

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

JAYNE
RYLON
Phoenix
Incantation

ELLORA'S CAVE *Quickies*®

Phoenix Incantation

Jayne Rylon

Amystia didn't think anything could be hotter than five-thousand wild years of passion with the most powerful vampire on Earth. Then she and her mate, King Dagan, began a steamy affair with his closest advisor. Threesomes with her two lovers were never supposed to be more than fun but, somehow, both her and Dagan's feelings have blossomed into something deeper than respect and friendship for Warren.

As they are on the cusp of proposing a more permanent relationship, a terrible accident destroys all plans for the future. Dagan's life hangs in the balance. In a desperate bid to save him, Amystia and Warren invoke ancient magic through a steamy ritual. If they fail, they'll all be doomed to eternal darkness. If they succeed, can their eternal love rise from the ashes?

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Phoenix Incantation

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PHOENIX INCANTATION

Jayne Rylon

Dedication

For Mari Carr, a phenomenal author and even better friend.

Chapter One

One week ago

"You're sure, Amystia? You're ready?"

My heart soars at the idea. I've craved this for nearly three centuries. "We've only been waiting for Warren to decide for certain. Since he's rejected Sylvia, he's exhausted the list of possible mates. He hasn't shown even a glimmer of interest in another for ages."

I had watched as my mate, King Dagan, bid farewell to the stunning young vampire who'd requested a personal audience. Only millennia of experience in tempering my reactions had prevented me from dancing on my throne when she divulged her news.

Dagan flashes me a radiant grin, broad enough to permit a glimpse of his razor-sharp canines. The unmitigated joy radiating from him thrills me to the core. He crushes me in his arms then whirls us both around. We spin ten feet off the parquet floor of the royal chambers. My ornate dress fans out behind us. For once I am glad of the formal attire I'm forced to wear to match my station as Queen of the United Vampiric Covens. The beaded lace bodice and flowing silk train seem fitting for the proposal we're about to make. Not to mention the military cut jacket, embroidered with the symbols of his ultimate rank, which hugs Dagan's impressive build.

"I don't want to wait another moment." I rest my forehead on Dagan's brow while I stroke his smooth cheek. The intensity of his maroon eyes still has the power to shock me. Especially when he's as aroused as he is now.

"We've waited long enough. Where is he?" Dagan trails his lips along the pulse hammering in my throat as I close my eyes then search the castle for the other half of my heart. I'm always able to sense his presence.

"The laboratory. He seems... agitated."

Dagan smooths the furrow of my brow then scoops me into his arms. "No need to worry, love. He's probably just frustrated over dismissing another very willing companion. You know how it disturbs him to injure anyone's pride. Shall we cheer him up?"

"Let's."

I squeeze my eyes closed as my mate flies along the corridors to Warren's tower. I never have gotten used to the way the two of them zip from point to point instead of gliding at a more sedate pace. As we near, a series of crashes reverberates through the stone foundations of the castle.

"Dagan..." An ominous frisson of warning tugs at my nerves. "Perhaps we should come back later. He's not responding to my calls."

Though all vampires have paranormal talents, mine have always been strongest when sensing and communicating with loved ones, even from great distances. Just a few hundred yards away now, and closing rapidly as we climb the spiral staircase, I should be able to hold a conversation with Warren. Yet I cannot dent the vampire sorcerer's concentration on his task.

"I won't waste even one more hour, Amystia. He'll have to resume his experiment tomorrow. Or maybe next week, after we've finished celebrating." Dagan barges through the oak plank door without so much as knocking.

The soaring bookcases that line every inch of the curved walls of Warren's sanctuary come into view as I blink open my eyes. Then a streak of black whizzes toward my face. Before I can react, Dagan twists to the side and drops me. Whatever was flying at me slams into the left half of my mate's chest with enough impact to launch him into the air over my head.

I stare, horrified, as he catapults through a row of beakers and other assorted glassware on the table nearby before destroying four entire shelves of ancient tomes with his limp body. Why didn't he slow himself?

"Dagan!" I rush to his side only to find him unconscious, something I've never seen in all our years together. Not even when he'd been ambushed by forty young rebels, or after he'd been hit by a tank, had he wavered before his injuries healed over seconds later. But now he lies crumpled on the stonework.

I pivot, searching for Warren. He's standing across the open space, his hand outstretched toward the line of targets he'd been aiming at before we intruded. Abject terror freezes his expression.

"Help him," I shout. "Warren!"

A blur streaks toward me. Then he is there, kneeling at my side.

"What have I done?" he wails as he drags Dagan from the rubble. "Dagan. Please wake up. Please."

Buttons pop off the fancy coat I had so recently admired. The dusty, ripped fabric is cast aside as Warren searches for the injury that has felled the mightiest vampire in recorded history.

I cradle Dagan's ultra-pale face while Warren examines my mate. My voice will not work as I wish. Instead, I reach out with my mind.

Wake up, Dagan. You're frightening Warren.

Amystia.

Relief dissolves the alarm flooding me when he responds, though the slight waver in his tone concerns me.

Are you all right, love? That... evil... headed straight for you. What the hell was that?

I'm fine, Dag. You have to come back now. Ask Warren yourself.

A ragged groan accompanies the flicker of his eyes opening. The sheen of lust that had brightened them has vanished but he'll recover within minutes. As he has done every other time he's sustained critical injuries in battle.

"Dagan!" Warren grasps his shoulders then props him against a cabinet.

“What exactly are you researching up here, Advisor? And when can we equip the guards with that spell?”

I grin at the attempted humor though Warren only stares in shock.

“It’s not something to joke of. I shouldn’t have attempted it on-site. Reckless! At least I didn’t perform the incantation correctly.” He rakes his fine-boned fingers through his mussed hair as he mumbles to himself, a habit I adore.

“What are you saying? I’d be tempted to believe I hit my head harder than I thought but you never make sense when you rant about your studies.” Dagan rubs one hand over his torso. The motion draws my attention to his sculpted form and the charred starburst covering his abdomen. That certainly hadn’t been there this morning.

“It’s something that could keep us from war forever. The ultimate weapon, devised by the ancients. I thought I’d patched together the proper spell several weeks ago. But I had shelved further trials. They’re too risky.” A grimace mars his youthful visage. “Forgive me, Dagan. Today I required a distraction...”

