



Immortally Theirs

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and occurrences are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places or occurrences, is purely coincidental.

For those who like a little added bite to their vampire romance.

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Chapter One

Shayla McDormand smoothed her hand along the sleek banister as she climbed the stairs. The hem of her nightgown trailed along the crimson velvet carpet that had lost its plush feel over time. Much of the wallpaper and fixtures around the manor showed heavy wear. In many ways, it reflected the way she viewed herself.

She'd inherited the property from her parents after they had passed away. The gesture came as a surprise, considering their lack of communication since she'd left home. And the fact she never came back to visit. Not that she wanted to be perceived as a bad daughter or ungrateful for all they'd done for her while growing up, but once she'd left, she'd promised never to return.

And here she was—another broken promise in a long line of them.

The first day she'd stepped through the doors, guilt consumed her. Her mother's perfume scented the air, as did her father's pipe tobacco. Old feelings from her childhood resurfaced. She should've visited instead of punishing them. Looking back, she knew they had only moved there to offer her a better education and a safe place to grow up. But the cruelty she experienced on her first day of school shattered any and all hopes of fitting in. Her classmates had deemed her a freak. Shunned her for living in a haunted house where the previous owner hated children. Treated her as though she didn't exist until graduation day, when she finally left to start over.

Sure, there'd been ghosts. Some even became her playmates.

Twelve years later, there were still ghosts, but none from her childhood.

The ambience of the house fit the bitter adult she'd become. It almost suffocated her. By the end of the first week, she thought the depression would consume her. And she'd probably have given into the darkness if it hadn't been for Armand Coudray and Bastian Trabor, her vampire lovers who knew no boundaries when it came to pleasures of the body. They'd saved her from...well herself, really.

It was the evening before All Hallows Eve. The same night a year ago, they had appeared

to her.

At first, she'd feared the vampires, afraid they would hurt her. But it didn't take long before she looked forward to their visits. They made her laugh, and were gracious with compliments. Made her feel loved and wanted, as if everything was going to be okay. It was hard not to fall for their charms, or the way they catered to her every need.

Bastian had seduced her first, but later that same night, Armand had made his presence known. She'd awoken in a haze, happily wedged between two luscious hard bodies. It had been perfect.

Rare was the morning when she didn't feel sated beyond all reason and comprehension. Soon the depression lifted and she looked forward to each day with a renewed spirit.

For almost a year, they'd become an important part of her life. Spoiled her rotten. Left her beautiful gowns once made for queens. Brought her breakfast in bed and often fed it to her. Drew hot baths. Read her stories. And best of all—pleasured her. Sometimes separately, but the most memorable of nights were when they were all together. Bodies rocking, swaying, moving as one. She didn't ever want to come down from the rapturous highs they took her to with their hands, mouths and cocks.

But once again, a shadow of gloom hung over her. The vampires wanted a specific answer. An answer she didn't want to give, an answer that would change her world—mortality and all.

Although sex with the dreamy vampires was phenomenal, her feelings for them went deeper. She genuinely cared for them both and couldn't picture her life without one being a part of it. So when they told her she needed to choose which of them she would marry, it felt like a ton of bricks on her shoulders. She'd become used to their presence, their quirks and mannerisms, and the feeling of completeness that she'd never experienced before. To not have one by her side would be like day without night. She'd been so happy and never expected it would end.

Shayla had never wished for time to move slower.

Her thoughts remained jumbled as she ascended the steps. At the top of the stairs, she sighed and strolled toward her room, bypassing the other rooms along the way. Six rooms to be exact, not including the study—a room she avoided. The moment she'd entered the room, she feared being in there alone. A large eerie portrait of a man that hung on the far wall disturbed

her. More than once, she removed it and stored it in the closet only to find the portrait put back the next day. And not by her hands. Since then she didn't bother to go back in. It wasn't worth the extra gray hairs.

She paused at her bedroom door and took a deep breath. Fatigue had set in early tonight, at least in her body. Her mind wouldn't stop racing. It would feel good to lie down, though she didn't expect to sleep. Not with such an important decision weighing heavy on her. She'd chosen the largest room at the end for the rich scarlet drapes of the large four-poster canopy bed, a place where she felt like a queen. They matched the scarlet curtains bordering the large picture windows that overlooked a stone courtyard with its many statues and a labyrinth of hedges. Hardly any flowers grew though, and those that did promptly died. Everything was a stone gray. Much like her thoughts this evening.

Shayla opened the door and at once, a smile curved her lips. A warm and inviting fire blazed in the fireplace. Someone had read her mind, and she guessed it was Armand. He had a flair for the dramatics and paid particular attention to the smallest details.

She leaned against the bedpost and stared into the flames, watching them flicker and sway. On rainy nights, Armand would read her romantic overtures from books and poems. Sometimes he'd act out the part of the anguished lover who ravaged the unsuspecting woman. She enjoyed it and the role-playing. He promised to treat her like a queen if she was chosen. He promised to give her everything she could ever want. Bastian offered the same in his own modest way.

While Armand liked sex to be artistic and savored her body with his tongue, Bastian was all about powerful strokes with his cock and taking command. Together they offered the perfect blend of pain and pleasure. Shayla often wondered what it would be like for them to drink her blood during the height of an orgasm. They never tried and she wondered if there was something wrong with her. Maybe someday she'd ask.

But for all the wonderful things they did, they didn't always understand her. Being vampires, they had the luxury of knowing the future that lay in front of them, where she was clueless. They didn't bother with regrets or agonize over the past of each day, trying to figure out ways to fix what they lacked control over. Though the thought of being immortal excited her, the thought of choosing which one she'd spend an eternity with didn't. If she could just have a sign. A single glimpse into the future to show her which path to take.

She would have to come to a decision by the stroke of midnight tomorrow night, or they would both leave and never return. Once again, she'd be alone. The house would drive her mad, and she feared it would be her undoing.

Shayla sensed a presence and turned.

Armand stood tall in his five foot nine, half-naked glory. Dark hair hung down to an inch above his shoulders with a jagged part at the side. She loved to stare into his deep green eyes that smoldered when he climaxed. Somewhat slender, his body was an equal mix of sinewy muscle and smooth planes. He considered himself a student of Shakespeare and Keats. Favored plays, poetry and fine literature. He loved to be in love and to express love with words. Love was art in his opinion. Her gaze followed the muscles of his abs downward to where his skintight black pants outlined his noticeable erection.

