then in a little while, he can feed again.”

She groaned. “You just don’t know when to give up.”

“I never give up on my family.”

“If you leave now, I won’t call the police. We’ll just forget about all of this.”

“And if he doesn’t get blood, he will perish.”

Marta glanced at Hugh. “What are you going to tell me next, that you’re both vampires?”

“If only it were that easy, *cherie*.”

Maximillian walked over to Hugh. Marta’s eyes opened wide when he lifted Hugh and slung him over his shoulder.

Like he was a sack of flour...

As though he weighed nothing.

“We are night feeders, drinking the blood of the newly-dead. We do not harm the living.”

Marta glanced at Maximillian's mouth, his fangs visible.

"H-how do you do that?" she whispered. She placed a hand on her neck.

"Anxiety. Fear. Need. When it is time to feed. All these things make our fangs protrude."

She let go of the breath she held. "I-it's a trick. It has to be."

"It is no trick, Marta." His voice held sensual, deep notes, laced with urgency.

"Please," he implored. "Show me where another body is so that I can ease Hugh's suffering. He must feed. You're a doctor. A physician is dedicated to saving lives, no?"

She was out of her mind to even *consider* helping them.

Maybe all this work with the dead...maybe being alone out on the body farm all this time...

Being without a man...

...had finally gotten to her.

Or maybe this was all a nightmare.

Hugh moaned, his eyes opening then rolling back in his head.

"Let's go."

She led the way into the darkened field beyond the farmhouse, the full moon their only guide that Halloween night.

* * * *

That night, Marta watched Hugh feed on a fresh corpse, her reaction a mixture of fascination, curiosity and...repulsion.

When she saw that he intended to gorge on the dead man's blood, she shooed him away.

"That's what got you sick. Take in small amounts of blood. Then you can feed again in a little while."

Yeah, she was totally losing it. Helping a madman to feed on her precious dead bodies!

What would Dr. Clayton say if he knew what she was doing?

He'd fire her ass in a heartbeat. She'd wind up in jail along with these two...

Monsters.

Marta shook her head to clear it. Never in all her life had she seen blood cells as mutated and quick to reproduce as Hugh's were.

Hugh.

God, he was gorgeous!

The full moon illuminated him, his golden hair and skin bathed in soft light.

She felt a stirring in her nether region, her panties growing moist as she watched him tip back his head to allow blood to flow down his throat.

A tiny, perverse part of her was glad to see that he was able to feed, that he did look better...

You're looney tunes, Marta. You need a man—one that does not feed on dead bodies—quick.

Maximillian helped Hugh to sit on a tree stump near the corpse.

She glanced at her watch. "We'll let him feed in another two hours. Right now, I want him to rest."

Maximillian nodded. "I will bring him to the gristmill."

She raised a brow. "That's where you're staying?"

"We own it, *cherie*. I bought it just a few days ago."

She angled her head. "You're not going back there."

Maximillian raised a brow. "*Non?* Then where?"

Marta folded her arms across her breasts, tightening her hold when she saw Maximillian's eyes stray there. She'd heard the term 'being undressed with his eyes' all her life, but never knew the full meaning until she felt Maximillian's heated gaze on her body.

Another little part of her felt like preening for him.

Idiot! Get down to business.

"You're going to both stay with me. At the lab."

Maximillian shook his head.

"Yes. You are." Marta took a few steps toward him, amazed at her own bravado, wondering why she didn't run like hell. "It's either that, or I call the police. Your choice."

Maximillian's face tightened into hard, angry lines.

"She has us there, cousin." Hugh reached out then dropped his hand.

Marta felt the heat of his golden stare burn straight through her.

“Our Marta is a crafty one.”

Our Marta...

It had a nice sound to it.

Stop it!

“Listen to your cousin, Maximillian. The authorities will lock you away forever. They’ll think you’re crazy. I, on the other hand, offer you a chance to feed nightly, as long as I can study the two of you.”

“*What?*” Maximillian thundered.

“Hugh sees reason, what about you?” Marta angled her chin, but her body trembled. This was her chance to make a name for herself, to come out from under her colleagues’ taunts of ‘Misplaced Marta.’ Her findings about these two ‘night feeders’ would stun the world of science.

“He can rest comfortably at the lab. I have an attic room where you can both stay. Later, he can come back out to feed again, and I can take another sample of his blood.”

Maximillian glanced at Hugh.

Hugh nodded. “Whatever you say, *cherie*. Just remember something.”

She raised a brow. “What?”

His eyes glowed, their red centers prominent.

“When the time comes, you may not rid yourself of us so easily.”

Chapter Two

The following day, Marta attended to her duties at the body farm, guiding her forensic pupils through their studies of decomposition.

Every so often, she'd glance upward, toward the attic room above the lab, knowing that she held two handsome, captivating Frenchmen prisoner. For most of her life, she'd avoided any kind of relationship with a man. 'Chubby' is what the kids called her growing up.

'Fat' is what she considered herself.

She glanced down at her ample thighs.

Maybe she'd try that no-carb diet again.

"Dr. Clayton is here." The sound of Susan's voice broke through Marta's reverie.

Marta shielded her eyes from the early November sun, watching as Timothy Clayton drove his BMW up the winding drive of the body farm.

He got out of the car and approached, his pleasant face coming into view.

"How goes it?"

Marta nodded. "Just fine."

From the corner of her eye, she thought she saw the curtains move on the inside of the attic window.

"I stopped by because the police still haven't found out anything about the missing bodies, Marta."

Yeah. That's because there's two monsters feeding on them...

"Well," she replied, hoping her voice sounded calm. "I'm sure they're doing their best."

Timothy raised one sandy brow. "That's a switch. Only last week, you had quite a bit to say about the police department's shoddy detective work."

She shrugged. "I'd rather have them on my side."

Timothy smiled. It was a nice smile.

Not like Hugh's or Maximillian's. Those were devastating grins. They lit up the night like the soft light of the harvest moon...

When in hell did she become so fanciful?

"How about a cup of your famous coffee?" Timothy took hold of her arm and led her toward the farmhouse.

She quickly dislodged his grip. "I-I would, Tim, but we've got lots to do today here at the body farm."

He frowned. "Marta, are you okay?" Sighing, he reached for her hand. "I think this is all getting to you, and rightly so. Maybe you should take some time off."

Anger simmered inside her. "Why? So my colleagues can continue with their snide remarks like, 'Misplaced Marta?' No, I'm not leaving the body farm."

He held up a hand. "I'm just concerned about you."

"I appreciate it. But, right now, work is what I need."

From the corner of her eye, she noticed that the attic curtain dropped back in place.

Oh, she was going to have to give Hugh and Maximillian a lecture on minding their business!

She led Timothy down the drive. "Thanks for coming by."

"I'm here if you need me, Marta. Just say the word."

He got into his car and drove away.

Oh, Marta had a few words all right...

...and she was going to say them to a couple of monsters she knew!

* * * *

As dusk fell that evening, Marta gazed through the lens of the microscope and shook her head.

"Fascinating," she murmured.

She watched while the cells in the fresh sample of Hugh's blood slowed their frenzied division. They seemed...satisfied. As though the more frequent, lighter feeding had enabled them to ingest more of the nutrients the human blood provided.

Armed with this new information, she marched up the stairs to the attic, determined to give Hugh and Maximillian a piece of her mind...

And this information.

Why she felt she owed them *anything* was beyond her.

Well, she did owe them something. Sort of. After all, her research on their 'condition' would make her world-famous.

While she walked up the narrow staircase of the old farmhouse, she recalled the feel of Hugh's lips on hers when he'd kissed her the other night. Her fingers trailed across her mouth as she relived that kiss, wondering why he called her 'Corinne.'

She'd give them the reprimand they deserved for spying on her earlier...

...and this new data.

But that was it.

She wouldn't allow Maximillian to trail his finger over her chin...

...or let Hugh kiss her again.

Or...anything else...

Right?

* * * *

In the small room upstairs Maximillian paced restlessly. He stopped by Hugh's bed and gazed down at his cousin.

"You seem better, Hugh."

Hugh nodded. "*Merci*, cousin. I feel much stronger."

Maximillian drew his brows together in thought. "Then it is time we plot our escape."

"Where can we go? At least if we stay here, we can feed." Hugh's eyes turned a deep, golden green, his fangs protruding from his lower gums. Soon his irises burned with bright red intensity. "*Sacre bleu!* Have you ever seen so many bodies, Maximillian? And all for us."

"They are not all for us," Maximillian snapped. "They are for her to study." He swallowed. Hard. "And so are we."

Hugh sat up straighter in the bed. "Perhaps so, but I do not think she means us any harm."

“Neither did Moira.” Maximillian’s voice took on a harsh note. “Yet, she betrayed us in the end.”

This time, Hugh rose to his feet and got out of bed.

“*Non!* Get back in that bed, Hugh.”

“I must stretch my legs.” He walked over to Maximillian. Laying a hand on his shoulder, he said, “We must learn to trust again. We must learn to trust Marta.”

Maximillian raised a brow. “Indeed? Why? So she can go back on her word? Study us, and then turn us over to the authorities?”

Hugh shook his head. Glancing out the window at the setting sun, he replied. “She reminds me of those women we helped. Remember Corinne?”

Thoughts of the beautiful, full-figured Corinne made Maximillian smile. “Ah, yes. A gem. Full of figure...and of heart.” He scowled. “Her bastard of a husband married her only for her money. Treated her abominably.”

“We showed her what love could truly be like, and helped revive her poor self-image. She may have had money, but no real love of herself. We helped her to leave her filthy husband, and helped her keep her fortune. Her money eventually fueled our coffers and enabled us assist other women like her.”

Maximillian paced again. Claspings his hands behind his back, he said, “And Moira ruined all of it.”

Hugh’s face flushed with anger. “She was a spoiled bitch who needed a good beating. Never in my life have I raised a hand to a woman, but her?” He shook his head. “I should have tanned her bottom and sent her on her way.”

Maximillian snorted. “She would have enjoyed it.”

Hugh shook his head. “We cannot let her deceit turn us into bitter...”

Maximillian raised a brow. “Monsters? You can’t ever seem to say that word.”

“We may need the blood of the dead to survive, Maximillian, but we are not monsters. We have hearts and minds. I don’t know about you, but I want to love again. Life is nothing without it.”

Maximillian clasped his hands behind his back. “You think I do not?” He glanced out the window. Then he spoke, his voice soft. “I watched Marta this afternoon with those students of hers. For once, I was glad for our sensitive hearing, because her words

to those young people inspired me, too. Her reverence for the dead, her concern for the living, yet...”

“Yet you fear she will ultimately bring us down.”

“I cannot help it, cousin.”

Hugh sighed. “We should tell her how we feel.”

Maximillian hit his forehead with the heel of his hand. “Ah, yes! Just tell her how we enjoy sharing a woman. How we’d both like to make love to her? I am sure she will fall into our arms.”

Hugh grinned. “You are very, how you say? *Sarcastique*.”

“If my words are touched with bitterness, it is because I burn for her. Yet, I cannot take that chance.”

“The love of a good woman, Maximillian. That is the only thing that will break our curse. We can be normal again, be free of this need to feed on the dead.”

Maximillian inhaled sharply. “I don’t know, Hugh. It must be much more than making love to her, of giving her pleasure. We must love her with all our hearts, and she in turn, must do the same.”

“She is our only hope. I feel it, in here,” Hugh patted the spot above his heart.

Maximillian’s mouth formed a thin, hard line. “And if you are wrong? We spend eternity like this.”