“We heard about Sylvia.” I bridge the gap between the men. One hand cups Dagan’s jaw while the other rests on Warren’s shoulder. Their fingers rise to mine, curling over my hands.

“I couldn’t accept her. It wasn’t fair to promise her something I don’t have to give. My heart is not my own.”

I want to ease the dejection in his eyes.

Don’t reveal our plans, Amystia. Not like this. Let’s wait until tonight. I’ll be recovered by then. We’ll make it special for us all. He deserves that.

Warren’s gaze flickers to the ugly mark, which still isn’t fading. “Are you certain you’re not suffering? The spell is intended to be lethal to our kind. Resistant to all cures, even magic.”

“It burns, though not much. I’m positive it will be a distant memory by dinner.”

But it wasn’t.

Chapter Two

Three days later

I cling to the ladder as I knock an inch of dust from the antique volumes ringing the top levels of Warren's laboratory. I refuse to glance down. I've never mastered levitating myself.

The cure has to be here. It's my final hope. We've already searched through every other tome in the palace. Vague references, veiled allusions and fragmented instructions are the best we've uncovered.

"Amystia, be careful!" Dagan's concerned bellow sounds hollow to me. Tingles run along my spine as he reaches out with his power. A few days ago, it would have supported me as sure as an iron fist but now I'm certain I would fall straight through the weak likeness of his former ability and plummet to the stone below if I let go. Though I'd heal soon enough, there is not a moment to spare.

Warren's essence mixes with Dagan's as he lassoes both the books and me, then controls our descent to the floor. How can I not care for a man who protects my mate's ego?

Dagan's brow is dotted with sweat but satisfaction tugs one corner of his mouth into a somber grin. "Perhaps the sickness is not as bad as it seems."

How I wish that were true.

"You should be in bed, resting." Warren joins us by the entryway where Dagan leans propped against the doorframe.

"I have things to attend to, things that need to be addressed. Until they are resolved, my mind cannot settle." He scrubs his palm over his jaw.

Warren loops his arm around Dagan's shoulder. The gesture would seem friendly if I didn't realize how much of Dagan's weight he supports as he guides my mate to his

private chambers. I curl up on the rich brocade covering Warren's bed. Dagan joins me, sitting with his shoulders against the headboard.

I rest my head in his lap, biting my lip to keep from sobbing. Warren lounges on the other side of Dagan's trim hips.

"What's bothering you, my friend?" Warren falls into the familiar routine. As Dagan's key advisor, he often acts as a sounding board.

"It's clear that unless we uncover a miracle, I am going to die."

I gasp. We have avoided the truth for three days. Hearing the blunt declaration rips my heart in two. How can I bear to live without him?

"Do not give up hope yet. We have found references to a ritual that could reverse the effects of the spell." Warren's confidence bolsters my hope but when I peer into his face, I see the tears in his eyes. He does not believe.

"A fool's errand, friend. Attempting such magic on the rumor of legend is folly. You would only destroy yourself. That cannot be allowed. When I am gone, you must look after Amystia."

The intensity of Dagan's determination would frighten even the most badass vamp but Warren merely nods.

"You still trust me?" His coarse whisper cannot contain the boundless agony I sense in him.

"We adore you, Warren. Our people rely on you. They will need you."

He abandons the bed, pacing the room. "They should destroy me for what I have done!"

"Come here." The order from his king is undeniable.

Warren sinks onto the mattress once more.

"You have been our closest friend, and sometimes lover, for nearly a thousand years. Do you not yet realize the respect I have for you? I instructed the council that, should I fall, Amystia will rule with you by her side. They could hope for no better

leaders. That is not my concern." Dagan's hand wanders over the shocked features of Warren's face. "Do not make me leave this world with even a sliver of doubt. Prove to me that you will not let my mate suffer for your guilt. You must take her, hold her, shelter her. Always."

"I swear to you that I will." With his gaze still averted, Warren grips Dagan's wrist with enough force that my mate winces. He is worsening by the minute.

"Show me that you can still love her though you no longer look me in the eye."

My jaw goes slack as I realize Dagan's intent. "You're ill!"

"I'm not so sick that I can't savor the most glorious thing on earth. I want to share you one last time." The pure devotion in his eyes makes arguing impossible.

Warren groans beside me. "It's difficult to be gentle when everything inside me rages against injustice. I won't touch her without control."

"I cannot rest until you do. Grant me this peace of mind."

Dagan strokes my hair where it drapes over his thigh. I would do anything to soothe him, either of them. Warren's pain affects me too. As usual, our king is right. We must take this chance to love together one final time or Warren will never recover. I cannot lose them both.

I shift on the bed, lying on my back between Dagan's spread legs, my head propped on his chest. His thick arousal nudges my spine. Untying the laces that cross the front of my long robe, he spreads the fabric wide in the wake of his hands. A cool breeze fans across my bare breasts and the slick flesh between my thighs. Memories assault me, making my pussy weep for all the pleasure Dagan and Warren have given me through the ages.

"Ah yes, you smell delicious, love. Intoxicating."

I should feel some dose of remorse that, even as my mate deteriorates, I hunger for both him and the man we had intended to bond as our permanent third. Instead, all I can do is surrender to the instincts that urge me to accept their touch.

Dagan cups my neck in his hand, sending shivers along the length of my spine as I recall the times he has drained his fill from me. The fingers of his other hand swirl over my collarbones, between my breasts then along my arm, making me squirm with the need for more.

“Get drunk on her, Warren.”

Our lover shoots me an uncertain glance. I widen the vee of my thighs, inviting him to sample the arousal he has inspired. Faster than I can detect, he flies from his perch on the edge of the bed. His tongue swipes along the cleft of my sex, gathering the dew from my lips.

“Yes, take more of her.”

Warren moans as he buries his face in my pussy, devouring my sopping flesh with desperate laps. He flicks his talented tongue around my opening, dipping inside just enough to tease before tracing the valley of my labia to my clit. When his lips envelop the bundle of nerves, the pleasure threatens to drown me.

I arch into Dagan’s hold. The position tilts my head back until Dagan’s mouth descends on mine. He claims me with a fierce kiss that shows me just how much he enjoys watching our lover consume me.

He cups my breasts, kneading the globes. My nipples stab his palms. Familiar lust overtakes my senses. I abandon all thought and embrace sensation.

My knees press closer to my torso when Warren spreads his fingers beneath my knees, pushing them up and apart. The pressure lifts my rear from the duvet, clearing a path for Warren to extend his laving to Dagan’s tight balls. The six-pack abs of my mate flex against my spine, making his cock jerk between us.