"Evening, love." His voice echoed deep and seductive.

Her pulse sped up. If she could purr, she would have. "Evening," she replied.

His glance heated her body from the inside out. "I don't suppose you've made your decision early?"

His self-serving question quickly tempered the blaze in her belly. It was the last thing she wanted to discuss.

"I'm afraid not." Her clipped tone came out harsher than she'd planned. Still, she wanted him to know the decision caused her nothing but anguish.

Armand raised a brow. "It has been a year, my sweet."

"*Almost*, a year," she corrected. "It will be one year tomorrow. I still have time to choose."

He sighed. "You know the life I can offer you. Riches. Luxuries. Anything your heart desires."

"Yes, and Bastian offers the same," she countered.

He chuckled. "Bastian doesn't come from the same bloodline as I."

She knew Armand meant well, but sometimes his words came out downright arrogant. Bastian was every bit as handsome and debonair, but without the theatrics and conceit. At the same time, she knew Armand couldn't help the way he was, and in the end she wouldn't change anything about him.

"I don't mean royalty and riches," she explained. "Just that he offers an immortal life

with all the perks, and then some. The same as you do.”

“But *I* only have eyes for you,” the vampire asserted.

“As does he.”

Armand clicked his tongue. “So he claims.”

“With the same fierce determination and loyalty as you,” she added.

Annoyance streaked his handsome features. “Then he steals my lines.”

She laughed and shook her head. “Always the actor.”

He reached out and traced a finger along her cheekbone. Her nipples instantly hardened. “Not when it comes to my love for you.” His expression turned serious. “That is all me. No acting required.”

Shayla exhaled and felt her entire body weaken at his touch. Sometimes she hated that her body responded so easily. Especially now when she wanted to be mad at them. Didn’t they understand what they were putting her through? How it ate her up inside? The stress was wearing heavy on her.

“It isn’t easy to have two men swear their undying love and have to choose between them,” she said softly. Her eyes blurred with the onset of tears, but she refused to let them show.

Armand waved his hand. “Bastian doesn’t even know the meaning of love.”

She narrowed her gaze and tilted her head. “Don’t say that.”

On cue, Bastian walked into the room with one brow raised. Shayla wondered how much he’d heard. Judging by the glare, he’d heard enough.

Bastian moved with a slow, sexy gait to the fireplace and stood in front of it. His long ice-blond hair and pale blue eyes were such a striking contrast to Armand’s darker features. He wore an artist’s shirt that showed off the planes of his chest, and leather pants practically painted on. The nomadic vampire’s preference was for swordplay and games. He too shared a passion for Shakespeare, but more for the darker side of love and the physical fighting than the poetic romance. He had a commanding approach, which is why she deemed him the fighter and Armand the lover. Though Bastian didn’t need any lessons in how to pleasure a woman.

Bastian nodded her way and then directed another heated glare at Armand. “Have you nothing better to do than hound her?”

“I’d hardly call it hounding,” the dark-haired vampire retorted. “Besides, this is *my* time to be with her.”

Bastian shook his head and propped his body against the fireplace mantle. "Please, you all but summoned me here with your incessant whining. It interrupted my reading."

Armand chortled. "Ah, I see. Trying to win her over by pretending to care about literature and the fine arts? I know you envy me, but must you mimic everything I do?"

The blond vampire scowled and turned his attention back to her. "My dear, you look lovely this evening. Are you pleased with the fire I started for you?"

She nodded in surprise. So Bastian was working his charm on her with something out of the ordinary. "Yes, I found the house chilly tonight. Winter isn't too far off. Of course it always feels like winter here."

"He stole the idea from me," interjected Armand. "You know that is *my* style, not his. I didn't get to it first because I planned to warm you up in other ways. More intimate ways."

"The thought never crossed your mind," Bastian said. "And as to your earlier comment of mimicking you, I'd never stoop to your level or try to be like you. If you had some redeeming quality, maybe, but you lack any."

Armand sneered. "You pretentious prick. I'll have you know—"

"Enough," Shayla said, though more to herself, and went to the window.

She rested her forehead against the cool glass and looked out to the courtyard in time to see the little girl ghost disappear into the air. A shudder went through her. All this time and the ghosts still startled her. Two other ghosts appeared to her since moving back, though she sensed many others around. There was the cook who chopped food early in the morning, and the carriage driver with his alabaster white horses. The carriage would arrive at the front of the house on any given night and ring the doorbell. He'd then escort an unseen person into the carriage and drive away. It fascinated her as much as it frightened her.

Shayla turned and faced the brooding men. "Enough," she repeated with more emphasis. "I don't care to be in the middle of your petty quarrels."

"Sorry," they mumbled in unison.

She was sorry too. Sorry to be expected to make a decision that caused her tremendous grief.

Armand approached and rested his hand on her shoulder. The heat went straight to her core. "You're distraught. Let us help."

Her shoulders raised and then lowered. "I don't think it's possible tonight. My mind is

elsewhere.”

“You know what a challenge does to me,” he replied with a cheeky grin.

“And me,” Bastian added.

Yes, she knew very well how turned on they became at the slightest hint of a challenge. Though the thought of being a conquest didn’t appeal to her, the thought of their bodies on hers made her pussy clench.

“I’m sure we can find a way to distract your mind,” coaxed Bastian. “At least let us try.”

As if she could say no. She couldn’t resist even if she wanted to.

“Very well.” Shayla tried to sound put out, but she knew they weren’t buying it.

“We’ll go easy on you, if you’d like,” Armand growled, stepping out of his pants.

“Speak for yourself,” Bastian retorted.

She enjoyed watching Armand shimmy out of his tight leather pants. With both of them naked and moving toward her, she could hardly contain her excitement. She loved the way their bodies felt against hers. Even more, she loved being between them. Filled and stretched by their hard, thick cocks at the same time.

Armand reached out and pulled her nightgown up over her head. With his thin moist lips, he kissed his way down her body. Her limbs turned to putty.

Bastian pressed his firm body behind her, his cock nestled at the cleft of her ass. His hands trailed around her until he palmed her breasts in his large hands. She let her body relax into him while Armand worked her thighs further apart. Through the veil of her lashes she saw him kneel. Her body quivered as he brought his hands up along the insides of her legs. Already she was drenched and they’d hardly laid a hand on her.

“It’s intoxicating,” Armand murmured. “Your scent drives me mad.”