Hugh shrugged. “We’ve been like this for three hundred years already. What have we got to lose?”

Maximillian shook his head. “Our hearts.”

Hugh crossed his arms over his chest. “I’m tired of merely existing. Of going from one strange land to another, of running whenever we’re discovered. Perhaps, being here with Marta is a blessing in disguise. It is our chance to find love and give love. To live again.”

Maximillian sighed. “I hope you’re right, cousin.” He looked away. “I hope you’re right,” he repeated softly.

* * * *

Maximillian opened the door on Marta’s third knock.

She took in a breath when he stood before her, his long, dark hair flowing past his shoulders.

He's a monster! A mutant...

A damned good-looking man.

"Oh my," she breathed.

"Good evening, *médecin*. He raised one brow, then smiled, his full lips curving upwards. "*Venez dans l'intérieur.*"

Her feet wouldn't move. Her mouth felt dry. If he said one more word in French, she'd...

"Come, Marta."

He wound his hand around her upper arm gently, pulling her inside the small attic room.

She entered, but pulled away from his touch lest she act like a complete fool, and engage in something stupid like reaching up to kiss him.

Marta glanced at Hugh. He sat in a chair, his long legs stretched before him, his shirt open just enough for her to view the fine dusting of golden hair that lined the bronzed skin of his chest.

Which was more handsome? Which man...?

Correction—which monster did she want to throw herself at?

Idiot!

Stop acting like a schoolgirl.

You're a doctor, for Christ's sake...

She moved as far away from Maximillian as possible, from his woodsy, musky, earthy smell that she already loved.

Glancing at the tray of uneaten food on the nearby table, she said. "I left that food by your door this morning. Why haven't you eaten?"

Hugh gave her one of his devastating grins. Angling his head, he replied, "We have no need of such sustenance."

"So, you only consume blood?"

Maximillian nodded. His dark eyes smoldered. "Yet, it is not the only sustenance we require."

She swallowed, anxious to hear more, yet...frightened. "What else?"

Hugh rose from his chair. "We long to be human again."

She angled her chin, her body trembling and burning at the same time. "I want to help you," she replied, her voice soft. "But until I can find out what's caused your blood cells to mutate, I'm afraid, there's little I can do."

Maximillian nodded, the harsh angles and planes of his handsome face relaxed. "It is enough that you let us feed, Marta."

When he uttered her name in his deep voice, she almost melted right there.

Okay, so maybe she'd hold off on that lecture she'd planned to give them.

She sat down on the bed. It felt warm, smelled of Hugh. His scent—a combination of citrus and earth, drifted by her nose.

"What happened to turn you both into monsters? I've been reading up on vampires and—"

"We are *not* vampires," Maximillian huffed.

"You have fangs," she challenged. Glancing at the full-length mirror near the bureau, she asked, "And how about your reflection? Do you have one?"

"*Non*," Hugh replied. "We don't, but—"

She shrugged. "Then you're vampires."

Maximillian growled. "We may not have reflections, but unlike vampires, we are bound forever to see ourselves cursed."

She frowned. "How?"

"Come." Maximillian stretched out a hand. "Hugh and I will show you."

She'd expected his touch to be cold, yet, his hand felt warm and strong. He curled his fingers around hers and gently pulled her from the bed.

She glanced at Hugh, afraid to meet his gaze, but her body betrayed her when he rose to his full height and reached for her other hand. Walking to the mirror, they stopped. Hugh placed a hand on the small of her back, his fingers trailing over her waist. Maximillian stood next to her, placing his arm just above Hugh's.

Marta saw her reflection, but nothing else, even though Hugh and Maximillian stood directly in front of the mirror.

She shook her head, thanking her lucky stars both of them had a firm grip on her, lest she slither down between them. For one crazy, dizzy second, she felt safe, secure...cherished.

Get a grip, Marta!

“You see?” she said. “You have no reflections, you’re both vam—”

In the next instant, a strange scene unfolded in the mirror. Maximillian and Hugh flanked a beautiful, voluptuous woman, dressed in clothes from a bygone era. Gold etched her skirt and her plunging neckline showed off an ample bosom. A small, black beauty mark accentuated the corner of her lush mouth.

The woman, along with Maximillian and Hugh, stood before a man dressed in long, flowing robes. Marta could not see his face, only his back.

“You have ravished my daughter!” The man’s voice boomed.

The mirror shook.

Marta’s eyes widened in fear, her knees buckling, but Hugh and Maximillian held her fast. The scene in the mirror continued to unfold. She heard Hugh speaking to the man with the long, flowing robes...

“We have done no such thing,” Hugh told him. He glanced at the woman. “Tell him the truth, Moira. We never touched you.”

The woman’s eyes filled with tears. “They took my virginity, Papa.” She sniffed...loudly. From beneath her lashes, she cast a sly look at Hugh, then Maximillian.

“*Non!* You are a foolish, jealous woman, Moira. You accuse us only to cause trouble.” Hugh’s voice rang out, his face flushed red with anger.

“For this crime, I condemn you to an eternity,” the man in the long robes shouted, “as monsters. The dead will be your only sustenance. Their blood is all you will crave. You shed my daughter’s virgin blood in heated passion, and so shall you be condemned.”

In the strange reflection, Marta watched as Hugh grabbed hold of Maximillian.

“You do this to seek your own revenge, Balthazar, for you know that we have discovered your secrets of alchemy. You hide your gold from the king, and you fear that we will tell him so.”

“Enough!” Balthazar waved his hand through the air. “My daughter shall be vindicated. Be gone from us now, and walk the face of the earth forever as night feeders.” He picked up a wand, waving it before them.

In that instant, Marta saw their fangs protrude from their mouths.

The eerie scene disappeared, along with Balthazar and his daughter.

She slumped against Maximillian and Hugh, placing a shaking hand on her lips.

“Oh my,” she whispered, looking first at Maximillian, then at Hugh. “I had no idea.” Marta walked over to the bed and sat down.

“We never touched Moira.” Hugh knelt before her. “You must believe us.”

Maximillian sat down next to her. The mattress dipped from his weight. Marta looked first at Hugh, then Maximillian. “Who was that man?”

“A selfish, evil wizard. His daughter was just like him. She was jealous because we helped several women to...well, let’s just say, we used our fortune to help a few women leave disastrous relationships. Soon, many came to us in search of help and...comfort. It is all we ever did. Moira was jealous, wanting our attention, thinking that our lifestyle was only that of seeking pleasure. When we rejected her advances, she accused us of ravishing her as a way of getting revenge.”

Marta rose to her feet. “Th-this is incredible...and unbelievable.”

“Believe it,” Hugh said. “For it is true.”

She glanced at the mirror, but all she saw was her reflection.

“It’s dark,” she whispered. “You should both feed.”

“You mean, you will continue to help us?”

“For as long as I can.”

They walked out of the small room, down the stairs and out into the night.

Silence engulfed them, but Marta swore she could feel Maximillian watching her every move.

It thrilled her, yet...frightened her.

I want both feelings. I want Maximillian and Hugh!

She was totally losing her mind, she thought as she trekked through the field, leading them to a fresh, dead body.

* * * *

Something puzzled Marta about the scene in the mirror.

She watched Maximillian and Hugh feed on a fresh corpse, her fascination and repulsion mingling together. Her body and mind waged a war, as desire for each of them swirled inside her, forming a giant knot of sexual tension. She could never seem to manage a relationship with *one* man, yet these two monsters with the devastating good looks and charming French manner made her breasts heavy with need, and caused her to change her panties several times a day.

Last night, alone in the small room across from theirs, she touched herself, imagining both man's hands where hers lay between her legs.

Now, watching them feed, those same, dark, disturbing thoughts intruded.

Squirming on the log where she sat, her little nubbin of desire swelled with need, yet...

That scene from the mirror broke through her thoughts this time.

Why did the sound of that wizard's voice seem...familiar?

Even though she couldn't see him, it was as though she knew him, yet she couldn't put a name to the face

Fool!

It was a trick...

It was very real. That damn mirror shook; the reflective glass almost came loose from the frame.

"Enough, Hugh," she called out softly. "You can feed again in two hours."

He gave her a wicked grin, the moonlight bathing him with a golden glow. "And what shall we do, *cherie*, in the meantime?"

She laughed; she couldn't help it. "I brought a deck of cards."

He shook his head. "Boring. I have something else much more pleasant in mind."

Marta raised a brow. "And what would that be?" Her heart raced with anticipation.

In the next instant, a tall dark figure appeared on the stump next to her.

"Maximillian," she sighed. "How do you do that? One minute you're over there, and in the next instant, you're here."

He buried his nose in her hair. "I think he means to make wild passionate love to you, Marta."

She elbowed him in the ribs. "Fat chance of that happening."

Marta wanted to crawl into a corner and just...disappear.

How desperate do you want to sound, idiot?

The moon illuminated Maximillian's face. She saw him raise both brows. "I would say, *cherie*, that it is a distinct possibility." He moved closer.

She didn't budge.

Couldn't.

Maximillian pointed at the sky. "Look at that moon. It is a beautiful night for love-making."

Marta jumped up from the log. "I think it's time I went back."

Maximillian sighed. "I meant you no harm, I..."

"Non, nor did I, Marta."

"We're sorry," they said in unison.

Fat! Fatty-fat, girl...these two gorgeous hunks don't want anything to do with you...

She wanted to turn off that 'fat' voice in her head.

It always intruded.

Besides, you're bright, smart; you'll bore them to tears...

Marta took off for the farmhouse.

She heard footsteps behind her.

When she looked back, a hand came around her mouth. She tried to scream, but another arm grabbed her around the waist and tackled her to the ground.

"Bitch, don't underestimate me," a gravelly voice whispered in her ear. "If you allow them to feed again, I'll destroy you."

A heavy weight descended. Marta raised one knee, and jabbed it into the groin of the man lying across her body. He cried out in pain, then leaned down and slapped her across the face.

Everything went black, her mind sinking into a void as dark as the night around her.

* * * *

Maximillian scowled, his face drawn in tight, angry lines. “Whatever made me entertain your crazy idea, I’ll never know.”

Hugh sprinted ahead of Maximillian. “All I know is that jogging you made me do is paying off.” He sighed. “It’s your lousy delivery that turned her off, cousin.”

Maximillian’s eyes grew wide. “*My* lousy delivery?”

“*Exactement!* ‘I think he means to make wild, passionate love to you, Marta.” Hugh snickered. “Please.”

“It was the truth. We both meant to make love to her.”

Hugh shook his head. “Fools that we are. Now, we scared her away.”

“We’ll find her,” Maximillian replied.

Hugh glanced at his cousin, worry marring his handsome features. “I pray we do.”

* * * *

A few minutes later, they found Marta lying on the ground, her eyes closed, a nasty gash on her forehead. She stirred once when Maximillian picked her up in his arms.

“*Sacre bleu!* Quick, we must get her back to the farmhouse.” Hugh raced along side his cousin, his heart beating wildly when Marta let go of a low, pain-filled moan.

Soon, the sight of the farmhouse came into view.

Hugh breathed a sigh of relief, opening the door, watching as Maximillian sailed inside with Marta cradled in his arms.

Her eyes fluttered open when he laid her on the couch in the laboratory.

She attempted to rise, but Hugh sat beside her and gently laid her back down.

“What happened?” she asked, her fingers touching the gash near her hairline.

“We were hoping you could tell us,” Hugh replied.

Marta’s body shook.

“I’m going to look for some brandy.” Maximillian told Hugh, and then exited the room, leaving Hugh and Marta alone.