“Overachiever.” Dagan growls against my lips.

Our lover’s wicked tongue lashes us both. The pulsing aura of the men’s passion surrounds me, enhancing my own pleasure. I writhe in their grasp. The motion grinds my ass against Dagan’s cock. I wish I could tip forward enough to take him inside me but he subdues my struggles with the band of his muscular arms around my waist.

"No, love," he whispers. "I want Warren to take you. I need to know he still can."

The younger vampire lifts his head from where he'd been working my clit with soft pulls of his full lips even as he caressed Dagan's wrinkled sac. I whimper in frustration. Despite the inferno burning inside my belly, I am still frightened, empty.

I need to be possessed—reassured that I will not suffer alone, as self-centered as that may be.

I squirm from between my lovers then turn onto my hands and knees to present myself to Warren. His fingers tremble as they curl around my hips. Yet he makes no move to enter me. He has always been eager before.

My lips nuzzle the engorged shaft of Dagan's hard-on. If one of them does not take me soon I will impale myself on their flesh. My breasts are heavy as they hang beneath me, my restless motion dragging my nipples over the intricate embroidery of the coverlet.

Warren teases my flanks with featherlight strokes of his fingertips. Still, he hesitates.

"She needs *you*, Dagan. I'm a pale imitation. The bastard who has stolen her king. I don't deserve a reward for that."

"She *deserves* a mate. One who loves her as you do. Take what she's offering. Don't hurt her further."

I realize I'm crying only when Dagan dashes the tears from my cheeks. He licks the liquid from his hand. The tingle of his power washes over me. He reaches for Warren. The energy is no longer enough to force compliance but it still clarifies his demand. It wraps around the base of Warren's solid erection then tugs him toward my waiting pussy.

The head of his cock bumps my sensitive opening, causing me to whimper. I rock into the contact, gaining the barest hint of penetration.

"Amy," he groans. "Are you sure?"

"I need you, Warren. Please, join with me."

We cry out together when his stiff flesh skewers me with one long thrust. He collapses, blanketing my back as he begins to move inside me. The even glide of his hips fills me to capacity on every stroke. I clench around him, struggling to keep him buried to the hilt.

In this position, his balls tap my clit on every pass, driving me wild. I open my mouth on a moan. My lips bump into Dagan's steel-hard cock. My eyes flutter open. A bead of pre-cum rolls down the flared purple head of his shaft. I reach out my tongue to lick it away.

Dagan's broad hand fists in my hair, for the first time ever preventing me from tasting him. I never thought I'd see the day when he refused a blowjob.

"Could this harm her?" Dagan glances at Warren, whose face hovers inches from mine. The heat of his labored breathing bathes my cheek.

"No, the taint resides in your blood alone. As long as she doesn't drink from your veins she will remain unaffected."

Dagan's other hand tangles in Warren's hair. With slight pressure on the back of our heads, he guides each of us to one side of his erection. I meet Warren's gaze around the throbbing shaft. Though he continues to fuck me with that devastating rhythm, I can see we both long for more. Together, we reach out our tongues and lick a synchronized line along the entire length of Dagan's cock.

My mate roars as we continue to flick, suck and nip his painfully aroused hard-on. Warren begins to take me harder, his hips slapping my ass. The motion forces me to dip lower, so I open my lips wide to mouth Dagan's balls. They shift against my tongue, drawing closer to his core.

With more room to maneuver, Warren engulfs the tip then slides down Dagan's pole until our lips meet in a heated kiss.

"After five thousand years...you'd think it impossible to surprise me." Dagan's fingers knot in my hair, keeping me in place though I make no attempt to retreat.

Who would willingly abandon this rapture?

Warren, who tends to seek an edge of pain with his pleasure, moans. The vibration shakes Dagan's balls and my lips around them. Our lover pumps into my sopping pussy, igniting flame after flame of ecstasy inside me. The increased pace of his strokes heightens the intensity of his balls slapping my clit.

I let Dagan slip from my lips, afraid that I might lose control and bite him in my mindless passion.

"Yes, Warren. Fuck her well. I bet she's clamping around your cock now." A sheen of sweat glistens on Dagan's abdomen. His fingers twist in the sheets beneath him.

As much as the sight arouses him, I will never be able to outlast him. Warren's shaft stretches my clinging sheath with every penetration. The ridge of his cock head and the prominent veins caress me from the inside. The sight of him devouring my mate fuels my desire. But Dagan knows how to push me over the edge.

"Her sweet pussy loves your cock. Pull out, Warren."

He groans in protest but does as commanded after several more full thrusts.

"Tease her, make her beg for it."

The tip of his cock returns, blazing hot on my skin. He taps the blunt head against my clit, never pausing the pattern of his sucking. I watch his cheeks hollow around Dagan's shaft a moment before my muscles begin to spasm.

"Please, Warren, fill me. I don't want to come without you. Please! I need you!"

I groan in defeat when the first ripple of my abdomen signals my impending orgasm.

"Now. Fuck her, Warren."

Stars zoom past my eyes as the world explodes. Warren's thick erection parts the swollen flesh of my pussy. He slams inside me, riding me hard, taking me higher. The fierce grasp of my undulating tissue drags him with me into climax. His throat flexes around his shout and Dagan's cock before he too pulls off the magnificent erection.

Warren pulses inside me, flooding my pussy with stream after stream of his passion.

At the sight of our release, my mate joins us though no one is touching his cock. It twitches against his abdomen then sprays a fountain of cum in arc after arc. One pearly strand drapes across my face. Warren reaches out to lick it from my cheek, inciting another batch of thrusts and grunts that I match with an equal number of contractions.

I catch several droplets on my tongue then savor the taste with a satisfied hum.

Warren continues to shuttle inside me long after we are spent. He moves softly until his wilting cock slips from my hold. We groan together then help Dagan rest against the pillows.

We take up our posts, one on each side of my mate. My head rests on his chest, allowing me to witness the knowing exchange between the two men.

“Thank you, Warren.” Dagan draws our lover to him for an extended kiss then cradles us both against his weakening body. “You two will do just fine without me.”

Chapter Three

Today

I am a selfish creature.

Five thousand years of wild nights with my soulmate haven't quenched my thirst for his love or slaked my hunger for his touch. But as the vitality leaks from Dagan's crimson irises in a wash of bloody tears, I know there's only time for one more tryst. And one more fight. I cannot let him go without them.