He kissed the smooth thin patch of fine hair between her thighs as the tip of his finger traced her labia. Shayla moaned. She closed her eyes, allowing the moment to take her away. Bastian furthered her arousal by lightly pinching her nipples while nibbling along the slope of her neck. His hot breath like an inferno against her exposed flesh. She pressed back into him even more. His cock pulse demandingly between the cheeks of her ass. Much as she wanted to beg them to fuck her, she decided to allow them their foreplay. Tonight might be the last time she was with them both.

Before the sobering thought killed her desire altogether, she let that thought go and

focused on the sensations awakening her body.

Armand pressed his fingers into her soaked pussy and delivered a hard wet kiss against her clit. The sudden contact almost made her lose her balance.

“You’re so responsive,” he groaned. “Every inch of you screams to be attended to.”

She wanted to add that two lovers attending to her were far better than one, but acknowledging it now wasn’t the best time.

“I’m curious to know how badly you want to be fucked,” Armand growled and slid three fingers into her pussy. A satisfied smile bowed his lips. “You want it bad. Don’t you.”

“Yes,” she whispered.

He didn’t waste any time. He pumped his fingers in and out of her pussy while rolling his tongue along her clit. She watched in desperation as he removed them and licked his fingers.

“Your pussy is the perfect elixir to quench my thirst.”

Vibrations of heat ebbed throughout her body. She loved this torture.

Again, he pushed his fingers inside her pussy, making his movements swift and deep. Her legs shook and made it difficult to stand. He trailed her inner thigh with his tongue until he reached her clit and then sealed his mouth over it.

“Oh god,” she moaned.

Armand’s tongue and fingers were persistent in drawing out an orgasm.

She brought her arms up over her head and let them fall loose behind Bastian’s neck as he massaged her breasts, giving extra attention to her nipples. He moved his mouth from her neck up close to her ear, whispering words that made her melt further into him.

“I’ll bet your pussy is flooded with your cream. All sweet and soaked.”

Shayla tensed her muscles and sucked a deep breath in. *Oh god, yes.* At any moment, she was going to drench Armand’s mouth and fingers with her cum. She didn’t dare move. She didn’t dare breathe.

“Let it go,” Bastian prompted. “Let it all go. Let me feel your body shudder against me.”

Her vision blurred and then the blessed orgasm broke free.

“Fuck yes,” she cried as her body bucked fiercely.

To add to the pleasure, Armand continued suckling her clit. The extra stimulation made her spasm. If it weren’t for Bastian holding her up, she’d have collapsed.

Armand gave another long, deep drag along her pussy and then smacked his lips. “Your

cum is like brown sugar on my tongue, love. So fucking addictive. Though everything about you is addictive.”

Armand slid down to the floor and stroked his cock with a tight fist. Her eyes widened. She watched the pre-cum appear at the tip of his cock, reminding her of a flawless pearl against the firelight.

“I want to feel that wet, soft pussy on my cock,” he said, his eyes dark and seductive.

Drenched as she was, her body craved more.

Slowly she situated herself over him. He held the base of his erection, and with Bastian’s aid, she gently eased down over him until her pussy stretched wide apart. She inhaled long and deep until he filled her completely. Armand gripped the curve of her hips and helped her match his slow, steady rhythm. She felt each succulent inch of his cock move inside her.

Aware that Bastian was near, she coaxed him closer until his erection was half an inch before her lips. She reached up and grasped his cock firm in her palm. He growled something she didn’t quite catch as she took him into her mouth. She slid her mouth back to the tip, taking him all the way to the hilt with her lips wrapped tight.

Shayla knew just how he liked his cock sucked, and she knew it wouldn’t be long before he came.

“You’re being naughty,” he groaned.

Sweat gathered along his forehead and dripped down to his chest. His thick thighs were chiseled to perfection.

“I know.” She went to take him in a third time, but he quickly withdrew.

“Let’s save that for another night, angel,” he rasped. “Right now I want to feel my cock inside that firm ass of yours.”

He moved out of her view and then gently pressed the curve of her back so she bent further over Armand. She heard the faint sound of the nightstand drawer open and shut. A moment later, she shivered at the icy liquid he applied to her anus. Bastian’s finger teased her sensitive opening as he lathered it on.

“So beautiful. So tight,” he groaned.

He massaged more cool liquid around her sensitive hole, and she made herself relax.

“Let’s see if you’re ready for me.”

Her throat tightened. All she could do was nod her head.

His fingers stretched her anus as he slipped them inside her. “Oh yeah, you’re ready for me.”

Armand stopped thrusting his hips and took to thumbing her nipples while Bastian’s cock rested at the tip of her ass. Any moment the delicious burn would start. Armand pinched her nipples like a vise at the same time that Bastian thrust into her. She let out a high-pitched cry of undeniable pleasure.

They didn’t waste another second. In unison, they pumped into her. Hard and fast. Driving their cocks with a force that left her moaning and whimpering for more. For the next several minutes she let ecstasy take her for a ride. The thrill of both their cocks inside her elevated her pulse double—almost triple time. Her body shook so much that she had to hold onto Armand.

They thrust simultaneously, obeying her sharp commands of harder, faster and deeper between labored breaths. Armand pumped his hips up into her while Bastian plunged behind her. A medley of grunts and fuck me’s echoed around the room. The heat from the fire paled in comparison to the heat the three of them generated together. She loved being this open and vulnerable to them. Loved the double penetration and how close it brought them. Loved being the object of their desire again and again.

Shayla felt the tide turn low in her belly. Like it or not, she was about to climax. The wicked sensations they stirred within her made her quick to orgasm, no matter how hard she tried to hold back.

“I’m going to come,” she cried out, prompting them to quicken their movements until the orgasm tore through her like a storm. As she bellowed a string of lust-filled obscenities, Armand circled her clit wildly with his thumb and Bastian smacked her ass. The shuddering and jerking of her body stimulated her further, causing everything to vibrate and bring her right to the edge of a third climax. In a daze, she worked her body with them, desperate to have them come at the same time she did.

“Speed up,” she moaned.

Her body buzzed while the vampires cursed between thrusts. Wide-eyed, she watched them turn into human fucking machines. Taking her with short, quick bursts until their curses turned into grunts. She watched Armand’s face twist up into a half-pained expression and then smile. To her relief, both he and Bastian climaxed. It took only one more circle of her clit and

she unleashed one hell of an orgasm. Once again, they'd satisfied her and then some.

Bastian withdrew his cock and slunk to the floor, pulling her along with him.