Hugh removed his coat, placing it across Marta’s shivering body. After a few seconds, she calmed, her big blue eyes fastened on him.

“I am sorry, and so is Maximillian...I mean,” Hugh ran a hand through his hair. “We didn’t mean you any harm, Marta. We were foolish to speak the way we did to you,

and we are truly sorry.” He placed a hand on her cheek, where a red welt formed. Narrowing his eyes, he asked, “How did you get this welt? It looks like,” he peered at it closely, noticing the imprint of a hand. “Who struck you Marta?”

She struggled to sit up.

“Oh my,” she lay back down. “I’m a bit dizzy.”

“Do not try to get up again. Just rest.”

Maximillian came in with a bottle full of amber liquid. “I could not find a glass.” He got down on his haunches next to Marta and tipped the bottle against her lips. “Drink some, *cherie*. It will relax you.”

The brandy sloshed into her mouth.

Marta rose then, her coughing uncontrollable.

“That burns.” She screwed up her face.

Hugh bent to examine her gash. “Let’s have a look at that head, *cherie*.”

“Oh, now look, I’m sure it’s just a scratch and—”

“Be still, Marta, and let Hugh examine your wound.” Maximillian pulled a chair over and sat down, then reached for her hand, running his thumb across the back.

Hugh felt her shudder again as he brushed some wheat-colored blonde hair from her forehead. He longed to take her in his arms, and calm her body in the only way he knew would work, but thought better of it. Fear for Marta, as well as desire, grew inside him, making his cock stand at attention.

“It’s not too deep. I’ll clean it.” Hugh glanced up and spotted a cabinet marked ‘first aide.’ He grabbed a bottle of peroxide and a few balls of cotton.

His hands trembled while he gently swabbed the cut on Marta’s forehead, his pulse quickening each time he saw that and the welt on her cheek.

“Someone knocked me to the ground...they called me,” she swallowed, “they called me a ‘bitch,’ threatening that if I let you feed, they’ll destroy me.”

Tears filled her eyes.

It was all Hugh could do to contain his anger. He rose from the couch and started to pace.

“Did you see who it was?” Maximillian assumed Hugh’s position on the couch next to Marta. He continued to bathe the cut on her forehead with a clean cotton ball moistened with peroxide.

“No,” she replied. She bit her lower lip. “I-I wasn’t running from either of you,” she murmured, her words slightly slurred.

Hugh glanced at Marta. The brandy had to be kicking in. What he wouldn’t give to beat her attacker to a bloody pulp! His hand clenched at his side. Balling it into a fist, he flexed it.

“I was running from myself,” she continued, letting go of a yawn.

“We must keep her from falling asleep.” Hugh cast a worried glance at Maximillian. “She could have a concussion.”

“I know what I’m saying,” Marta turned on her side and glanced at both men.

Hugh’s member sprang to attention once more when he saw the dreamy look in her eyes.

Down boy!

Maximillian rose from the couch. Sliding his arms beneath Marta’s shoulders and the backs of her knees, he lifted her. “Time for you to rest, *cherie*. We will watch over you this night.”

Marta nodded, her eyes closing.

“Do not sleep!” Hugh shouted.

His fear that she would never wake up tightened his gut. The last time he’d been this scared was when Balthazar condemned Maximillian and him to a life of night feeding.

At that moment, Hugh wished he were indeed a vampire, so he could tear Marta’s attacker to shreds.

* * * *

Marta snuggled against Maximillian’s wide, warm chest, feeling cosseted and coddled at the same time. From the corner of her eye, she watched Hugh walk along side his cousin, worry lines etched into his golden features.

Someone actually gave a damn about her!

Okay, so it just happened to be two monsters—inhuman mutants who feed on the blood of fresh corpses.

Yet, if they didn't make love to her soon...

Your fat, Marta, fatty-fat-fat!

"Shut up," she grumbled to herself.

Maximillian raised one dark brow. "*Excuzes moi?*"

Her inner voice, the one that always managed to creep in and tell her she wasn't worthy of love, silenced the minute she heard Maximillian speak French.

Marta wound her arms around his neck, her nose buried in the warm, fragrant skin of his throat. She answered. "*Je voulais dire, rien que par.*"

Hugh ran a hand over her hair, smoothing the strands. "Our Marta speaks French?" He grinned, one of those devastating golden smiles.

She lifted her head from Maximillian's shoulder. "I speak Spanish, too." The effect of her words ruined when she yawned. "I don't know why I'm so sleepy."

Maximillian gazed down at her, his dark eyes intense. "Because you were...how you say? Conked on the head, *cherie*."

He entered the small attic room. Hugh drew the covers back on the bed then Maximillian laid her down on the mattress.

She held out a hand when he turned away. "Please stay. Both of you." Marta reached for Hugh, too.

Then she dropped her hands, snuggling under the covers.

"We must wake you regularly."

Her eyes fluttered closed. "I know."

"Sleep, *un joli*." Hugh told her.

Sleep, pretty one.

All her life, no one had ever called her 'pretty.'

Her father would always call her 'his girl.'

Never pretty.

He told her she 'had smarts,' and that would take her far in life.

It had.

Just not where Marta wanted to be.

Chapter Three

When Marta's eyes opened next, it was still dark. She glanced out the window of the small attic room, watching as a cloud passed over the full moon.

She heard the distant, lone howl of a wolf and immediately snuggled back under the covers.

"Ah, *cherie*, you wake on your own. That is good."

Maximillian's deep voice drifted by her ears.

The chair next to Maximillian was vacant. "Where's Hugh?" she asked around a yawn.

"Right here, *un jolie*."

Bearing a tray with food, his tall frame filled the doorway. He walked over and set it down on the small table near the bed.

Marta inhaled deeply, taking in the delicious odors of fragrant herbal tea combined with the scent of toasted bread and cinnamon.

Her stomach grumbled.

Maximillian's face split into a wide grin. "Ah, our Marta is hungry. A good sign."

"Indeed." Hugh nodded.

He poured her a cup of the steaming tea and lifted the cover on the dish, where she spied two pieces of perfectly toasted bread, drenched in butter and cinnamon.

She grabbed one piece of toast and munched heartily, sipping the tea.

"Wha's in the bowl?" she asked around a mouthful of food.

Hugh laughed as he watched her eat. "Soup, *cherie*. I managed to put it together from the meager fixings in your, how do you say? Ice box?"

She swallowed and took another sip of tea. "The word is 'refrigerator.'"

“A mouthful for me to say in English.” Hugh gazed down on her. “How is the head?”

“Better.”

Maximillian frowned. He rose to his feet and walked toward the window. Gazing outside, he said, “We must find who did this to you, Marta.” He turned and looked at Hugh. “We have put her in danger.”

Hugh ran a hand through his hair. “Do you think he has come back?”

Marta lifted the cover on the bowl of soup. “Who?”

“Balthazar. The wizard who condemned us to this life of night feeding.”

She shook her head, surprised and pleased it didn’t hurt. “How could he come back?”

“He dabbled in studies of time and space continuum. His eventual goal was to travel through time.”

She plunked the cover down on the tray. “You believe he’s gone forward in time, to this century?”

“There is every possibility.” Maximillian answered. “He was a very powerful wizard.”

Hugh leaned over and tucked a napkin under Marta’s chin. Dipping a spoon into the soup, he raised it to her lips. She sipped, her eyes nearly crossing at the savory taste that caressed her lips and tongue.

After a few more spoonfuls, she asked. “But why follow you into this time?”

“There is only one thing that will break our curse: the love of a good woman,” Hugh said softly. He put down the spoon.

Marta swallowed, her heart racing.

“I think Balthazar fears you are that woman. That is why he attacked you. If you break our spell and shatter the curse, then he fears we will destroy him.”

Marta frowned as she recalled the eerie voice that threatened her earlier.

It sounded familiar.

She tucked the thought away.

Right now, she had to deal with her feelings. Determined not to shovel them down with food, she pushed aside the tray and said, "I want to know what you did for those women you helped."

Maximillian raised a brow then cast a worried look at Hugh.

"It is unimportant, *cherie*."

She shook her head. "No. It is very important, Maximillian. It's important to me." Her gaze settled on Hugh. "I need to know."

Maximillian nodded. "Hugh and I came from a very wealthy family. We were always close as boys, because we had no siblings."

Hugh continued. "Our fathers told us we had to use our fortunes for the greater good. Something that would truly help people."

"But as life would have it, we were young and impetuous, always getting into some kind of trouble."

Marta could picture it. The two of them tearing up the town.

"Our fathers were close, too. One day, they traveled their lands, visiting the tenants that inhabited them. They discovered, too late, that some of them were ill with some strange sickness. My father," Hugh said quietly. "Died first. Then Maximillian's." He walked over and laid a hand on Maximillian's shoulder. "Their deaths left us in charge of our families...and our fortunes."

"We grew up very quick in the ensuing years. One day, Hugh overheard his mother and one of her sisters discussing the plight of Corinne Dubois. We remembered her, a pretty, young thing, bound by marriage to a bastard of a man. The rumors were that her husband abused her, and married her only for her money." Maximillian smiled. "Hugh and I always admired her." He laughed. "Perhaps, we were just a bit in love with Corinne."

Marta hated that a spurt of jealousy ran through her. "She must have been beautiful."

"To many, she was not. But to us, she was *magnifique*! Plump, luscious...desirable."

"H-how did you help her?"

“By conceiving a plan to help her leave her husband. A bold move back then for a woman. She left with no money, only the clothes on her back. For the few days we kept her hidden, we discovered that the rumors of abuse were true.”

Marta picked at a loose thread on the coverlet, her fingers twitching. “What had he done to her?”

“Nothing physical. But her mind was corrupted with thoughts of inadequacy, for he always berated her. She had no love in her soul. We—”

Hugh shook his head. “I think we’ve said enough.”

“No!” Marta rose to her knees. “Go on. Please.”

Maximillian glanced at Hugh. Then his dark gaze settled on Marta. “We showed her, together, that she was worthy of love, that she was indeed desirable.”

“Y-you made love to her?”

Hugh nodded. “*Oui*. It was our way, our...lifestyle. Maximillian and I always shared our women.”

Silence cloaked the room. Marta couldn’t find words to reply.

Maximillian ran a hand through his long, dark hair. “We were foolish to say anything.” He cast a worried look at Hugh.

She sat back on her heels, her mouth open.

“We should leave. It is enough you have allowed us to feed, and you helped Hugh. For that, we are truly grateful.”

Maximillian walked toward the door, so did Hugh.

She watched as if in a trance.

Her eyes widened. “No!” she shouted. “Don’t.” Marta scrambled out of bed. “Wait. I need—what I mean is, please stay. Help me,” she implored, her heart in her throat, her body on fire.

Maximillian stiffened. “You don’t know what you’re saying, you’re hurt, you’re—”

“I’m perfectly fine.” She angled her chin.

Hugh shook his head. “We’ve put you in enough danger already.”

She chewed her lower lip, tears filling her eyes.

Once again, rejection rears its ugly head.

“It’s all right. I understand.” Her voice cracked. “No one wants the fat girl.” She walked back over to the bed and plunked down on the mattress.

She felt like she was seventeen again. No date for the prom. She stayed in her room that evening and studied all night, telling herself she didn’t care about some stupid dance.

Some hurts just never go away.

Maximillian and Hugh walked over to her.

“*Un joli*, do not say such a thing.” Hugh stroked her hair. “We adore you.”

They sat on the bed, flanking her on either side.