Friends, nobles and staff file from the room after saying somber goodbyes. Warren lingers longest before bestowing a final, enduring kiss on pale lips. Pain obscures my vision. It prevents me from realizing we're alone until I hear Dagan's whispered entreaty.

"Lay with me, *Amystia*." Beloved light. He imparted the term of endearment, popular in his youth, on me before the pyramids. The pure label predated the modern concepts of good and evil that draw false boundaries on an endlessly complex universe.

Dagan's raspy voice is only a faint shadow of the resounding timbre he possessed less than a week ago. Seven days—a blink compared to millennia of existence. How well I know, each moment is precious. A single millisecond, a slip of the hand and a whim of fate can steal every modicum of bliss from one's existence.

Who would have believed an accident could claim the life of the world's oldest and most powerful vampire when endless assassins could not?

I lower myself to the satin sheets that cradle his withering body. Unbidden, my finger traces the ominous black line leading from the wound, along his veins, ending less than an inch from his still heart. The damage has progressed so much closer in the past hour.

It won't be long now.

"Come." Dagan spreads his arms wide. The strain around his mouth at the simple gesture is more than I can bear. I'm afraid to lay my head on his now frail shoulder, in the spot I've found solace and shelter for all my long life.

The corner of his wicked mouth slants up in a ghost of a smile. "You could never hurt me, Amystia. Come."

"I need you." Guilt infuses my gut for my weakness. I should be the one to comfort him, and yet I find myself clinging to his chilled torso, terrified to let go. My shaking body rattles against his as my control slips. "I'm begging you, as I have never done in all our time together. Let me perform the ritual."

"No. It's only a myth. I will not allow you to risk yourself, or Warren." My plea upsets Dagan. He struggles to draw breath. Though it pains me to see, I take the opportunity to argue my case when it would otherwise be impossible to get a word past my stubborn and dominant mate.

"I cannot live without you."

He coughs. The alien sound of suffering from a creature immune to sickness terrifies me. I send a thin stream of power to soothe his labored gasps as I stroke midnight locks from his handsome face.

"Grief has never destroyed a vampire. Especially not one as strong as you, Queen."

"I'll be the first, remembered in some tragic song, infamous among the covens. Is that what you want?" I'm not really kidding, though I try to sound as though I am. "If I cannot keep you here, I will follow where you go."

"You've always had a flair for the dramatic." Love radiates from his attempted grin in waves and he draws strength from our bond. "But this time, I will not change my mind. Your soul is priceless. More valuable to me than anything else. Including my own."

"But..."

“Amystia,” The thread of sound frayed, near to snapping. “It’s too late. Do not waste our time. Let me hold you.”

It is impossible to deny a dying man his final wish. I snuggle into his welcoming arms, our bodies forming a single unit, and lift my head to brush my lips against his as I have infinite times before. Desperation, longing and fear drive my frantic kiss. As always, Dagan becomes a sturdy receptacle for my turmoil of emotions—collecting them, bottling them and grounding me.

When I surface to gaze into his eyes, he whispers against my mouth, “I’m sorry I can’t love you one last time.”

With a thought, I banish our clothes to the bedroom floor. I nuzzle the sweet spot at the base of his neck, then lick my way down his muscular chest to scrape my fang across his nipple, just as he likes best. “You can.”

Before he can argue, I slide my palm lower, past the delectable ridges of his steel-hard abs, to cup his flaccid penis. Muted hunger flares in his eyes. Even on his deathbed, Dagan wants me nearly as much as I want him. As I have done during the deepest hours of previous nights, when our lust outlasted the capability of his body, I use my power to direct the flow of his hot, delicious blood. His cock inflates below my hand, transforming into the thick shaft that fills me to perfection.

If only it were so easy to stop the progression of his poison.

The weight of my full breasts rests on his muscular arm and my crimson fingernail traces the prominent vein that decorates the underside of his cock while memories of thousands of shared ecstasies bombard my mind.

“Hurry, Amystia.” The pleading in his voice stems from more than desire. If it had been that alone, I could have teased him for days. And oftentimes had.

I wrap currents of air around myself until I float into position, straddling his lean hips. Though our lovemaking is rushed, I’m wet and ready to hold Dagan as close as I can. Primal instincts take control. I hover over the blunt tip of his impressive erection before sinking onto it bit by bit.

It feels like coming home.

The intensity of our situation enhances the familiar sensation of our bodies gliding against each other but worry prevents me from soaking in the pleasure of our union. For Dagan, I work my magic and all my charms to raise him higher. I stroke his chest with my palms, lick a glistening trail over the seam of his lips and replace his suffering with desire.

Using more tricks, I enchant the satin sheet he lies on to caress every inch of his fevered skin while I ride his full erection. Beads of sweat dot Dagan's brow. I clasp his hands in mine against the bed as I prepare to grant him one final release. I focus my energy into an ethereal hand and use it to draw swirling spirals of delight across the sensitive sac housing his balls.

Words are beyond us now but the pleasure is plain to read in my lover's eyes. Our spirits twine together so tight, I can hear his thoughts as though they are my own. My brave, honorable mate struggles to resist until I am ready to find satisfaction with him.

I don't think it will be possible this time.

I'm amazed when, with one last burst of strength, he summons his power to flutter against my clit in the single motion guaranteed to throw me into oblivion. I shatter around him, the spasms of my flesh dragging him with me. Ecstasy permeates our bodies, our souls, and the power of our joining crackles through the very air around us.

A satisfied smile registers on Dagan's face. His eyes open wide as his gaze locks onto mine. He mouths, "I love you."

Then, he is gone.

I reach out to him with my mind.

Nothing exists.

Chapter Four

Disbelief swamps my senses but even that cannot eclipse the agony shredding my insides. For a moment, I observe the lifeless shell of my mate before overcoming my instinctive distaste and sinking my fangs into the thick artery at the base of his neck. I have not lived this long, and served as Queen of our people, without learning to do what I must despite my personal feelings.

Dagan's blood is bitter. Rancid poison and the stench of death ruin the sacred flavor of my mate. I ignore nature's warning, swallowing despite the reflexive reaction of my body, which urges me to purge the spoiled food.

There isn't a moment to waste. Even as I drain the last bit of lethal toxin from Dagan, I call out. My dignified status doesn't generally lend itself to shrieking, but my royal bearing can't conceal the horror in my heart.