She lay sandwiched between their sweat-slicked bodies, watching the glow from the fire cast shadows along the ceiling. Shayla wanted things to stay the way they were.

For their strong, chiseled bodies to anchor hers.

For their deep, sensuous voices to whisper seductive words.

To bring her to one earth shattering climax after another.

To fill her with a confidence that didn't exist without them.

This was her heaven. Her paradise.

It would have been easier had she never fallen for them, but it didn't make her decision easier to think that way. Her love for them grew stronger each day. In their arms she found the ultimate happiness.

Shayla tilted her chin to catch a glimpse of Armand only to be met with an impish smile. When she turned to look at Bastian, he wore the exact same expression.

"Are you any closer to a decision, my sweet," Armand asked.

"No," she moaned and covered her eyes.

Damn them both. How could they ask her that after what they just shared? Were a few moments spent wrapped in a cloud-nine sandwich too much to ask for?

"That's all right," Armand soothed. "You've still got time. But I bet I can make the decision easier."

The knot in her stomach returned. "Please don't try."

"But love, our only desire is to make you happy. Once Bastian leaves, I can show you what I mean."

"No," she said through clenched teeth.

"No?"

"That's right," she snapped. "I said no. Right now I want to be left alone."

Armand faced her and propped up onto his elbow. "But I always stay until you fall asleep."

She pushed him to his back and sat up, arms folded. "There's little chance of sleep happening if you stay, thank you very much. How can I possibly relax? I have an important decision to make by tomorrow night, and your one-upmanship comments haven't helped."

Armand flashed a wounded look and trailed his fingers along her arm. Goose bumps dusted her flesh. Mad as she was, he still had a hold over her. How in the hell could she live without his touch?

“Then I’ll leave you to your rest. Until tomorrow evening, my love.” His lips captured hers and his hot breath whooshed into her lungs.

Armand rose and scooped up his clothes. He stopped at the doorway and blew her a kiss. Frustrated, she put her hand up in a block position. When she lowered her hand, he had gone.

Now to deal with the other one.

Bastian smirked. “I know you’ll choose me, so I’ll not brood the way he does. How about I give you a massage to help ease the tension?”

At this rate, she was so tense it would take a miracle to loosen her muscles. “Wonderful as it sounds, and it does sound wonderful, I meant it when I said I wanted to be alone. Thanks all the same.”

“Of course.” His lips pressed against hers and lingered long enough for heat to fill her belly.

He broke the kiss and stood. “Sleep well. Rest those mesmerizing eyes of yours.”

“Night,” she murmured.

Damn. Currents of pleasure raced through her body and hit every nerve ending like some crazed pinball machine. She couldn’t live without his touch either. Together they made her sizzle in all the right places. She craved both of them. She needed both of them.

A chill quickly swept over her flesh with the departure of their bodies. She rose from the floor and climbed into bed. The bulky blankets were a far cry from two hard bodies, and not nearly warm enough.

Shayla tried to get comfortable, but restlessness proved that difficult. The tears that she’d held back for much of the evening finally made their way down her cheeks and along the satin pillowcase. How could she possibly choose one over the other?

Chapter Two

Armand had been reluctant to leave, noting the deep crease along Shayla's forehead. He didn't like the way he'd left things. He understood her decision wasn't an easy one, but it was necessary. From the moment he'd first laid eyes on her, he'd been possessive of her. With a single look, she managed to set his body on fire, and aroused him from the dead sleep he'd spent centuries in. She was breathtaking with her long jet-black hair and cobalt blue eyes. Her curvaceous figure reminded him of an hourglass. Her breasts were perfect and soft. Her hips and ass sent his mouth watering. Every sweet inch of her body was made for loving, touching, caressing, and devouring. Armand knew her blood would taste like the most luscious cream he'd ever had. But until she declared her to be his, and only his, he'd never bite her. He didn't want her to have a single moment of doubt or regret.

In the beginning he'd come to the manor looking for a new home for his coven, the Black Thorns. He heard it was abandoned and thought it perfect. Only he found it wasn't abandoned after all. He found Shayla. She was everything and more than what he looked for in a partner. He wanted to find a way to make her smile every day. Bring her pleasure and help take away the sadness she seemed to cling to. He watched her for weeks, learning her routine, mannerisms, and studying her habits.

Before he had a chance to introduce himself, another vampire approached her. The one he would come to know as Bastian, part of the Manzanita coven. Sworn enemies. Right away he despised him and his rough exterior, but he couldn't ignore the way Shayla took to him. Armand knew he had to take action and make his presence known or risk losing her.

After weeks of brooding, he called a private meeting with Bastian where they expressed their mutual feelings for her. Together they came to the conclusion that they both loved her and wanted nothing more than to treat her well. While neither wanted to give her up, her selection of her eternal mate would have to be solely her decision. He wanted nothing more than to slay

Bastian, but he worried it would break Shayla's heart and he'd never know if she would have chosen him. He and Bastian agreed to a one-year pact. To put up with one another for her and not destroy each other. Once she'd made her choice, the other would leave and never make contact again.

It seemed like a good idea at the time. He didn't realize how unhappy it would make her. He could see that it troubled her and he didn't know how to make it better.

Unsure of what to do, he sulked about from room to room. If only he could help make the decision easier on her. Shayla's pleasure was all that mattered to him.

* * * *

Bastian paced the downstairs foyer. It had been a long year and soon he'd have Shayla as his own. He didn't hate Armand. Much. How could he when they both wanted the same things for a woman they loved? But his affections were more than that of fairy tales. He didn't need poetry and literature to motivate his feelings for her. He loved her. Plain and simple. He'd die for her. Battle for her. Go to any lengths necessary for her. And once she became his wife, he'd protect her with fierce determination. Of course, he could've had her all to himself early on, but he cared too much to manipulate her thoughts or emotions. Even if it meant victory over Armand.

He wished to make her decision less daunting. Seeing her distraught over their request to choose racked him with guilt. Not enough to step back and let Armand have her, but guilt nonetheless. He never expected to meet a woman who would have him so enraptured he'd spend a year trying to convince her to have him. When he took Armand out of the picture, it was time well spent.

Bastian felt the need to check on her to see if she'd fallen asleep. Though she tried to hide it, he'd seen her eyes brimming with tears, and it left him with a heavy heart.

He turned to go up the stairs when he noticed Armand standing on the last step wearing a smug expression.

"Don't you have better things to do," he snapped.