Maximillian placed one long finger under her chin, tipping her head back. “Sweet,” he muttered as he kissed her, his lips fusing with her lips. He swept his tongue inside her mouth, the tip searching, exploring each recess.

Hugh slid his arm around her waist while he buried his nose in her hair, inhaling deeply. “Our Marta smells like an entire field of flowers.” He kissed the delicate skin behind her ear.

They laid her back on the bed.

“We have dreamed of this, *cherie*,” Maximillian told her.

“We were afraid to tell you,” Hugh said as he unfastened her blouse, his long golden fingers releasing each button slowly.

“I w-was afraid to say anything, too,” she whispered, reveling in the sensations that Hugh’s fingers, and Maximillian’s hot mouth, wrought on her senses.

Maximillian frowned. “Are you afraid now, Marta? If so, we will stop.”

“Don’t!”

Maximillian smiled.

So did Hugh.

“Then it will be our pleasure...and yours...to show you just how much we want you.”

* * * *

Her pleasure...

When was the last time anyone cared about her wants, her desires?

Fleeting thoughts of her on-again, off-again relationship with Timothy Clayton ran through her mind. Like her father, Tim enjoyed her 'brain.' They had many heated debates and discussions about science and forensics.

They made love, too.

But it was never as heated as...

Oh my...

Hugh undressed her, bit by precious bit. The backs of his knuckles brushed her skin while he unfastened her blouse.

She felt another hand at her waist as Maximillian freed the button of her jeans. A quick 'zip' followed then he drew her jeans over her hips, down her thighs, gently tugging them off her feet and ankles.

Marta saw them fly through the air then land on the floor somewhere at the end of the bed.

Her body burned, her mind filled with lust when she realized she lay before them dressed in nothing but her panties, bra and blouse.

They soon divested of her those three items of clothing, too.

It couldn't come fast enough for Marta.

Her breasts swelled, their heaviness like a weight on her chest. Hugh kissed each one, while Maximillian worked her white cotton panties down her legs.

Naked, sprawled on the bed before them, her first instinct was to cover herself.

Hugh placed his hand across hers on the bed. "No, *cherie*. Do not hide from us. You have brought us from darkness into light, now it is our turn to do the same for you."

The breath left her body in short, shallow pants.

He stroked her face. "Easy, *un jolie*. We will bring you to passion very soon."

She looked down at the top of Maximillian's dark head. He raised it just a fraction to smile at her, his dark, almost-black eyes intense with desire. "*Oui*. We intend to bring you to paradise and back."

Marta sucked in a breath when Hugh leaned down and drew one of her nipples into his mouth. Sucking gently, he released it long enough to trail the tip of his tongue across it.

Her back arching, she raised her hips so that her little nubbin pushed into Maximillian's mouth. It felt like a hot, moist brand as he gently took the little pearl of flesh between his lips. He worked it with his lips and tongue, alternately sucking then twirling his moist tongue across her clit.

She spread her legs wider, giving Maximillian greater access, but it wasn't enough.

"More!" she cried. "More!"

Hugh worked magic on her breasts, stroking and massaging them, sucking on her nipples, then blowing gently on their distended tips. He flicked each one with his tongue.

Maximillian drove his tongue inside her, pulling it out, lifting it to lick her pussy, passing the tip directly across it.

With each pass of their hands, each stroke of their tongues, they drove her to a frenzied, fevered pitch, her body shaking as a delicious throbbing sensation consumed her.

When her orgasm hit, she moaned, alternately crying out "Hugh!" then "Maximillian!"

Marta shattered into a thousand tiny little pieces while pleasure so intense, so deep, slammed into her.

Breathless, boneless, her body sank down on the bed.

Curling onto her side, she rolled next to Hugh.

Marta felt the mattress dip when Maximillian settled his body on the other side of her. He patted her bottom and kissed her ear, whispering, "Sleep, *un jolie*."

Hugh stroked her face, placing a gentle kiss on the tip of her nose. "Rest. We will keep watch over you, *cherie*."

Her eyes closed, her breathing deep and even, Marta sank into a dreamless oblivion.

Chapter Four

She woke the next morning to bright autumn sunshine streaming in through the attic window. Outside, the trees offered a myriad of deep orange, russet and brown colors, swirling together in her mind.

Never had life seemed so sweet, so colorful...so amazing.

Maximillian stirred next to her. He shifted his body so that her bottom lay wedged against his groin. Her eyes widened as his stiff penis nudged the cleft between her backside. Tightening his hold on her waist, he drew her back against him, while Hugh stirred restlessly next to her. He moved closer, his golden face nuzzled against her chest, his lips a hair's breadth away from her nipple...

He murmured something in French then his lips grazed her distended peek.

Marta didn't move, didn't utter a sound while he suckled her.

Soon, the hand at her waist slipped lower, Maximillian's long fingers searching for her clit. Her breasts felt leaden, and that wonderful, pulsing sensation built between her legs while Maximillian stroked the inside of her thighs. He leaned over, bringing his lips to her ear.

"Good morning, *cherie*."

Hugh's eyes opened. Kissing each breast, he uttered. "What a pleasant way to start the day."

Her body stretched like a bow, her senses wide-awake, Marta enjoyed the feeling of their mouths and hands on her naked flesh.

"Do you not have students today, Marta?" Maximillian asked.

"*Pas aujourd'hui*," she replied.

Hugh grinned. "You will drive me wild with your French." Then he nipped her breast every so slightly, his fangs visible.

She giggled. Marta couldn't remember the last time she'd actually...

Giggled.

She sucked in a breath when Maximillian gave her bottom a playful tap with the flat of his hand.

Her clit throbbed in response, her face heating. She wondered what it would feel like if he ever really spanked her...

Get a grip, Marta.

You're nothing but a big, fat girl and...

She silenced her fat voice by leaning over and kissing Hugh.

Surprise lit his eyes, the golden flecks prominent. "My sweet, you are playful this morning." Hugh replied as she fused her mouth against his.

"We shall accommodate you, *un jolie*." Maximillian whispered in her ear, trailing the tip of his finger against her anus.

She shuddered with pleasure.

"You like that?" he asked, his deep voice soft.

She managed a nod.

Rising up on one elbow, Hugh lifted her chin with the palm of his other hand. Tipping back her head, he continued to explore her mouth, while Maximillian continued to play with her bottom hole. He licked the tip of his finger, then inserted it inside her. She writhed against him, enjoying the fullness in her backside.

"*Cherie*, you drive me wild with your passion," Maximillian hissed in her ear. "I long to take you this way. Are you sure you want that?"

"Yes, I want that," she breathed.

"I will pleasure your breasts and your clit, *un jolie*. You must feel both at once."

Her body burned with lust.

Maximillian and Hugh divested themselves of their clothing.

Marta looked her fill. From their large, stiff cocks paying her homage, to their lean hips, her gaze traveled upwards to their wide chests.

She wrapped her arms around her knees and smiled at them. "*Magnifique!*"

She giggled again.

They dove onto the bed, making her bounce. She couldn't stop laughing.

"I'll show you." Hugh grinned. "You'll not laugh at us!" He tickled her ribs, sending her into peals of laughter.

She couldn't seem to catch her breath as his fingers trailed over her ribs, down her legs, behind her knees.

Her breath caught and held when Maximillian slipped a finger into her ass.

She stilled, relishing the full feeling.

Hugh caressed her breasts, his hands kneading and massaging them gently. He slipped his hands lower, to her waiting nubbin of flesh, where it pulsed pleasurably when he stroked her between her legs.

"You are ready for me, *cherie*, yes?" Maximillian whispered in her ear.

He slipped his wet finger in her bottom hole again, but this time, he reached around with his other hand to gently massage her pussy. Heat pooled low in her groin.

"And for me?" Hugh asked.

His lips caressed each breast, sending a shiver of longing down her spine.

She had never been more ready in her life!

Arching her back, she purred like a kitten when Maximillian slipped his stiff cock in her anus and Hugh entered her channel in the front. Each man filled her, clouding her mind with desire. She didn't know whether to rotate her hips to accommodate Hugh or grind her bottom down on Maximillian.

"Easy, *un jolie*," Hugh told her. "Let us do the work." He grinned one of his golden, devastating smiles.

Maximillian chuckled low in her ear. Pushing aside some of her hair, he nipped her earlobe with his fangs.

She shuddered again.

He moved slowly, easing stiff cock in, then out of her backside.

Hugh did the same to her pussy sliding his member against her swollen clit, making it pulse and throb.

Each man wrapped an arm around her waist, supporting her, giving her a double dose of pleasure as they slid their cocks inside her.

Marta's face flushed crimson, knowing she had to be the most perverse woman on the face of the earth.

Hugh reached up to smooth the worry lines between her eyes. "It is good, no?"

She nodded against his chest as he eased his cock in, then out, in slow, leisurely strokes.

Maximillian stopped his movements. He reached around and cupped her chin in his palm, forcing her to look at him. "You are embarrassed."

She sighed. "I've never felt anything so wonderful, yet..."

"Do not be ashamed, *cherie*," Hugh crooned in her ear. "It is all for you. And you *should* enjoy it."

She made herself relax again, allowing Maximillian to fill her ass, and Hugh to fill her front channel. Again, their powerful, slow strokes built her desire to a fever pitch of longing. Hugh laved one of her nipples with his tongue, while Maximillian reached around and tweaked the other gently with his fingers.

This time, her orgasm exploded, her mind filling with a thousand shooting stars while she rode the crest of a pleasure wave.

When she came back down to earth, she realized that they remained fused together, with Maximillian nestled against her backside and Hugh tucked against her front. She loved the feel of his chest hair against her breasts. Maximillian's hard muscled thighs cradled the back of hers.

Marta knew, in her heart of hearts, that she'd never be able to choose one man over the other.

She had to have them both...

Always.

* * * *

"What happened to Corinne?" Marta asked sometime later, as she lay nestled between her two loves...

Her two loves...

She had to stop thinking like that!

It was sex, nothing more than a wild night of passion.

But not for her.

The fat voice had disappeared, and in its wake, it left a new, stronger Marta.

One determined to live life to the fullest.

She lay on her side, facing Hugh, stroking his chest. Maximillian lay curled around her back, her bottom nestled against his groin. Each man had an arm anchored around her waist, holding her firmly.

Marta had never felt so protected, so safe, so...

Loved.

She just had to admit to herself that she had fallen in love with two monsters...

Night feeders.

She felt like laughing all over again.

Why couldn't I fall in love with two normal men?

Maybe she didn't want normal.

Maybe she wanted all of life—it gruesome elements as well as its beauty. For that's what Hugh and Maximillian were—horrible, gruesome creatures who fed on the dead, yet...

They were beautiful.

"To answer your question, *cherie*. Corinne found happiness in England, with a new husband, a kind man who treated her well."

"But how?"

"We helped her with safe passage to Britain and with our contacts there, found her refuge."

"But what about her husband in France? Her money?"

"Ah," Maximillian smiled. She loved when he smiled; it softened the severe angles and planes of his handsome face. "We convinced him that it would be in his best interest to divorce Corinne and give her back her fortune."

She raised a brow. "How did you manage that?"

"Simple, *cherie*. We gave him a choice of either having us pay all his gambling debts or...letting his creditors get hold of him instead."

Marta frowned in confusion. "But that would mean he went through Corinne's fortune."

"Indeed."

"So, how could you..." Her eyes widened. "Did *you* give Corinne her fortune back? The two of *you*?"

Hugh nodded. "But we never told her. She, in turn, with the help of her new husband, made that fortune grow even larger. Corinne never forgot what we did, and when times grew lean for us, she lined our coffers so we could continue to help other women like her."