"Warren!"

The bedroom door slams open and the tall, lithe vampire appears at my side with preternatural speed. His gorgeous face crumples in sorrow as he absorbs the scene before him. Dagan's wasted body, the fresh puncture wound on his neck and the drip of still-warm blood from my fangs declare my intent.

"What have you done, Amy? There's no going back now. You have to attempt the Phoenix Incantation." It isn't a question. Warren's low voice covers a core of steel. The perfect complements to Dagan's brawn and savvy, his rational mind and dedication to academics have earned him the title of King Dagan's most trusted advisor. But it is his quiet confidence, proven loyalty and underlying vulnerability that have made him our closest friend for a thousand years.

During the past week, Warren and I had frantically searched the tomes of the compound's extensive library for a cure but all we uncovered were cryptic references to an arcane rite.

The Phoenix Incantation.

"I'm sorry, Warren." He lifts me from the bed. I take the solace offered in his steady embrace with unabashed greed, speaking in hushed tones against the warm plane of his chest as he holds me. "I didn't want you to be torn between your king's command and my insistence. This way, either the poison or the magic will reunite me with Dagan. I can't bear to be separated from him."

"Did he give you his blood willingly?" Over my head, Warren's tear-filled stare fixes on the remains of the man we both loved most. My skin tingles as he levitates the corpse to the waiting marble platform. The whisper of satin declares the black sheet has become a shroud.

I shake my head in sadness, "He forbade me to try. I took it right after..."

"That will make things more difficult. The incantation works best when the subject seeds their life force with the will to be anchored to the mortal world." Warren voices his concerns aloud. It's endearing. We'd been over this plan many times in the past days, after all optimism for Dagan's recovery had evaporated.

"You still plan to execute the magic alone?" The flash of hurt in Warren's eyes adds another weight to the burden on my soul.

"Yes. Direct me. There's only an hour or so until dawn." The complex summons would take time to prepare. In all the obscure references, we'd found only one consistent instruction. The ritual had to be complete before daybreak following the death of a soulmate.

"What will you use to draw his essence to you? The magic requires something strong enough to pierce through the underworld."

"Memories. I know it didn't work for the ancients, Warren. But Dagan and I shared millennia of experience—far more than the average lifespan during the dark times."

Warren shakes his head in vehement denial. "I've been thinking. There's a better way."

"Does it place you at risk?" I can't bear to have his death on my conscience.

"I would forsake my life for either of you as my king and queen and my soul for your friendship." He strokes a stray tress of hair from my face with unrivaled tenderness. Warren has always embodied a softness Dagan lacks. His refusal to answer my question gives me all the information I need.

"In case things don't go as planned..." I can't bring myself to voice the worst. "Our people will look to you for guidance, for leadership. They need you, Warren."

"And what of my needs?" His graceful, long-fingered hands cup my face, tilting it toward his. "I don't wish to be sentenced to a life alone. You should understand that."

The sincerity in his gray eyes tugs at my heart but I won't condemn him to a fate worse than death. Failure in the Phoenix Incantation results in the voiding of the conjurer's soul.

"You belong here, Warren. You're barely twelve hundred years old. You have your whole life ahead of you. In time, you'll find your true mate and forget about us." I bestow a serene kiss on his lush mouth to ease the sting of my rejection.

"No one could ever replace you in my heart." He pushes me away then spins to face the shrouded form across the room, his fists clenched at his sides. An uncharacteristic crack in his reserve allows his anger and frustration to pour out. "It's my fucking fault he's dead!"

I reach up and lay my hand on his shoulder. His violent trembling vibrates down my outstretched arm. "It was an accident. No one blames you. Dagan knew better than to enter your laboratory without knocking."

Warren faces me. The unveiled misery in his expression knocks me back several steps. "I'll never forgive myself if I don't try everything within my power to bring him home."

The ultimate truth of his statement rings between us. Who am I to destroy his chance for absolution? "What are you suggesting?"

"I've seen the power of your love for each other during sex." He hesitates as though gathering courage to propose the most logical solution. I already know what he'll say. As usual, he's right. "Together, we'll call him to us with passion."

"You read the warnings, Warren. The magic will ensnare any participants in the rite." The ramifications of his scheme swim in my mind. "This would bind you to us forever."

"You wouldn't want to have me? Or is it Dagan who would object?" Uncertainty colors his automatic response. How have I missed the depth of his emotions? His cool, bookish façade hides feelings that run deeper than I imagined.

I gather his stiff body to mine and squeeze him before meeting his searching gaze. "Dagan and I have often talked of proposing a more permanent relationship between us. We only delayed because we wanted to be sure you had the chance to search for a lover who could be yours alone. In fact, that's why we came to you that day. Once you'd dismissed Sylvia, we knew you were meant to be ours."

He blinks back the tears gracing his full lashes like dew on a crisp morning. "The two of you are all I've ever wanted. The others were just a distraction. And now I stand to lose you both. Let me do this."

Warren's fingers dig into my upper arms with bruising pressure, a testament to his desperation. He has never touched me with anything but the utmost care before.

"How do we begin?" I ask. Relief erodes the tension in his pinched expression. His head dips forward until his forehead rests on mine and we stand eye to eye for a long moment. Then the scholar returns and he's all business.

"Stay here."

Warren uses his gift for preternatural speed to run to his laboratory and gather supplies. He transports a sturdy table made of scarred planks along with all the necessary supplies in the blink of an eye. He wastes no time, levitating me onto the

rough wood. The coarse surface abrades my bare skin. I shift restlessly, in search of a comfortable position. Before I find one, his power wraps around my wrists and ankles, tugging them to the corners of the platform.

I gape at Warren from my vulnerable, spread-eagle pose. Where is the careful, submissive man I've come to love?

"There is no time to waste on pleasantries, Queen. Dawn approaches."

The menacing snick of metal shackles encircling my limbs both frightens and thrills me. Instinct prods me to test the binding but the mystical artifacts prevent my magic from undoing the clasps. I am truly held at Warren's mercy.

Before my eyes, a silver ceremonial robe replaces his modern clothing, transforming his innocent appearance into the image of a powerful sorcerer straight out of legend. If anyone can save Dagan, this man can. I swallow past the lump in my throat when he turns to a thick, leather-bound book—the one he compiles his notes in—lying open on a stand nearby. Sandy hair feathers over Warren's forehead in familiar disarray as he peruses the flowing script.