"Not really," Armand mused. "Not when I'm so close to being crowned the victor."

Irritation racked his body. "You're clueless, you know that?"

His rival furrowed his brows. "How so?"

"You haven't any better idea who she'll choose than I do. You might think your words

sound confident, but I hear them for what they really are.”

“Enlighten me.”

“They’re nothing more than words of self doubt. And it makes you sound fake.”

“I gather you’re an expert?”

Bastian shook his head. “If I’m an expert, it’s only because I’m doing the same damn thing.”

“You’ve lost me.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“Prick.”

This wasn’t helping. Bastian regained his composure. “Sorry. Look, we share the same goal. We both want Shayla to be happy. You’ve seen how upset she gets when we fight over her, how it tears her apart. It’s clear that we’re going about this the wrong way.”

Armand crossed his arms. “How so?”

“By bickering with one another we’re showing our weaknesses, not our strengths,” he explained. “She needs to know that her choice is the right one. She needs to know she’ll be protected and taken care of by a strong, commanding husband. At this point why would she choose either one of us?”

Bastian waited for his rival to process his words.

“Hmm. What you’re saying makes sense. Do you propose another way to sway her mind?”

“I do as a matter of fact. It will require putting our differences aside and working together. Are you up for a challenge?”

Armand nodded. “Always.”

“Good. Then here’s what we’re going to do.”

Chapter Three

Shayla opened her eyes and breathed a heavy sigh. The day she'd been dreading was finally here. She hadn't meant to fall asleep, though she hardly felt rested. Her sleep had been riddled with disturbing nightmares with themes of loneliness. Dreams where she'd been an older woman without anyone to console her. Without anyone to love her. Dreams of collapsing in the middle of a desert thousands of miles from civilization, alone and scared. She blamed the damn decision and how it invaded every aspect of her life. It was debilitating. Why couldn't they understand that she loved them both?

She considered lounging around feeling sorry for herself, but it was late in the morning, and too many things reminded her of Armand and Bastian. Their heady masculine smells lingered on the sheets, pillowcases, and all over her. None of it helped.

Restless, she stood and slipped into a silk robe, the lightweight fabric cool against her skin. A bath sounded like the perfect thing to loosen the knots in her neck and stomach. Still half asleep, she shuffled into the bathroom and turned on the water. The tub was large and made of porcelain with brass claw feet. A perfect escape. With the water running, she disrobed and stood before the mirror. More wrinkles than a year ago. Her body was soft, though she didn't mind. Curves had always been her thing. They made her feel womanly. Exercise hadn't ever been a task she aspired to do. Climbing the stairs was about the extent of it.

When the water reached the right temperature, she added half a bottle of bubble bath and slipped inside. At once it helped soothe her.

While she bathed, parts of her strange dreams came back to her. Why had she been alone? Had it been her decision to remain alone? Had the dreams been a sign that she shouldn't choose either? Or did the dream represent her fear of becoming a lonely old maid. Or worse yet, maybe she'd driven the vampires away. Again, she wished she had answers.

Shayla decided to get out of the tub before the water cooled too much. She stepped out

carefully and grabbed a plush green towel to wrap around her body, and another one for her hair. She chose a black dress that hugged her best assets. She took her time blow-drying her hair, singing into it like a microphone. It helped take her mind off more pressing matters.

At her vanity, she put on makeup and brushed her hair until it was smooth and shiny. It had been ages since she got this dolled up.

“Eat your heart out boys,” she said into the mirror and then laughed.

She went downstairs and glanced outside the front door. Her smile instantly turned down at the gray drizzly day in front of her. A murder of crows circled the front walkway, their caws so loud they almost pierced her eardrums.

Already the depression had set back in. She felt as miserable as the day she arrived.

She slammed the door shut and rested her back against it. What was her problem? Why couldn't she make up her mind about her future? She wasn't a child. She could do this.

It was more than making up her mind. It was coming to terms with where her life had taken her. How much regret she lived with. How much energy she spent punishing others and punishing herself. As if she couldn't ever truly be happy.

Then there was the heavy weight of guilt on her shoulders. She loved her parents but they'd been eccentric people. They were mistaken in thinking that she could handle anything they threw her way. She'd been so young, and they'd thrown her to the wolves. But she couldn't dwell on that. She was an adult now.

If only she could shake the disturbing letters her mother sent just weeks before her death. Not even letters but strings of words scribbled down on faded paper. Words that didn't make sense. Gone was the beautiful curve of her mother's penmanship. In its place was a mad attempt scrawled in...fear? Anger? Pain? She couldn't tell. Her father had called once, asking for her to come down and see them. His voice urgent, terrified even. It wasn't like him at all. Shayla didn't know why it didn't prompt her to see them. Stubbornness? No, just plain fear. Something that dictated her entire life.

It took her months to finally make up her mind to see her parents, and then she'd gotten word they died. If she'd visited sooner, would they still be alive?

She walked down the hall and fought the barrage of tears that threatened to spill over. This pity party had to stop.

From around the corner, Armand stepped out, his lips set in a smirk.

“You look radiant today, my sweet.”

“Be quiet,” she muttered. “I have dark circles under my eyes.”

He brought his face close and squinted. “I don’t see any.”

“I covered them with makeup, but trust me, they’re there. What are you doing here? I didn’t expect to see you until later.”

His boyish grin let her know he was up to something. “We came to check up on you.”

Shayla cocked her head. “We?”

Bastian made his appearance wearing an equally mischievous grin. “Surprise, love.”

Now she really didn’t trust them. They were acting funny. And they were being nice to one another. Two huge red flags.

“You know very well that I have until midnight to announce my final decision.” Her voice reflected more anger than she’d planned to exude.

They looked at her with brows arched.

“Pardon,” Armand asked.

“I know what you’re doing. You’re here to pull out all the stops. Probably duel for me or something immature.”

Bastian smiled. “We considered a battle in your honor but didn’t think you’d go for it. If you would rather we did...”

“No,” she shouted. “You expect me to believe that you two have all of a sudden become friends? That you’ve put your differences aside? I’m not buying it. What are you up to?”

Armand’s puppy eyes almost had her fooled. “Honest. We aren’t here to coax you into anything. Just to show you a good time. We have a surprise for you. Let us entertain you. Please?”

Denying them took far too much energy.

“Oh, all right.”

They each took her hand and led her into the ballroom, her favorite room in the manor. It was elegant and colorful, a huge contrast to the gray and gloom of the rest of the place.