"Oh my," Marta's eyes filled. "She was very lucky."

"As were we, to know such a woman and..."

"What?" she held her breath.

"And to know you, *un jolie*", they replied in unison.

Maximillian lifted her chin with the tip of his finger. "Why do you cry, *cherie*?"

"I love you. Both of you," she blurted. She raised a shaking hand to her lips. "I-I...I'm sorry. I should have never—" Hugh placed an index finger over her lips. "We are glad."

Maximillian nodded. "Indeed we are."

She angled her head. "I-I don't know what to do, I've never been in this situation. I could never choose between the two of you."

They both grinned. "And we would have no other woman but you, Marta."

She hugged Hugh, then Maximillian.

The doorbell to the farmhouse rang, its chime echoing upstairs.

"Who could that be?"

Marta wrapped a sheet around her body and walked over to the window. Her eyes widened when she saw Dr. Timothy Clayton press her doorbell again. He stepped back, gazing upward, shielding his eyes from the early morning sun.

Then the phone on the bedside table rang.

She picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Marta? It's Timothy. I went to your house and you weren't there. I tried calling your cell phone, but you never answered."

"I-it's probably dead. I forgot to charge it."

Even though her back faced Hugh and Maximillian, she could feel their eyes on her.

"How about letting me in? I want to talk to you."

“Yes, of course. Certainly. I’ll be right down.”

She ended the call.

Turning, she said to Hugh and Maximillian. “Stay up here. Don’t make a sound. I’ll try and get rid of him as fast as I can.”

Maximillian tugged her into his arms, the sheet slipping from her body. “Do that, *cherie*. Hurry back, so that we may love you more.”

If Maximillian were not holding onto her, she would have slithered into a puddle at his feet.

He released her, but she soon found herself in Hugh’s arms as well. “I will miss you, *un jolie*. Come back soon.”

She dressed quickly and exited the small room, a finger against her lips, signaling them to remain quiet.

At the door, she blew them both a kiss and walked out, her heart tripping in her chest as she raced down the attic stairs.

* * * *

“Why are you here and not at your house?” Timothy asked her a few minutes later, his face etched with lines of worry. “This is so unlike you, Marta.”

She crossed her arms over her chest. “I-I’ve been working, on something special.”

He raised his sandy colored brows. “Really? Like what?”

She blew out a breath. Dropping her hands to her sides, she replied. “I don’t want to say yet, but trust me, it’s going to blow the lid off the scientific community.”

He took a step towards her. “How about you tell me over dinner?”

She shook her head. “No. Not now. When I’m finished with my research. I’ve been keeping notes. You’ll read them when I’m done.”

He smiled, reaching out to brush a stray lock of hair that touched her cheek.

“Mysterious Marta. I can’t wait to hear all about it.”

She gave him a small smile. “Better than ‘Misplaced Marta,’ wouldn’t you say?”

Timothy scowled. “You don’t have to prove anything to anyone.”

“But with this...discovery...I will.”

He nodded, smiling. “And you won’t give me a hint?”

“Give *me* a little more time, and when I’m ready, I’ll show you. I’ll let you read my notes.”

“Well, as long as you’re all right, I’ll let you get back to work.”

She walked him to the door.

“But how about that dinner? I promise,” he held up a hand. “No talk of science, just...us.”

“Some other time, perhaps.”

“All right, but I won’t give up on us.”

She wondered when there had ever really been an ‘us’ between her and Timothy Clayton.

“Have a good weekend, Marta. I’ll see you Monday.”

“See you Monday,” she replied as she watched him walk out and get into this car. She stood in the doorway until his car disappeared from view.

She ran back up the stairs only to find Hugh lounging in a chair and Maximillian sprawled on the bed.

They rose to their feet when she entered, closing the door with a loud ‘click’ of the lock.

Maximillian’s voice was hard. “What does he mean to you, Marta? Is he your lover?”

Hugh asked. “Are you going to dinner with him?”

Her mouth hung open. She snapped it closed.

““When I’m finished with my research. I’ve been keeping notes. You’ll read them when I’m done.”” Hugh mimicked her exact words.

“You were spying on me again!”

Hands on hips, Maximillian replied, “We have excellent hearing, Marta. Our five senses are quite strong.”

“Well then, hear this.” She poked Maximillian in the chest. He looked down at her finger then up, his dark eyes boring into hers. “I told him all of that just to get him out of here.”

Hugh snorted. “Do not lie, *cherie*. It does not become you.”

“I’m not lying. I...” She sat in the chair Hugh vacated. “I have no intention of showing him my notes.”

Maximillian beetled his brows. “Why not? You could make that name for yourself.”

“‘Mysterious Marta,’” Hugh mimicked.

She rolled her eyes. “Knock it off.”

Maximillian leaned down, his hands on the arms of the chair, caging her. “We happen to love you, *un jolie*. Or does that not mean anything to you?”

“I love the two of you.” She felt the start of tears, but choked them back. “And I would never do anything to hurt either of you.” She glanced at Hugh. “Ever. But I had to get rid of him.”

“Will you rid yourself of us, too?” Hugh stood off to the side, his face awash with misery.

“No,” she whispered. “I’d rather die first.”

Maximillian leaned down and kissed her. “We would give our lives to save yours, Marta.”

He lifted her from the chair as though she weighed nothing, and placed her on the bed. They removed their clothing, and hers. Marta tipped her head back while each man rained kisses on her face, her throat, her breasts, her belly and her clit. The more they kissed her, the more her body burned with need.

They rolled her gently on her abdomen and kissed her shoulders, her back...her bottom. Maximillian concentrated all his efforts on her right cheek, while Hugh trailed his lips across her left. Marta gripped the bed sheet in her fisted hand, rising up on her knees, her backside high in the air.

Maximillian took her first, sliding his slick, hard penis inside her anus, filling her completely. She rose up on her hands and knees, grinding against him as he slid in, then out. From the corner of her eye, she saw that Hugh leaned back against the pillows and watched them, a delighted grin on his face.

Her breath caught when Maximillian wound an arm around her waist, his hand straying to her clit. While he pumped into her bottom, his fingers played with her swollen

little bud of flesh. He stroked her there, allowing her to rise up off the bed, holding her against him as she pillowed the back of her head against his shoulder.

Marta knew her breasts jutted out for Hugh's perusal.

She felt gloriously free when she peeked at him beneath lowered lashes. His penis stood at attention.

Hugh leaned forward and suckled her breasts, taking each one into his mouth, treating her nipples to the hot, wet tip of his tongue.

She cried out when her orgasm consumed her in a fiery blaze, her body writhing against Maximillian, her breasts filling Hugh's mouth.

She slumped against Maximillian. He eased out of her bottom, giving it a pat, guiding her towards Hugh's outstretched arms. Placing her head on Hugh's shoulder, he wound his arms around her and stroked her back while she came down to earth.

"Are you ready for me?" he whispered in her ear.

She lifted her head and smiled.

"Come ride me then, my sweet."

He left the bed and eased his tall frame into a chair.

Patting his bare, muscled thighs, he said, "Come here, Marta. Ride my cock."

Maximillian helped her off the bed.

On shaky legs, she managed to straddle Hugh's thighs, inserting his long, hard cock into her pussy. Bracing her hands against his shoulders, she rode him in a rhythm as old as time.

Her face flamed when she noticed that Maximillian watched her backside slap down onto Hugh's thighs.

"Very nice," he encouraged. "You have a lovely bottom." He gave it a pat.

Her embarrassment slipped away, replaced by a feeling of absolute power.

She had two men captivated.

The fat girl.

Hugh allowed her to come first, then he spasmed inside her, filling her to the brim with his huge member and seed.

She collapsed against him, panting, knowing that Maximillian still watched.

Her feeling of power fueled more pleasure. Still nestled on Hugh's thighs, she tossed back her head, allowing her hair to stream down her back.

"Our Marta is playful today," Maximillian stated from his position on the bed. "Perhaps she'd like to have fun in a different way now."

He rose from the bed and walked over. Leaning down, he whispered in her ear. "You like it when I take your ass?"

"Yes," she purred.

"Women who like that usually enjoy..." he stopped long enough to nip her neck, his fangs jutting out. "Some heat on their backside, too."

Her entire body flushed.

"Do not spank her too hard, Maximillian, or we won't be able to make love to her."

Her belly fluttered, her clit throbbed.

"No, I won't, cousin. Just enough so she feels a slight sting."

She moaned when Maximillian lifted her from Hugh's thighs.

Hugh grinned. "I will enjoy watching this." He leaned upwards, took her face between his two large golden hands and kissed her soundly. "Then I will take care of you, my sweet. I will satisfy the desire Maximillian stirs between your legs when he lays his hand across your bottom."

Maximillian sat down on the edge of the bed and patted his thighs. "Come Marta. Lay across my lap."

For just a second, she hesitated. She had been unsure all her life. Hiding behind her body and her wants and desires.

No more!

She inched toward him, then bent down and settled herself across his thighs, her only view the floor below.

Maximillian ran a hand across her backside. "I will only spank you enough so that it stings."

She held her breath, waiting for the first slap.

It didn't come.

Maximillian positioned her so that her behind rose straight up in the air, his arm across the small of her back. Her legs left the floor—she dangled precariously across his thighs, her world tipping on its axis.

“I want you off balance; I want you to only know the feel of my hand on your bottom.” Again, he ran a hand over her backside, his finger skimming the cleft.

SMACK!

She sucked in a breath when heat spread across her skin.

SMACK!

Her clit pulsed.

SMACK!

Gripping Maximillian’s leg, she felt the sting of his palm.

SMACK!

Her pussy throbbed with need. She squirmed on his lap.

SMACK!

Maximillian eased her from his thighs, steadying her as she stood on trembling legs.

Hugh rose from his chair and eased her down on the bed, facedown. He smoothed back the hair from her face and whispered, “Now, *un jolie?*”

She managed a nod.

“I will help ease your lust, for I’m sure the fire Maximillian wrought on your poor little ass has swept to your cunt.”

His wicked words enflamed her more.

She pulled him down next to her and kissed his face, nipping his mouth, drawing blood.

“Ouch!” His golden eyes darkened. “Maybe *I* should spank you, too.”

Maximillian stood off to the side, his head thrown back in laughter.

“She got you, cousin. Our Marta is quick.”

“Not as quick as me!”

He flipped her on her back, lifting her stinging bottom with both hands cradling her cheeks. Then he slipped inside her and brought her to passion, his cock stroking her pussy repeatedly until she tossed her head from side to side.

Marta threw her arms around his neck and clung to him when her orgasm hit, crying out, “Hugh!”

He spent himself inside her, panting, but didn’t pull away.

Hugh leaned down and kissed her, a deep, drugging kiss that she felt clear down to her toes.

“How is your backside?” he whispered.

She glanced at Maximillian and reached out a hand to him. He clasped hers in his own, lifting it to kiss the back of it.

“It’s just fine.” She smiled. “Just fine.”

Chapter Five

That evening, she managed to sit at the small table in the kitchen off the laboratory, Hugh and Maximillian across from her.

She sliced off another piece of the succulent steak, savoring the crispy, salty taste of the spice mixture Hugh had sprinkled on it before running it under the broiler. Then she dug into the fluffy baked potato loaded with butter. Her eyes crossed when she sampled the flesh of the potato.

“All you had in your ice box was that yogurt.” Hugh screwed up his face. “Do you not eat anything else?”

She took a sip of water. “I’m always dieting.”

“I’m glad I found that steak in your freezer. And one lonely potato in your ice box.”