He mutters to himself as he reads. "Yes, third circle here. Then the forms, finally the call." He nods one last time before assessing me. His intense stare burns my bound body. "Dagan's spirit won't be able to resist you."

Warren raises his hands, palms up. His eyes close and all the lights douse. Panic threatens to overwhelm me as I struggle to see in the supernatural darkness. Night never blinds a vampire. I thrash against the restraints, terrified, but I can't break free.

"Warren?" I hardly recognize the feeble croak that escapes my throat.

His fine-boned hand clamps over my mouth an instant before he whispers in my ear. The murmur comes so soft I wouldn't be able to hear him if not for my augmented senses. "The incantation has begun. Any misspoken words can have unintended consequences. You must not use your powers either, they can interfere. Forgive me, Queen."

I wonder what he's apologizing for a moment before a scrap of cloth wads in my mouth, trapped by another strip bound behind my head. Warren's hand lingers, stroking my hair until I can control my instinct to fight. Once more, his barely audible voice snakes through my fear. "Last chance to stop, after this we're committed or the results will be disastrous. Are you sure?"

I nod, the only way I can communicate. Nothing can revoke my determination to attempt the ritual if there's even a remote chance of success. Besides, the poison I ingested already burns through my veins. The successful spell presents my single chance at survival.

Once again, Warren removes his support to continue the rite. I'm alone in the dark.

Is this what it's like when you die?

My skin crawls, my nipples draw tight and goose bumps rise up on my arms as powerful sorcery pervades the room. One by one, red candles illuminate the inky blackness as Warren chants in a monotonous tone. The flickering light outlines his sleek shape as he circles my immobilized form. With every flame that ignites, an answering spike of arousal slams through my core. There is something seductive about the authority he wields and my helplessness before him. He imbues my body with the desire to attract Dagan's soul.

The rhythm of his mellifluous speech entrances me. Several minutes pass, maybe as long as a half hour, before I'm aware of him standing beside my shoulder. Hundreds of candles, positioned in three rings encircling me, set the room ablaze.

My eyes widen as Warren plucks one from the iron stand and then holds it aloft over my exposed torso. His gaze flicks to mine as his hand tilts, causing the molten wax to bulge along the lip of the candle. The power surging in the air swirls the curls around Warren's face. Beautiful and dangerous, he towers over me.

The first drop of maroon paraffin falls as though in slow motion. Warren's arm lifts high, providing the material plenty of time to cool. I watch with a mix of fascination and horror as the scalding blob races ever nearer. I'm thankful for the fabric that

muffles my moan of pain, and arousal, when the bead finally splatters across the taut skin of my abdomen.

Something wild rears up in Warren's stare. Then he releases a thin stream of wax that forms the foundational line of a spell form down the center of my torso. I writhe within the confines of my bonds, the heat soaking into my core and setting me on fire. Moisture gathers between my legs while Warren continues unaffected. All the while, he maintains the ancient language of the incantation.

I brace myself when the next spurt of liquid drapes across my breasts. My heels drum on the wood beneath me but the sting quickly morphs into desire. Three, four more times, Warren decorates my flesh with the scorching substance. Each flare of pain mixes with the enchantment pulsing around us, instilling me with uncontrollable lust. I would beg him to touch me if this damn gag didn't dampen my cries.

He returns the candle, now a sliver of its previous size, to the ceremonial holder. His hands fan out over my abdomen and his voice raises. The invocation reaches a fevered pitch.

Then all is silent.

The atmosphere is heavy, laden with energy. Warren unties the knot on my gag then grabs a goblet from a pedestal near the tome of instructions. He gulps—his masculine throat bobbing—before leaning over me, removing the cloth from my mouth then sealing his lips over mine. The acidic tang of ceremonial wine spills onto my tongue as he shares the offering.

Hungry, I delve into the recesses of his sweet mouth to sop up the last drops. He kisses me with unleashed fervor the like of which I've never experienced from our docile playmate. His robe vanishes then he flies on top of me, steamy flesh pressed to steamy flesh. My head drops with a *thunk* against the table, exposing my neck to Warren in the clearest sign of a vampire's trust and desire.

I imagine Dagan. How he would love to watch Warren ravish me while I sucked Dagan's glorious cock! A faint pressure daubs my lips as though I can actually feel his engorged tip applying for entrance.

Warren distracts me from the sensation as he nibbles his way between my breasts, his long body nestled in the cradle of my thighs. His tongue laves my belly, soothing the sting of his love bites. He's always been attentive to my pleasure.

I moan when he suckles one hard nipple against his razor sharp teeth for a moment before continuing his journey, leaving a trail of passion in his wake. His elegant hands surround my hips, gripping them tight before he buries his face in my pussy.

Warren's wicked tongue tortures me, flicking and flittering in delicious eddies around my clit and the swells of my engorged labia. I strain against the shackles, desperate to press my wet folds against his talented mouth. A whimper of delicious frustration seeps from my parted lips.

Being bound always enhances my desire. It reminds me of the time Dagan captured my wrists then pinned me to our oversized bed, giving Warren free rein to take pleasure from my exposed flesh. Instead, he'd made a study of all the ways to tease me, driving me wild—just as he was now—for hours until I nearly collapsed from exhaustion after dozens of orgasms. My forearms prickle in the spot Dagan's hands had encircled.

A ray of panic invades my sphere of longing. What if we cannot reach my mate? The light touch on my arm evaporates as my focus scatters. Warren's head snaps up, his silent communication imploring me to concentrate.

He provides incentive, his finger dipping inside the moist entrance of my pussy. Another traces the tight ring of muscle below. The dual sensations force me to recall the special times I've spent sandwiched between the sweat-slicked bodies of my two lovers.

Dagan has always been an ass man. He loves to fondle, spank and fuck my rear. While I relish submitting to my mate in the most primitive display of possession, being with both Dagan and Warren enhances the experience. It allows my mate to take what

he needs yet provides me the means to find my own satisfaction. Nothing can compare to the sensation of two hard cocks pistoning inside me while I'm cocooned in the heat from Dagan's muscular body and Warren's trim form.

Warren's exploratory digits seem to expand inside me. I can no longer deny that there's more at work than our earthly flesh. I tense then peek at the vampire between my legs. His concerned gaze fixes on mine, careful to observe the situation. He nods, reassuring me and driving me higher when his face nuzzles my pussy.