Authentic crystal chandeliers hung from the high vaulted ceilings. Oil paintings of people she only wished she could meet claimed the wall space. It was a room fit for a princess.

Bastian bowed before her and held out his hands. “Care to dance?”

Shayla was about to ask to what when the sounds of piano and violin music filled the air.

“I’d love to.”

She nestled in close to his body and rested her chin on his shoulder. Eyes closed, she allowed him to guide her around the room. It was what she needed and helped take the edge off.

At some point Armand took his place and, with his dramatic flair, nearly swept her off her feet. It seemed like hours passed and she’d forgotten the depression. She laughed and enjoyed herself more than she had in a long time.

The music from the record player switched to a livelier song. Bastian and Armand spun her around until she was so dizzy she fell into a throne-like chair. Before she could get up Bastian knelt at her feet. His eyes were dark and dreamy.

Shayla cleared her throat. “What are you going to do?”

“Get you off. Any objections?”

She swallowed hard as his hands reached up beneath her dress and pulled her panties down. He brought the lace to his nose and inhaled. To watch him was plain sexy.

“Nope. None.”

Bastian raised her dress up further, exposing the pink slit that drove him wild. Face between her legs, he inhaled her scent. A scent he could never get enough of. His cock wrenched hard and pressed tight into the seam of his pants. He brought the panties to his nose and inhaled again.

“This is like a damn drug,” he growled. “It makes me want to fuck you non-stop.”

He slid his hands underneath her thighs and brought them up and over the arms of the chair while Armand worked the dress over her head. Braless, just the way he liked to see her. He paused to watch Armand work her nipples until they became taut little buds. The way her body writhed and blushed turned him on something awful.

Bastian stood and removed his clothing. He didn’t want anything between them. Back to his knees, he pressed his face between her thighs and licked along her soft, dewy skin. His fingers worked her creaminess around her pussy and then along his lips. Her gentle moans echoed in the ballroom. The kind of music he could listen to for a lifetime.

“Taste me,” she moaned. “Please.”

He licked her clit and then sealed his mouth over it, suckling the mysterious bead as if the act alone sustained his existence.

Her legs flailed on either side of his head, pelvis grinding against his mouth. He looked up to see Armand's lips quivering and eyes ravenous as he looked on. They both wanted inside her wet heat. Buried deep. They didn't want to share her or the title of best lover, but for now, they would have to. Just for a little while longer.

Bastian pulled back and stared into her eyes. "I'm going to make you come. And then Armand will have his turn. To finish it off, we'll take you together. Each orgasm like nothing you've ever experienced before."

Before she could utter a word of protest, he thrust his fingers inside her. He watched the way her lashes fluttered and her jaw slackened. When his thumb brushed her clit, it made her pupils get big and her face turn pink. The face of an angel and the body of a sinner. Damn, he loved her.

Her scent beckoned to him again and he suckled her clit. Drawing the pink pebble into his mouth, he kept thrusting his fingers, deeper and faster. She moved with him, widening her thighs, grinding her pussy hard against his lips. Her melodic pleas kept his cock rock hard. He couldn't wait to be inside her.

When he knew she wouldn't last much longer, he pulled his mouth away and jiggled her clit between his fingers.

"You just come, sweetheart. We're both going to watch."

She bit at her lip, eyelids barely at half-mast.

"That's it baby. I want your cream to run down my fingers. Hell, I want your cream to run down my hand. And when that pussy of yours is done flooding, Armand is going to take his turn. You're so beautiful, love. I just love to watch the lust radiate from your eyes."

Her body arched, and then she screamed. Bastian cursed as she creamed his hand good. All he could think about was how incredible it would feel right now to shove his cock inside her. To thrust inside her moist heat.

But for now, he'd have to be patient as Armand had been for him.

"Stand up, beautiful," he said and let her rest her weight on him.

Armand took a seat on the chair and reached for her. He brought her pussy right down on his erection, well lubed from her cream.

Envy racked Bastian's body, but he wouldn't let her see. Instead, he focused on her face.

"I thought Armand had the best seat, but I think I do. I get to watch the way your body

reacts each time you go down on his cock. I get to watch the way your nipples harden like cherry pits, so tempting I just want to bite them.”

He loved the way she was open. Never shy or embarrassed about her body or needs. Always willing to try new things and new positions. He looked forward to a lifetime of bringing her rapture. He could afford this one night to share her and be civil with Armand. It wouldn't be easy, but he could do it.

He watched her climax and could barely wait another second.

Shayla could barely keep it together. Her body was on fire. She liked the way Bastian stared at her while Armand fucked her pussy. She moistened her fingers with her tongue and brought them to her clit. Slowly she circled her fingers and smiled. She enjoyed the tortured expression on Bastian's face. In retaliation, he wrapped his hand around his cock and stroked it from base to tip. God, she wanted to taste him. Fill her mouth with his saltiness. At the same time Armand's big thick cock had her pussy spread unbelievably wide.

“Work that clit,” Armand whispered. “I want you touch yourself while I fuck you good.”

She nodded and circled her fingers in a swift, steady pace. Bastian ran his tongue along his lips and kept tugging his cock. Shayla could feel the climax building. She wanted to come because she knew what was next. She'd have them both, the way she preferred. The way it was meant to be.

Armand pumped up into her so hard she could barely keep from falling.

“Come, Shayla. Hurry.”

Her hand burned from working her clit, but she didn't let up.

“Mm, yes,” she gasped. “Yes, I'm close, I'm close, just like that, just like that. Oh god, yes.”

The release was crazy sweet the way it slammed through her. She barely had time to catch her breath when her lovers helped her turn around. Now she faced Armand. Her legs were sore from the chair arms, but she didn't care. A little discomfort was so worth the pleasure.

She started to ride Armand's cock and welcomed the cool liquid Bastian coated her ass with. His fingers toyed with her tight opening briefly before in one quick motion he entered her.

Shayla moaned into the bliss, all stretched and full of cock. She was so completely soaked that her cream ran down her inner thighs.

“We want to hear you, sweets. Let it all go when you climax and fill this house with your lusty cries.”

They’d get an earful all right. Armand and Bastian thrust relentlessly into her. Intent on getting her off. Their bodies were incredibly close. All mashed together. Slick and slippery. The scent of their arousal strong and permeating the air. Her entire body was high on constant stimulation. She felt things more than before. Each movement bringing her to a heightened state that she didn’t believe existed. *This* was their final showdown. Not the incredible sex from last night—that had been the cake. Now she was getting the icing, and it would be the sweetest of memories.