Maximillian’s dark brows rose. He leaned back in his chair, folding his arms across his chest. “Why do you not eat more?”

She sighed. “Because, I’m fat. FAT. F-A-T.” Glancing at a magazine on a nearby chair, she rose from the table and snatched it, throwing it into Maximillian’s lap. “Go on. Read it. The cover has a picture of a mile-high chocolate cake, and then inside, it gives you fifty diet tips for losing ten pounds in a hurry. Talk about self-defeating.”

Hugh shook his head. “Ridiculous, this diet of yours. You are beautiful, *cherie*. Your body is a temple for us to worship. There is no need for you to lose weight.”

Okay, so she wasn’t above flattery...

“All my life, I’ve had a ‘fat voice’ in my head. I’ve always tried to silence it through dieting and losing weight, but you,” she grabbed Hugh’s hand, “and you,” she grabbed Maximillian’s, “have shown me that I don’t have to listen to these stupid magazines that tell you how to lose weight and drool over the size two women modeling the clothes.”

Maximillian turned the pages and scowled. Then he tossed the magazine on the table. “Nothing has changed in three hundred years. Women in our time cinched their waists until they couldn’t breathe. I never understood it. Hugh and I always like full-figured women.” He smiled. “We adore you, *cherie*. We like you this way. Don’t ever change.”

She plunked down in a seat.

“If I see you eat one of these,” Hugh held up a container of low fat yogurt. “It will be I who spansks you in earnest, *un jolie*.”

She grabbed the container of yogurt from Hugh and threw it in the garbage can.

Both men cheered.

She felt elated.

“I just wish that you could both enjoy human things, too.”

“Some day, perhaps, but until we can free ourselves of this curse, we shall have the pleasure of watching you enjoy food,” Hugh told her.

“And we’ll also have the pleasure of...you.” Maximillian kissed her.

She shut her eyes and savored it.

Marta opened them. “I-I almost forgot to tell you something.”

“What?” They asked in unison.

“Come with me.” She walked into the laboratory and sat down by her computer.

“Do you know what this machine is?”

Maximillian shook his head. “No. But we’ve seen quite a few.”

“It is a computer. And my notes, about you two, are on it.”

Hugh raised a brow. “So?”

“Watch this.” She pressed a key and opened the file marked ‘Night Feeders.’

“You see this key that says, ‘delete?’”

The both nodded.

She pressed the key. The file disappeared from the screen. “All my notes are now gone.”

Hugh eased his tall frame into a chair. “But why, Marta? Why did you erase these notes?”

She reached for his hand and brought it to his cheek. "I don't care what you are or what your past is." She glanced at Maximillian. "All I know is I love the two of you very much."

A lone tear slipped down Hugh's face.

She caught the golden drop, mesmerized while she watched it shimmer then dry up on the tip of her finger.

Maximillian cleared his throat. "You could have made much money from your discovery."

"I don't want money. I want the two of you," she replied, her voice soft.

Hugh sighed. "*Merci.*"

Maximillian nodded his head. "Are you ready, Hugh? If we leave now, we can be back soon." He smiled at Marta. "And make love to our woman."

"Ready for what?" she asked, trying to concentrate on something other than Maximillian and Hugh's lovemaking.

"We are going out to the field of corpses to feed."

She rose from her chair. "Then I'll go with you."

Maximillian eased her back down. "No. You will stay here. We don't want a repeat of what happened yesterday."

Hugh got up from his chair and shrugged into his long, dark coat.

"But, I can't let you go out there alone! We have to find out who attacked me, and maybe, if we all go back out there we can catch the person. You need all the help you can get."

Maximillian frowned. "Which we are more than capable of providing for ourselves."

Marta folded her arms across her chest. "Oh, I get it. This is the male ego thing surfacing, isn't it?"

Hugh raised a brow. "What 'male ego thing?'"

"This is where you turn all macho on me, isn't it?"

"This is where we protect you, *cherie*. Even if it is from ourselves. We cannot, we will not allow any more harm to come to you. We will feed, and then come back to you soon."

Maximillian grabbed her shoulders and drew her forward, kissing the top of her head.

She slapped him away. "I'm not a child. And I know how to use a gun."

"A gun is little use against a wizard like Balthazar." Hugh told her.

"You can't be sure it's him. Maybe someone else knows what you're doing. It could even be the police watching you. Why—"

"No more foolish talk, *cherie*. Stay here. Stay safe. We will be back soon."

In the next instant, they disappeared.

"That was a cheap trick!" Marta said, to no one.

She left the kitchen and grabbed her jacket from the coat rack in the hallway. Marching into the small room off the kitchen, she took a rifle from the gun case and some bullets. She loaded them into the rifle then cocked it once.

She'd be damned if she'd let them shut her out.

And she had to know who was out there last night. If they came back, she'd be ready for them.

She just wasn't sure if she'd be ready for Hugh and Maximillian's reactions when they found out she hadn't paid their warnings one iota of attention.

Fear coursed through her as she made her way through the night to the field of corpses along side the body farm.

Fear...and a strange feeling of anticipation.

The night held secrets.

Marta was determined to discover them...

No matter what.

* * * *

When she neared the field of fresh corpses, Marta watched Hugh and Maximillian feed, careful lest she disturb them. She held the rifle across her lap while she sank down onto a tree stump, the full moon bracketing both men as they drank blood from one of the newly dead.

A movement in the trees caught her attention. She watched the branches sway, even though there wasn't a breeze that night.

Hugh and Maximillian swiveled their heads in that direction, too.

“I’m here, Marta. Right behind you!”

Her eyes widened upon hearing the same eerie voice again. She lifted the rifle with shaking hands and aimed it at a shadowy figure standing in some bushes. For just a second, the moon’s light shone down on a man dressed in long flowing robes. Marta pulled the trigger on the rifle, sending a bullet in his direction.

“Hah! Your puny gun is no defense against me.”

She cocked the gun and fired again, but in the next instant, some unknown force wrenched it from her hands.

Marta screamed once as a heavy weight descended on her.

* * * *

Hugh and Maximillian lifted their heads the minute they heard the gunshot and Marta’s scream of terror.

They flew out of the copse of trees where they had been feeding to see Marta scrambling to her feet and running.

No one else was in sight.

That they could see...

But they felt Balthazar’s presence all around them.

The minute they moved their feet, he tripped them, his laugh coarse.

Still, they could not see him.

“Fools. You think I’ll let her get away?”

Maximillian growled low in his throat, his fangs visible and bloody. He lashed out at the unseen specter, his nails long, sharp and claw-like.

“Hah, hah! You’ve never outsmarted me in three hundred years; you think you can do that now?”

“I think you are afraid!” Hugh shouted. “Afraid that for once, we may actually have a chance at breaking your curse.”

It became quiet, the only sound wind through the trees. Soon, the wind picked up, and blew with such force, that many of the trees bowed to its violent intensity. It lasted for a few seconds then all was quiet again.

“He’s gone.” Maximillian sighed. “Damn it!” He ran a hand through his hair.

“Where is Marta?” Hugh looked around, his eyes wild with fear. “Marta!” Hugh shouted.

No answer.

They ran through the trees then took flight, leaping high into the air, landing near the farmhouse. They settled on her doorstep.

“Marta!” Maximillian shouted. “Marta!”

She came running through the bushes, stopping in her tracks when she saw them.

Her face was dirty, leaves and small twigs stuck out at odd angles in her air.

For Hugh and Maximillian, she was a welcome sight.

She ran to them, throwing her arms around them both, laughing and crying at the same time.

“Ah *cherie*.” Hugh hugged her tight.

Maximillian did the same.

Then he gazed down at her, his eyes blazing with anger.

“You are going to get the spanking of your life!” his voice boomed.

Hugh glanced around, his eyes darting everywhere. “We cannot stay out here. You can spank her inside.”

He shoved the two of them forward.

Marta ran inside the farmhouse with them following close behind. Once inside, she locked the door.

“Look, I can explain.”

Maximillian advanced, his steps wide and purposeful. “You will, after I make sure you do not sit for a week.”

She tried to dart past him, but he snagged her arm. They were nose-to-nose. “Why did you not heed our warnings to stay here?”

She shrugged out of his hold. “That’s the thanks I get for saving your hides?”

“It is your hide, *cherie*, that you should be concerned about.”

She angled her chin. “I distracted him from the two of *you*.” Her voice shook with anger.

Hugh ran a hand through his hair. “It was Balthazar.” He dropped his hand to his side. “Our night feeding brought him out. He was probably waiting, knowing that Marta

would be with us.” Hugh glanced at Maximillian. “But I think you may have wounded him with your claws.”

Marta’s eyes widened. “Claws?”

“Just one more trick we have up our sleeves.” Maximillian glanced out the windows. “Come upstairs. I think we’ll be safer up there.”

He placed a hand on the small of Marta’s back. She felt herded, as though she had no choice but to go where Maximillian led her.

They entered the small room. Maximillian walked to the windows and drew the blinds.

“We must not go out there to feed again.”

Marta pulled away from Hugh. “But how will you survive? You must feed!” She swiped the tears from her face.

“No, we cannot. It is too dangerous. He’s counting on us coming out there...and you, too, *un jolie*.” Hugh said. “I agree with Maximillian.”

“Balthazar enjoys making his victims squirm. He’ll make us crazy with fear, wondering when he’ll strike, but he won’t come in this house unless he’s invited. And once he is asked, he’ll never leave, unless we outsmart him.”

Timothy’s words, the ones he uttered when he stopped by, rang in her ears...

How about letting me in?

Foolish. Why should she think about him now? She shook her head to clear it of her crazy thoughts.

“I-I could get a body, b-bring it here, inside the farmhouse. That way, you could still feed.” She told them.

“And risk your boss finding out? No, we must leave.”

Her heart felt as though it were breaking in two.

“Where will you go?”

Hugh shrugged. “I-I don’t know.”

“Balthazar will find you, no matter where you are.”

Maximillian sat down on the bed. He looked at Marta and took her hands in his, running his thumbs over the backs. “If we leave, you are in danger. He may come after you again and knowing we are not here, he will make you easy prey. If we stay...”

“He may come after her anyway.”

He glanced at Hugh. “You are right, cousin.”

Hugh shrugged. ““We are damned if we stay, damned if we go.”

“Then let’s fight him. You have powers. That little disappearing trick you do, for one.”

“A puny trick compared to Balthazar’s.”

She shook her head. “There must be something we can do.”

Maximillian held out his arms. She came into them willingly. “Just love us.” He told her.

Hugh stood beside them. “Stay with us,” his voice held soft, deep notes. “Until the end. If we cannot feed, I know it will come soon.”

Marta didn’t know what to do. All her life, she’d been able to make sense of things, to find solutions to the most overwhelming criminal cases using forensics.

But this?

How was she to fight pure evil?

Just love us...

She stripped the clothes from her body and stood before them. Soon they shed their clothing, too. In a bold move, Marta pushed them both back onto the bed. Fueled by fear, adrenaline coursing through her veins, she knelt on the bed and took Maximillian’s large cock into her mouth. She heard his sharp intake of breath as she suckled him. Her tongue laved the tip of his penis, where she noticed one tiny drop of his semen.

She turned her attention to Hugh. She reached for his cock, gently taking it in her hand, running her fingers up and down his distended shaft. With the pad of her thumb, she gently swirled it around the tip of his penis, eliciting a low moan from him.

Soon, their hands were all over her, touching, stroking, kneading...soothing.

She needed their touch, craved their touch, just as they needed blood to survive.