I gasp when he sucks my clit into his warm, moist mouth. Pleasure zings through my veins, forcing me to rock my hips, begging for more. I watch him ingest every drop of my arousal so I witness the moment when his control snaps. His eyes turn wild, almost possessed. He lunges up then covers my body.

With one thrust, Warren enters me completely. The sudden intrusion of his long cock shocks my accommodating muscles. I can only remember one other time he conquered me with an intensity nearing this. Dagan had commanded Warren to ride me hard while my mate watched, stroking his thick erection. All the while he had coached Warren, encouraging him to fuck me harder, faster. Just as Warren is doing now.

On the edge of my vision, an insubstantial apparition coalesces. I can almost picture Dagan as he was that night, fist wrapped around his meaty cock, his chest bellowing with harsh breaths as he witnessed Warren use me and make me love it.

Warren's shaft jerks inside me and, somehow, I know he is remembering the same liaison. His thrusts grow frenzied. His steel-hard flesh rasps against a delicious spot deep inside me. On any other night, it would be more than enough to make me come.

My orgasm is elusive. After so many lifetimes with Dagan, I struggle to tip over the edge in his absence. No matter how skilled Warren is, or how amazing his long cock feels stroking my pussy, I miss my connection with Dagan.

I conjure an image of the most erotic night of our lives. The night Dagan and I first discussed mating Warren.

After several rounds of escalating lovemaking, Warren had buried himself inside me one last time while Dagan recovered his stamina. I took Dagan's half-hard cock in my mouth, simply enjoying the taste of our mingled essence and the heavy weight of his shaft on my tongue. I tried to fondle his balls with one hand but our positions limited the motion of my arm.

I rolled away, letting him slip from my lips, intending to pleasure his sac with my mouth. Before I could, Warren captured my jaw and guided me to him for a searing kiss. His moan, and the thickening of his shaft inside me, made it clear he enjoyed the flavor of Dagan's musk. We turned together, me to lave Dagan's testicles and Warren to steal his first taste of cock.

Warren never faltered in his pounding rhythm inside me as he engulfed Dagan's instantly rejuvenated erection in wet heat. From my vantage point, I watched Warren's throat flex as he worked the head of Dagan's cock while I lapped at my mate's balls. When Dagan fisted his hand in Warren's hair then tugged our lover's face to his abdomen, Warren shivered inside me.

I can almost hear the strangled groan Dagan made right before he said, "I need to fuck right now. Get out of the way, Warren. Or I'm going to take your virgin ass!"

Warren didn't move.

Above me, Warren gasps and his eyes glaze over. Just as they had that night. Behind him, the flickering candlelight casts a shadowy outline of Dagan mounting our lover. Warren bucks on top of me, grinding his shaft into my greedy pussy then retreating as he impales himself on the ghost of Dagan's cock.

The carnal illusion floods my soul with passion. Wave after wave of pleasure crash over me, threatening to drown me in sensation. My orgasm triggers Warren's. Jets of his hot cum fill me as his cock pulses somewhere far below the surface of my belly. My muscles clamp around his jerking flesh, wringing every last drop of ecstasy from our climaxes.

I can't breathe. I can't move. I can't think or fear. All I can do is accept what he gives me and wish Dagan were here to share it.

A shockwave of ecstasy, magic and love radiates out from the juncture of our bodies. Warren tips his head back and roars with completion. A starburst of white light flares so bright I squint into the gleam for any sign of success even as I expect to burst into flames from the searing desire blazing inside me. Then the sparkle fades, leaving me gasping in the wake of our magically enhanced coupling.

Warren flops beside me when the black satin sheet across the room flutters to the ground. Nothing lies beneath it. For long moments, the only sounds in the room are the sputter of candles about to burn out, our harsh panting and the clank of the room's automatic shutters blocking out the breaking dawn.

I close my eyes, terrified. Have we failed? I prepare myself to surrender to the void in payment for the faulty spell. The death of a vampire leads to no afterlife.

Chapter Five

Instead of the abyss devoid of sound and light I expect, I hear the most beautiful thing in the entire universe.

Dagan's gruff, arousal-laden voice barks, "First, you disobey your king by dabbling in dark magic you don't fully understand. Now you two will stand aside and let your mate suffer?"

My eyelids fly open. Dagan kneels behind Warren, his gorgeous cock in hand. The sheen in his eyes proves he comprehends the gravity of the situation despite his flip comment. He guides his shaft along the furrow of Warren's ass but both of us are too exhausted, and overcome with relief, to do more than cling to each other as tears of gratitude roll over our cheeks.

"Dagan..." I try to express the hundreds of emotions swirling in my mind but it's unnecessary. All three of us understand what must happen. We require no instructions, the magic lives in us. Instincts drive Dagan to complete the ceremony by grounding himself in our world once more.

He jerks his shaft with lazy grace while he murmurs to us. "It was so dark, so cold. Then I saw a beam of light composed of brilliant colors. I knew it was you. Both of you. It was painfully beautiful, the way I feel when you're with me, when we're making love. It hurt to move, to swim against the current sweeping me away. But I couldn't let it take me. We belong together."

His last word draws out to a growl. He'd fought to return to us like the warrior king we've loved for eons. I've never craved him more. The tempo of his hand crescendos and his voice takes on an ancient inflection when he pronounces. "You are mine. And I am yours. Forever."

It's impossible to forget the moment he made that vow to me when we were new, barely turned vampires. There isn't a shred of doubt in my soul that reforming our sacred oath, including Warren in our sphere of mated bliss, is part of our destiny.

I surround Warren's trembling fingers with my own. Dagan uses his enhanced magic to move the three of us, still linked, to our marriage bed. Though I can recognize the fingerprint of his life force with my eyes closed, it is even more spectacular than before. Unbreakable.

The net of his unique power cradles us until we float onto the down mattress. I've always thought the enormous bed, raised on a gold-leafed dais, to be an over-extravagant indulgence by my romantic husband. At the dawn of this new phase of our lives, the ornate canopied enclosure makes the perfect backdrop for our extended pledges.

This time, sorcery ensures their truth. The Phoenix Incantation has granted all my seemingly futile hopes, my desperate wishes. No amount of time with the two men I love could suffice. I'll need eternity to illustrate the depth of my devotion. And bask in theirs in return.