Their grunts grew in volume. The tightness in her belly started to come undone. She should be sad that this was the last time to be with them, but instead she milked it with everything she had. It felt so damn good. Most women could only fantasize about two immaculate lovers. She had the real thing.

“Scream it, love,” Armand pleaded.

Despite the ache in her legs and the kink in her side, she let them take her body until she couldn’t hold it in anymore.

“Yes. I’m going to come right the fuck now.”

She screamed their names as they simultaneously climaxed.

Shayla crumpled forward into Armand with Bastian’s arms draped over her back. Her body jolted every few seconds and made her gasp.

She refused to let this be the last time. She pulled away from their stronghold and stood with her hands on her hips.

“You are incredible. As lovers, as friends, and as men,” she started. “I want you both as part of my life. What we’ve shared during this time has been amazing. You’ve helped me through some difficult times in my life. It’s your love, compassion and kindness that give me strength.”

“You can’t be serious,” Armand quipped. “You must choose one of us.”

She waved her hand. “Impossible. It’s not something that I can do.”

Bastian kissed her shoulder. “Don’t be afraid of the unknown. Embrace it. Whoever you choose will make you a very happy bride.”

Unreal. They were so damn stubborn. “You claim my happiness is your first priority. Is

that a lie?"

"Of course not. I've never lied to you," Bastian stated.

Armand shook his head. "It's not something I could ever do."

"I can't be happy picking only one of you. If I can't have you both, then I'll be unhappy the rest of my life."

Armand's lips curled back. "It's been hell dealing with him for a year. He's an enemy to my coven. I can't possibly do it for an eternity."

"I hate to agree with anything he says," Bastian added, "but the feeling is mutual."

They were so immature. So hell-bent on which one was the right man for her that they couldn't see the obvious.

"Don't you understand? You are the perfect opposites for me. You are my sweet and—"

"Sour," interrupted Armand. "Me being sweet, of course."

She frowned. "No, spice is what I was going to say. You're my night and day. My cream and sugar. My internal balance. The point is, together you make up the perfect lover. You satisfy me, as one, to a point I've never reached before. I crave the idea of being your woman. To have the love of two committed and sensual lovers who have been so devoted and attentive to me. I can't imagine not having your bodies beside me."

Bastian groaned. "But, him of all vampires? What if I introduced you to another member of my coven? There are plenty of other lovers to be had. Far less conceited might I add."

She crossed her arms and narrowed her glance. "No."

"It isn't fair to ask me to deal with someone I loathe forever," Armand scoffed.

"I didn't find your request fair, either," she countered. "It has caused me nothing but heartache and distress. Both or none at all—but hear this: if you choose none, I will grow old alone. I will die alone. And I'll die with a broken heart. You'll have only yourselves to blame."

"Great, you've picked up Armand's flair for drama," Bastian said dryly.

"And *your* stubbornness," she concluded. "I'll let you think about what I've said."

"That won't take long."

Shayla folded her arms. "I'm serious. I want you both. Try to find a way to deal with it or find a way to say goodbye. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to make myself something to eat."

She walked down the hallway and headed to the kitchen. Between the hot sex and the

heated argument, she'd worked up an appetite. To her surprise, they didn't chase after her. She imagined them still standing there with their jaws to the floor, beside themselves with what she said. Adrenaline surged through her entire body. She'd never made the decisions before. For once, she felt in control and empowered.

As she entered the kitchen, Shayla noticed a bitter chill hung in the air. Looking around, she didn't see any open windows to explain it. Too hungry to investigate further, she opened the refrigerator and scanned the nearly bare shelves. Cheese would have to suffice.

She reached for a package when a deep tone resonated around the house, vibrating the floorboards. Shayla straightened up quickly and closed the fridge. *What the hell was that?* She called out to Bastian and Armand, but her voice was drowned out by a downpour that beat against the windows. *Great, a storm.* She hated storms. The lights flickered a few times and she decided to forgo the hunger pangs.

As she reentered the foyer, the wind howled and blew debris underneath the door. The lights flickered again and sent goose bumps across her flesh. Her house was scary enough during the daytime, but during a storm, it frightened her even more.

She hurried up the stairs to grab the brass candleholder from her bedroom. Before her foot hit the last step, the electricity went out and enveloped her in darkness. Save for soft light that spilled out from under the doorway of the study.

Just ignore it, she ordered herself, but her curiosity won out.

Breath held, she walked forward at a tentative pace and rested her hand around the knob.

It's just a room, she reminded herself. *There's no reason to be afraid.*

She opened the door a crack and peeked inside. At once, she relaxed. The candles inside the wall sconces were lit and flickering.

"Armand? Bastian? What are you imps up to now?" They must have known the storm would make her uneasy. She'd never told them how the room itself made her uncomfortable, but she appreciated their attempt to calm her.

She walked a couple steps further into the room. Despite the candles, there was a noticeable draft that differed from the other rooms of the house. Shayla paused at the window to look out when a flurry of crows appeared, their wings fluttering hard against the window—so hard she worried the glass would break. Candles or not, the room freaked her out and she just wanted to get the hell out of there.

A triple flash of lightning brightened up the room momentarily, long enough for her to notice something different about the portrait. A slow scream started from her gut. The portrait of a man's face that had always frightened her was gone. The canvas was blank. Shivers raked her back and made the fine hairs on her neck rise. Another batch of lightning illuminated the room followed by rolling thunder that she felt in her core.

Strange movement from the corner of the room drew her gaze. She watched the curtain billow and then a face press into it. With a gasp, she made a run for the door. Before she reached it, the door slammed shut. The lock clicked, its sound of finality making her entire body tremble.

From behind her a low gravelly voice whispered, "You're mine, all mine."

Chapter Four

Armand continued to pace around the house. Inside the ballroom, he observed Bastian looking deep in thought. “What are you doing in here?”

“Reflecting.”

“About what?”

“The past year. Shayla. This house.” His voice was low and listless.

“Sounds serious. I’ll leave.”

Armand went to turn when Bastian gripped his shoulder. “Wait. We need to talk.”

“Oh?”

“I’m concerned about Shayla.”

And he wasn’t? “I share your concern.”

“It kills me to see her in so much pain.”

“I don’t like it either.”

“That pain is solely because of us. We’re to blame for her unhappiness.”