Marta rolled onto her side. Maximillian took her from behind, and Hugh entered her from the front, their rhythm perfectly matched as they brought her to the height of passion.

Her orgasm brought blessed relief from fear.

That night, as she cuddled between them, she slept.

It was a restless sleep, filled with strange dreams...

She ran through the dark woods.

Running...

There was no end.

At morning's first light, she woke. Donning her robe and slippers, she made her way downstairs, careful that her movements did not wake Maximillian or Hugh.

They needed rest.

And she needed time to think.

Time. There was so little of it.

If she didn't come up with a way to slow Hugh and Maximillian's cell growth, she feared the lack of fresh blood would destroy them.

Marta sat down at her kitchen table and cradled her head in her hands.

She sat like that a long time, and didn't move until she heard her doorbell ring.

* * * *

She gazed out the small window next to the front door.

Timothy stood outside, looking up at the house before impatiently pressing the doorbell again.

She opened the door and let him in.

"I wanted to see how you were doing." He held up a bag. "I brought bagels. Thought we could have breakfast together."

"I-I'm afraid not."

He put the bag down on a table nearby. "What's wrong? You look terrible."

She glanced around. "I have coffee on. Come into the kitchen."

He grabbed the bag of bagels and followed.

Once in the kitchen, she poured him coffee. Passing him the cup, she noticed he took it with his left hand. His right hand remained at his side. "What's wrong with your arm?" she asked.

"Nothing." He accepted the cup from her.

She frowned when she saw a red stain on his shirt. "You're bleeding." She nodded towards his upper arm. "Let me see."

Marta moved towards him and rolled up his sleeve. Timothy's eyes never left her face.

Blood stained the bandage on his arm, too. She unwound the gauze and noticed four scratches.

"What's this? It looks as though..."

She suddenly remembered Maximillian and Hugh's conversation...

...but I think you may have wounded him with your claws.

Timothy jerked his arm away.

"It was you," she said softly. "*You* were outside last night in the field of corpses, weren't you?"

He angled his head, rolling down his shirtsleeve. "So, now you know."

She plunked down into a chair.

"Know what?"

She glanced back to see Maximillian and Hugh standing in the kitchen.

She rose to her feet on shaky legs.

"I came here this morning," Timothy walked over to the coffee pot and helped himself to more. "To say thank you."

"Thank you? For what?" Her voice wobbled.

He smiled thinly. "Your notes. They were very helpful." He glanced at Maximillian and Hugh, taking a sip from his coffee mug. "These are the uh two, creatures, I take it?"

She moved to stand between them and Timothy.

"Don't, *cherie*," Hugh whispered.

She shooed him away.

"Your notes were very helpful, Marta, and I thank you for giving them to me."

Maximillian frowned. "You said you destroyed them."

Timothy smiled. "Ah, yes, she did, but not before granting me permission to use them and present them to the board of directors here at Long Island College. I think they'll find Marta's research very interesting. After all, we will share all the monetary rewards you promised, isn't that right, Marta?"

The look on Hugh's face—misery mixed with pain and betrayal, was more than Marta could bear.

She turned away from him, her body shaking with fury. "I never said any such thing."

Timothy raised one sandy brow. "Oh really? That's not the discussion I recall. I remember you saying quite clearly that this would put both of us on the scientific map. We'd be celebrities, and you two," he glanced at Hugh and Maximillian, "would be locked away somewhere where you could be examined and studied and, well, viewed by the public." He laughed, a coarse, sardonic laugh. "The public always loves a good freak show."

Marta panicked. She glanced at her two loves. "You can't believe what he says."

"It is like Moira's betrayal...all over again." Hugh shook his head.

"No!" she cried, panic clawing her insides. "I'm not like Moira. I haven't betrayed you."

"I've got several members of the board of directors on their way here now...and the authorities." Clayton glanced at Hugh and Maximillian. "It will be better if you come along quietly."

Hugh growled low in his throat. She watched in horror as he lashed out, his hand growing claw-like talons where his nails should be. He swung out at Clayton, but he backed away, right into a small hutch against the wall. It came crashing down, the plates shattering into hundreds of pieces on the floor.

Marta screamed when Maximillian pounced on Timothy.

He turned his head in her direction, the centers of his eyes burning with bright red intensity. Then he shook his head, the bright red of his eyes gone. "Why?" he asked her. "Why did you do this to us?"

Tears streamed down her face.

"Look at his arm." Her voice wobbled. "Timothy's arm has claw marks on it. He was out in the field – you slashed him."

Maximillian grabbed hold of Timothy's arm. He pushed up his shirt-sleeve.

The scratches on his skin were gone.

“But how can that be?” Marta shook her head. “The claw marks were there a few seconds ago...”

“You lie, Marta.” Maximillian sighed. “And you broke our hearts.”

In the next instant, Hugh grabbed hold of Maximillian.

They disappeared, as though they had never existed.

All was quiet.

The only thing Marta heard was the ticking of the clock as she stared at the empty space where they once stood.

Timothy stirred on the floor.

Then he got to his feet, rising to his full height slowly.

He didn’t stop.

He kept on rising, and rising...soaring up in the air....

Her eyes widened as she watched his head touch the top of the ceiling.

Long, flowing robes of gold, blue and silver swirled around him.

“You’re Balthazar?” Her body trembled. “But how can that be possible?”

“Your Timothy is a nice warm body to possess...he has helped me move through your time.” Balthazar’s voice boomed. “I needed the body of an evil human. Timothy Clayton proved very useful, for his soul is rotten, his greed boundless. He traded the use of his body for gold. Humans always want riches—the pursuit of wealth is always their downfall. When I’m through with him, I’ll dispose of his body. But now, it is time for me to rid the world of *you*.”

Marta screamed, but she was certain...no one could hear her.

Chapter Six

“I am tired of walking, cousin. Can we not just disappear again?”

“We can only do that trick a couple of times in a row, Hugh.”

Hugh shook his head. “We have come full circle. We are on the same road that took us to Marta.”

“Do not mention her name again,” Maximillian growled.

“I am going to rest.” Hugh marched over to a nearby log and eased his tall frame down onto it. He stretched out his legs and grabbed a stick, drawing a pattern in the dirt in front of him.

“What is that?” Maximillian sat down beside him. “It looks like a ring.”

“It is.” He sighed, tossing the stick away. “There was something about that man, that Timothy Clayton, that disturbed me.”

Maximillian snorted. “How about the fact that he was ready to turn us into science experiments?”

Hugh shook his head, a thoughtful look on his face. “It was something else.” He turned his head towards Maximillian. “That gold ring he wore.”

“So?” Maximillian raised a brow. “What of it?”

“It looked familiar.”

“How so?”

“A plain gold ring. Perhaps...” Hugh turned his head away. “Marta had given it to him. But it seems old, it...” Hugh’s eyes widened. “Balthazar!”

“What of him?” Maximillian glanced around. “He is here?”

“No, I’m an idiot!” Hugh smacked his forehead with the heel of his hand. “He is at the farmhouse, with Marta!”

“What? You make no sense, cousin.”

“Oh, but I do, Maximillian. I do. And if I’m right, we don’t have a moment to lose. He has used the ultimate deception on us, our own fears and mistrust.” He grabbed hold of Maximillian’s arm. “Come, we are going back there.”

Maximillian shrugged him off. “I am not. We are getting as far away from that body farm...and Marta...as possible.”

Just then, Maximillian’s ears picked up a woman’s scream, it sounded faint, yet he couldn’t deny what he heard.

Hugh glanced at him. “Did you hear that? It sounded like Marta.”

They took flight. As they soared over the trees and foliage, Maximillian asked Hugh. “How is that ring significant?”

“Because it is the one Balthazar created with his black arts and alchemy from that small piece of lead. He wore it proudly, remember?”

Maximillian’s eyes widened. “And he must have inhabited Clayton’s body. That’s the only way he could get around without being detected. Good God, we must hurry!”

“We are cousin, we are.”

They arrived at the small farmhouse in time to see Balthazar’s face pressed up against the glass of the front window. He had grown in size so much that his entire face and body filled the front room of the small farmhouse. Next to him, he held a struggling Marta.

“She will die if you come any closer!”

They stopped their approach.

Suddenly, Marta broke free of Balthazar. She ran away, but neither Hugh nor Maximillian could fathom where she went.

“Come out, Balthazar, and fight us here, on our terms. Do not involve innocent human beings.”

The house shook.

“I pray that she got out, cousin.” Hugh grabbed hold of Maximillian.

“I shall kill him if he harms one hair on her head,” Maximillian’s voice vibrated with fury..

He blinked once, and Balthazar stood before them.

“You will pay for all eternity for what you did to Moira. I will not let you rest. Never!”

“Leave Marta alone,” Hugh said quietly. He glanced at Maximillian. “Do your worst to us, but leave her be.”

From the corner of his eye, Maximillian saw Marta creep towards them, something in her hand.

“She has done nothing wrong.”

Balthazar snorted. “Other than allowing you to feed? To give you sustenance?”

“She loves us,” Hugh said softly. “And we love her.”

Upon hearing Hugh’s words, Balthazar’s robes stopped glowing, their magnificent colors fading. The gold ring on his hand turned to lead. Soon, it became dust, and disappeared from his finger.

“No!” he shouted. “No, this cannot be. I am fading.”

Hugh grinned. “The love of a good woman has broken the curse.” He clapped Maximillian on the back.

Balthazar turned to run. He collided with Marta. For just an instant, they struggled, and then she plunged a hypodermic needle into his back. He staggered once, and then fell to the ground. Marta dropped to her knees then pushed the end of the needle, delivering its contents into his back.

Balthazar rose to his feet and ran, his robes dropping away from his body in ragged pieces. Soon, he tore through the woods, Marta’s eyes on his naked back.

Or rather...Timothy’s naked back.

“He is just an ordinary man now.” Hugh grinned. “He is just Timothy Clayton, a human being. Nothing more.”

Maximillian turned to face Marta. “Are you all right?”

She walked into his outstretched arms, then Hugh’s. “I’m fine. And as long as he’s just an ordinary man now, he will soon have very extraordinary problems.”

“Such as?”

“I injected him with blood I took from a corpse last week. The man had died of something called salmonella or food poisoning. The bacteria were still alive in that sample. It now lives in Timothy. Soon, he’ll be very ill.”

“It’s the least he deserves,” Maximillian growled.

Hugh grabbed hold of his stomach. Maximillian took his arm. “What is it, man? Are you ill?”

Hugh let go of a bark of laughter. “My stomach. It rumbles. With hunger!”

Maximillian’s eyes widened when his stomach gurgled, too.

She blew out a shaky breath. “Are you human again?”

Then she heard their stomachs rumble. A smile lined her face.

Marta took of both their arms and led them back to the farmhouse. “Come on, I think it’s time we got you some real food.”

At the front door, she stopped and turned to hug each of them.

“My two loves,” she whispered. “Forever.”

About the Author

Catrina Calloway adores writing romance, and her motto is: 'Two, hot, hunky heroes are better than one.' Born in Alaska, the land of the midnight sun, and now currently residing in New York, Catrina was an avid reader of romance for many years before penning her first erotic ménage romance story, 'Eight Erotic Nights.' Catrina loves to hear from her readers and fans so please feel free to email her at:

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The Assassin was sent to ensure that the Vampire Queen died, and to recover the Elixir that would restore his kind back to their glory. He endured years of training and sexual restraint in order to become the best at what he does.

He is on the hunt for the *Elixir of Life*.

Micah and Sasha are vampire servants to the Queen. When she is murdered they believe their lives are coming to an end as well, but the Queen has left them one special gift and a mission...