In unrehearsed unison, Warren and I each claim one of Dagan's giant hands then recite the vow in return. "You are mine. And I am yours. Forever."

Dagan crushes me to his chest as he settles onto his side in the mountain of assorted pillows. He drags Warren closer until I am sandwiched between them. The heat of their toned muscles surrounds me but only provides a millionth of the warmth I derive from the emotions churning within my heart.

Above my head, Dagan whispers as he stares into our new mate's eyes. "Thank you both for the risk you took. It makes me ill enough to die all over again imagining what could have happened to you."

His burly arm drapes over Warren's waist, skimming my hip.

"We were coming for you, Warren. That day. Please believe we wanted you long before this enchantment bound you to us."

The gentle caress of elegant fingers moves along my ribs then up Dagan's wrist. I turn until my back is snug against Dagan's chest so I can glimpse the peace in Warren's expression. He smiles at me then says, "I know."

He dips his head, nuzzling his nose against mine before nibbling at my lips. I sigh when he releases me. Then I tilt my face up to watch as he and Dagan exchange a fierce kiss. Dagan's hand slides up the flexed muscles of Warren's shoulder to anchor him in place. The corresponding throb of his rejuvenated erection on my stomach has me squirming.

"Take her. She is yours as well as mine." Dagan rasps in fragments between rough duels of their tongues.

Warren angles his hips then uses his power to align his cock with my welcoming flesh. He glides into me, filling me with one long stroke. The pleasure drives me past rational thought. I throw one leg over his hip to cling to him, though it would be impossible to get any closer. My lips latch onto the pulse in his throat but I force myself to refrain from the delicacy until the perfect moment.

They must hurry, I need to taste him. To seal our bond.

Lost in the rapture of his smooth thrusts, I hadn't noticed Dagan probing my rear with a tendril of his magic. The tiny stream embedded in me begins to expand, catching my attention, enhancing my pleasure. I moan when the air between my legs is formed into many tiny fingers that tease my sensitized pussy.

The flurry of motion draws the arousal dripping around Warren's cock to my ass. My lover fucks harder as several of the tendrils extend their reach, shimmering over his tight balls. I laugh at his tortured curse. My amusement is cut short when they continue growing until they undulate over my clit.

I clamp around Warren's cock and around the magic that has begun to spread my ass open in such gradual increments I feel only the pleasure and none of the pain. The excess moisture from my pussy is drawn onto the clenching ring of my ass, painted there with swirls of insubstantial contact that leave me craving more.

“Dagan, I need you.” My fingernails rake Warren’s back as I struggle to steal more of him, of them both, but I am pinned helpless between them.

“Shh, love. You’ll have me. You always have me. Let me work you open, I don’t want you to hurt for even a moment. No more suffering today.” The mass of solidified air filling my rear bulges again, though nowhere near the girth of his mammoth cock. I don’t care if it stings, I want him inside me. He’ll ease the ache soon enough.

As though he senses my impatience, Warren redoubles his efforts to distract me. At the same time he lunges within my pussy, pummeling my sopping flesh, Dagan increases the swirls of his magic massaging my clit.

I cannot resist them. My spine arches, pressing my head into Dagan’s shoulder. He devours my lips as he continues to prepare me. I fight the assault of ecstasy but I cannot hold on.

“Come for me, Amy.” Warren groans as he observes the rapture that must be written on my face. His slick chest glides over mine, stroking the aching peaks of my breasts.

He grinds against me, driving me beyond control. I shatter around him, screaming his name even as Dagan expands the probe in my ass. Before the spasms of climax fade, Dagan replaces the shaft of air with his cock. I’ve never felt it this hard before. Huge, even for him, I see why he has insisted on waiting.

Dripping wet and ready, I expect him to impale me with ease. Yet he triggers an answering aftershock of desire with every thrust that works him a little deeper. When the head of his cock nudges Warren’s stiff flesh through the thin tissue separating them, both of my mates groan.

My orgasm is endless, bursting in surge after surge as they refuse to let me relax. Dagan roars when he is finally seated to the root. His magic lifts us. We float over the bed—spinning, hovering so that both of my lovers can move freely within me. The vigorous lunges of their hungry bodies leave me incapacitated. All I can do is enjoy the gift of their passion.

My hair drapes around us like a curtain, or hangs beneath us like a waterfall as we spin and rock together. The remnants of my orgasm coalesce, building again into something more substantial.

“Yes, love. That’s right. Take us with you this time.” Dagan redoubles his efforts. Or maybe his control has disintegrated. He fucks me like a wild animal, though his hands are still tender when they caress the sides of my breasts. “I need to taste you.”

The last is a ragged growl from his throat. The same urge burns my belly. Just the thought shoves me closer to the precipice. Warren moans then tilts his face to lick a path up Dagan’s neck. My fangs rest over the artery exposed to me. When the pumping blood beneath Warren’s skin bumps against my teeth, I am lost.

I come again, squeezing the shafts that fuck me together. The flexing of all my muscles sinks my teeth into Warren’s neck. The delicious tang of his blood fills my mouth, gliding over my tongue. The erotic pain obliterates his control. He snarls as he erupts deep inside my pussy, still fucking as he bites Dagan. His essence is tinged with Dagan’s flavor, the combination pure perfection to my taste buds.

Dagan surrenders, groaning as he pumps his seed into my ass. The razor sharp canines that pierce my artery trigger the last burst of my orgasm. Nothing can surpass the pleasure of feeding my mates. Dagan releases in a final fury of passion. His power sputters as his concentration evaporates. We tumble to the bed together.

The punctures on our necks heal instantly as our fangs are withdrawn. Warren lifts his head from its cushion on my breast, to lap tiny spatter marks from my cheek as *our* mate collapses beside us.

The moment the three of our essences have mingled, irrevocably blended, the taint of the poison lifts from my blood. A tingling sensation builds over my heart in an intricate design. Simultaneously, each of us glances down to discover our own matching brand.

A single phoenix, encased in a heart-shaped flame, rises above three separate figures—identical, everlasting and flawless.

Jayne Rylon

Just as our love for each other will eternally be.

About the Author

Jayne Rylon's stories usually begin as a daydream in an endless business meeting. Her writing acts as a creative counterpoint to her straight-laced corporate existence. She lives in Ohio with two cats and her husband, who both inspires her fantasies and supports her careers. When she can escape her office, she loves to travel the world, avoid speeding tickets in her beloved Sky and, of course, read.

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