Winter's Blood

When Angelina's sister is kidnapped, she is forced to steal a much sought-after formula. Fortunately, fate has paired her with a handsome vampire who has promised to help save her beloved sibling.

Dante wants to break through the frozen barriers of Angelina's heart, and will do almost anything to accomplish his goal. But first, he and Angelina must fight the evil and keep the precious formula out of evil hands.

Will Dante and Angelina be successful in their quest? Or will the blood spilled be their own?

Blood Red Rose

With the threat of danger high, Eli's world is on the verge of being destroyed. The *Elixir of Life* is needed by the Others now more than ever. Their assassin has Eli in his sights. Eli is ready for this threat, but he finds an unexpected, yet intriguing distraction.

Rose is a beautiful female vampire on the run and doesn't realize how much she will need Eli. Yet, in the end, will she need to save him?

*Also Available from
Resplendence Publishing*

***Nuit Aux Trois* by Melinda Barron**

Quinn's two roommates, lovers Fletcher Covair and Devlin St. Giles, have the perfect idea: Quinn will accompany them on a Halloween ghost hunt at a haunted plantation. Quinn agrees, knowing there's no such thing as ghosts and thinking the time away will give her time to assess her future job prospects, and if nothing else, a chance to relax.

But the plantation's resident ghost, Alison, has other ideas. She wants help in righting a long-time wrong, and it seems that the ghost has chosen Quinn, Dev, and Fletch to assist her. While Quinn's mind is reeling from the knowledge that there are really ghosts, she comes to another shocking realization: Dev and Fletch have more on their minds than ghost hunting, and Alison isn't the only restless spirit who wants to make contact.

***The Resurrection of Josephine* by Melinda Barron**

Martin Vandreen avoids graveside funerals at all costs—for good reason. As a spiritual medium with the ability to communicate with the dead, cemeteries tend to be filled with restless souls that want to chat with him. But when Martin makes an exception and attends the burial ceremony of his dear friend's departed father, he encounters a powerful entity that nearly kills him.

Rumer Rousseau and her lover Noah Hopper will do anything to stop the resurrection of Josephine, including forcibly enlisting the help of Martin. Martin reluctantly agrees to help find a way to destroy Josephine before the evil witch gains enough power to overturn the spell binding her spirit to her crypt, thus allowing her to return to the world of flesh and blood.

Suddenly, Martin's orderly, somewhat private lifestyle is turned upside down. But within the arms of Rumer and Noah, he finds that he no longer desires the solitude he once treasured, and longs to have a relationship that can stand the test of time. But will the bond they forged together be strong enough to survive the resurrection of Josephine?

***Beyond Death* by Jinger Jackson**

Allana Simpson is cursed. Love only brings death to everyone around her. She longs for a normal life with one man that she can give her heart to without killing him.

Tom Haugan never believed in curses until he met Allana. She opens up a world for him that he never knew existed. A world he never wished to learn about.

Tom wants to protect Allana, to heal her heart and take away her pain. The closer he gets, the more “accidents” occur. He’s not willing to give up on what they could have. Allana’s longing for Tom and the dream of a future filled with happiness weakens her resolve to remain alone. She trusts him and decides to let him in. Now death stalks them both...

***Rules of Darkness* by Tia Fanning**

They tell me that I am special, that my ability to heal is a “gift” that should be treasured and appreciated. As far as I’m concerned, I’m not gifted...I’m cursed. Nothing in this life is free, not even gifts. There is always a price to be paid somewhere, somehow.

My healing gift came with twelve Rules of Darkness, rules that I must follow at all times, until the day I die. The rules are ingrained in who I am. They dictate how I live my life when I am awake, and they haunt me when I’m asleep. *Don't look into a graveyard, Katia. Don't touch the dead, Katia. Never seek out the lost, Katia...* It’s enough to drive a person mad.

And perhaps that’s where I find myself now. A victim of a disease I can cure in others, but not in myself. It’s madness to break the rules, and yet, I don’t care. I’m tired of living my life this way. I’m tired of the rules. I won’t do it anymore, and if that means I suffer the consequences, then so be it.

***Their Lady Liberty* by Ann Cory**

There’s nothing Liberty likes better than to spend her time with the two men who ignite her body and show her pleasures like no others. She belongs to them both, and doesn’t want it any other way.

Brandon and Neil can focus on little else but thoughts of Liberty’s hot body and carefree ways, both always dreaming of the next time they’ll be together. As Brandon and Neil see it, there are worse things to be than at the mercy of a sex goddess.

Behind the steamed up windows of Brandon’s van, the threesome meet up for an afternoon rendezvous. Here they can love freely, and live out their most decadent fantasies with... *Their Lady Liberty*.

***Breakfast at Tiffany's* by Ann Cory**

Cool smoothies and hot sex...

Tiffany has dreamed of opening her very own smoothie bar. Creating fun and tasty concoctions is her specialty. But first she needs to sell her idea, and that will require bringing samples of her best recipes. She calls on Marcus and Shane, her hot and handsome best friends, to help her decide which ones to choose.

Marcus and Shane have worshipped Tiffany for years and would do anything in the world for her, even share her if her heart so desires. In support of her opening her own smoothie bar, they agree to be her guinea pigs. However, a morning of taste testing quickly becomes more about pleasure than business.

Red Garters, Snow and Mistletoe Tales Available at Resplendence Publishing

***Unwrap Me, I'm Yours* by Demi Alex**

Hope Verdetti lies to her mother about having a phenomenal fiancé who surprises her on a trip to Vegas. Now her family expects him to come home with her for the holidays. She needs a man that fits the bill—and fast!

After seven interviews with hired, handsome applicants in three days, she finds her solution in the neighborhood coffee shop. Sexy and irresistible Jon Edwards volunteers for the task, having an agenda of his own.

With their holiday agreement set, Jon turns up the heat and gives Hope the present of her life...himself.

***Red Ribbons and Blue Balls* by Tia Fanning**

After Nicolas punishes her for being naughty, the usually nice but now sexually-frustrated Winter arrives at their secluded mountain cabin bearing gifts—special gifts that will ensure his submission and her revenge.

With only seven days left until Christmas, Nicolas expects to spend the night decorating the house for the approaching holiday, but Winter has other plans...

Christmas might be coming, but if Winter gets her way, Nicolas won't be.

***Nice and Naughty* by Mia Jae**

Cassie Franklin has to prove herself. After all, she's the first female head of the English department at the university. But that doesn't mean she has to prove herself sexually to Eric Marsh, a fellow professor in the English department, does it?

Then there is Ryan. Strong and sexy, with hands that can ease away the tension of most any job, he almost makes her forget her risky escapades with Eric.

Until Cassie realizes that Ryan and Eric have a closer connection than she ever could have imagined, and they have very specific plans for her...

***Eight Erotic Nights* by Catrina Calloway**

The holiday season is a time for joy, but Laney Taylor couldn't be more depressed. She's selling the last piece of her grandmother's exquisite antique china to feed the hordes of 'new' homeless living in their cars in an abandoned parking lot on the outskirts of town. But on the way to the shop, an accident lands her in the hospital—and into the arms of the two hot, hunky Samaritans who saved her life.

Josh Goldman and Zach Brenner share a successful construction business, and a secret longing. They can't believe their good fortune when they save Laney Taylor from a freezing to death. Both men have desired Laney since high school, and made a pact that if they ever had the chance to have a relationship with the sexy, full-figured woman of their dreams, they wouldn't mind sharing.

When a winter storm gives Josh and Zach an opportunity to share the pleasures of the 'festival of lights' with Laney, and a chance to fulfill their long-held erotic fantasies, they can hardly believe the good fortune the Hanukkah holiday has brought them. While fate and circumstance may require their eventual separation, all three are determined that they will not waste a moment of their...

Eight Erotic Nights.

Handcuffs and Lace

Resplendence Publishing's Erotic Romance Line of Law Enforcement Themed Stories

***Ticket Me More* by Tia Fanning**

Hailed by the bridal flower world as an artistic genius, Meli works long nights making bouquets for women lucky enough to find love, while she herself lives a life of solitude. She yearns to share her heart and body with someone other than Bob, her *Battery Operated Boyfriend*, but acute shyness keeps her from engaging the “living” world.

However, Meli's quiet and predictable existence takes an unexpected turn when she is pulled over and ticketed by the most gorgeous cop she has ever encountered—Officer Michael Johnson. Though he doesn't seem to notice her as anything more than a traffic violation, Meli makes plans to overcome her timid nature and seize the police officer's attention...using any speed necessary.

***Cuff Me Lacy* by Demi Alex**

Three months is way too long to wait for some simple, low-down, straight forward sex. It's not like Officer Chrissie Hansen is asking for prince charming to offer her the love of a lifetime. All she wants is a good orgasm that she doesn't have to work for alone.

At least with “The Bull” she knows what to expect. But when Patrick MacKlick returns to her life and tempts her with new options, she discovers that lace can imprison a heart better than handcuffs can.

***Search Me Baby, One More Time* by Melinda Barron**

Wren Thornberry's life isn't going according to plan. She let her father talk her out of marrying Bryan Stockard, the man she loves, and moved halfway around the world. Now

she's back home in Texas, babysitting her grandmother while grandma and her boy-toy work through their list of sexual exploits, making themselves the talk of the town.

But what Wren doesn't know is that things in her hometown are about to heat up even more, and it will have nothing to do with her grandmother. It seems that Bryan Stockard is still around, he wants to get back into Wren's life—by any means necessary, and now he has just the tools to do it: A police uniform, handcuffs, and the authority to make Wren *assume the position*.

***What the Cuff?* By Celia Kyle**

God really should have reconsidered making werewolves. That, or Lyssa needed to get better taste in men and stay away from those with wandering eyes—and other things. Drunk as a wolf, she stumbles to her best friend's house to sleep off her whiskey induced haze and wakes to... *cuffs*?

Caleb sees his chance and takes it. His buddies on the force ribbed him but good for buying silver plated cuffs. But with a werewolf in his bed, the woman he's yearned for since they were teens, he wasn't taking any chances. Lyssa was his. She just didn't know it yet.

***Going Commando* by Catherine Chernow**

Bounty hunter Shyra Lawrence listens to her favorite radio station one morning where the DJ's are discussing "going commando" —*a.k.a* wearing no undies. Captivated by their conversation, she decides to shed her panties in favor of the freedom that wearing no underwear brings.

Enthusiastic, Shyra sends an email to her best friend, Donna, detailing the delights of panty-freedom, but unbeknownst to Shyra, she's hit the send key...to the wrong email addy!

When Derek Grayson opens his emails that morning, he discovers that his #1 employee and top bounty hunter, Shyra Lawrence, has sent him an erotic, enticing message about going commando. Derek has always been polite, professional, and so damned attracted to Shyra that it's almost painful. Working day in and day out with voluptuous woman has sent Derek's hormones into overdrive on more than one occasion.

Now, Shyra's shed her panties and Derek's got all he can do to contain his lust when she announces that she's... GOING COMMANDO.

***Handcuffs and Lies* by Bronwyn Green**

Sometimes promises to friends are the hardest to keep. Undercover police officer, Michael Tanner, promised his dying partner that he'd take care of the man's little sister. Trouble is, after her brother's death, Doctor Tori Spinelli wants nothing to do with Michael—or any other cop for that matter.

Tori has always fought against overprotective men and deception. Forced into protective custody with Michael, she's now faced with both in the same package. Despite their differences, Tori falls in love with him, but how can she trust a man who lies for a living?

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