Armand sighed. “She was unhappy when she first came here. We helped bring her out of her shell.”

“And since then we’ve become the source of her unhappiness,” Bastian reasoned. “Ever since we asked her to choose between us she has started to withdraw.”

He’d seen it too, but felt helpless in how to help. “I’ve already tried things your way and that didn’t work. What else do you suggest? And don’t you dare say we should choose for her.”

Bastian gave him a grim look. “That isn’t what I’m saying.”

“Look, her happiness means the world to me, but what other choice do we have? She can’t have us both. This is her choice to make and hers alone. We can’t toy with her emotions.”

Bastian nodded. “I agree.”

“I only feel bad because you’ll have to deal with the outcome. And here I was ready to

become friends with you.” He realized it came out more pompous than planned, but it was too late to take it back.

“Right.” Bastian ran a hand through his hair. “We tolerate each other, nothing more. I don’t know what her choice will be, and for the moment, I don’t even care. I’m asking you to back off. Don’t make this more difficult for her. I can’t stand the pain it’s causing her.”

Armand felt punched in the gut. “You back off. I came to her first.”

“Only because you do everything in a brash manner, while I have tact.”

“No, you have poor timing,” he spat. “You’re weak and waste time mulling things over.”

“I’m not here to fight you, only to make it easier for her.”

“You couldn’t fight if you wanted to,” Armand challenged.

Bastian chortled. “You know I have the upper hand. You don’t have experience with swords, so it would be an unfair fight.”

“Sword or not, it doesn’t mean I can’t fight.”

“If you want to have a go, I’m ready.”

Armand couldn’t believe that they hadn’t duked it out earlier. Now on the last day before one of them would be chosen, Bastian wanted to fight?

“Here,” he asked incredulously. “Right now?”

“Unless you’re afraid.”

That little remark really set him off. “Sounds like the best invitation I’ve had in centuries. But we’ll fight with fists not swords.”

“Fine. I’ll still win.”

Armand got into a warrior stance, his fists in front of his face, knees bent.

Bastian swung first and Armand went down.

“You asshole,” he groaned. “That’s going to leave a mark”

* * * *

Shayla tried the doorknob but it wouldn’t open.

Damn, she cursed.

“Shaaaylaaa,” the creaky voice moaned.

She turned, her eyes darting all around.

“Who’s there? What do you want?”

The face moved along the curtain until the ghost of a man appeared. An older man with

eyes that pierced straight through her. She was certain she'd seen him before. When she figured out from where, her blood ran ice cold. He was the man from the portrait.

"What do I want? I want *you*, Shayla."

A lump formed in her throat, making it difficult to swallow. "Who are you?"

"Someone who wants to take away all the sadness that surrounds you. I've waited for you. Watched you. And now I finally have you all to myself."

His deep voice vibrated through her stomach. Bile crept up her throat.

The ghost moved toward her at a languid pace. A thin, dark smile bowed his lips. He smelled of death and something else—evil was the first thing to come to mind, though she didn't know what evil smelt like.

Her lips quivered. "I-I think you have the wrong person."

"No. I don't. I studied your pictures for years. I memorized each line of your angelic face and every scintillating curve of your body. You're even more stunning in person."

What was he talking about? "What pictures?"

"The ones your parents kept in an old album on my desk." He motioned with his chin. "I listened to them talk about you. Listened to your mother cry over your absence and wish you'd come to visit. I knew you were special and it was time to bring you back here."

Her throat tightened. She reached behind her and blindly tried the knob again. "I don't understand. You're a ghost. How did you bring me back here?"

"Through your mother's letters."

Blood drained from her face. "My mother?"

"Yes. I used her to make you return. Your father too, though he didn't provide much use. Too hard to control the way I wanted. But I got what I wanted out of them until I no longer needed them. They would've only been in the way. Understand?"

She couldn't process what he was saying. "No, I don't understand."

"You will in time. All that matters is we're together. I've watched you since you returned. Inhaled your heavenly scent, and waited until I couldn't stand to wait anymore."

Her lungs ached from holding her breath so long. She was certain she'd pass out soon. "I'm sorry if you have some sort of expectation of me, but I don't want to be with you. Let me out of this room right now. I beg you, please."

He advanced closer. "Soon. But it will be on my terms."

“Please, I want to leave now.” Her pulse pounded like a jackhammer in her ears. “Let me go.”

“Go where? You have nowhere to go. You’re all alone in the world. At least, you were. You’ll never be alone again, and you’ll never have to leave this house again. Once you’re dead, we’ll remain here forever.”

“What do you mean when I’m dead?”

The ghost chuckled and moved an inch closer. “You don’t have to be afraid of death. Accept it and it can be almost poetic. Your mother accepted her death, though your father didn’t and as a result his death was painful.”

She couldn’t stand to hear him talk about her parents. “You really want me to believe that *you* killed them?”

“You should. It’s the truth.”

“But, why? Why would you harm them?”

“To get to you.” He smirked. “I knew while they were alive I’d never have you to myself. My choices were limited.”

Tears filled her eyes. “But my mother, she was a beautiful and kind-hearted person.”

“She was. I enjoyed driving her mad.”

Shayla remembered the cryptic words she received in the mail. At the time, even she thought her mother had sounded off her rocker, mad even. Her heart raced. “Then the letters—”

“Yes. Frantic cries of help. I directed the pen, controlled the words and made her think she heard voices in her head. There was only one way to stop them and I offered her that luxury too. She was such a fragile thing. Much too easy to manipulate.”

She choked back a sob. “And my father?”

“Just a formality. I was able to make him call you the one time, but he fought me. So, I pushed him to his death. Now that I think about it, I didn’t feel any remorse when I killed him, not the way I did for your mother. You look like her.”

She felt the walls close in around her. “You’re the one who’s mad.”

“I did it for you, out of love. I thought you’d appreciate the lengths I’d go to for your respect and admiration.”

“I don’t. And I assure you, I don’t feel anything for you. I never will.”

He threw his head back and chuckled. When he stopped, his eyes narrowed and held her

captive in his stare. “Why, because you think the vampires will give you what you want? I’d hoped you would tire of their games. They don’t care for you the way I do. They don’t understand that you long for the kind of freedom only I can offer.”

“What kind of freedom are you talking about?”

“Death,” he replied. “Once you’re dead you’ll know the sweetest peace. All the regrets and sorrow you surround yourself with will disappear. With them, you’ll live forever with the pain of your past. I know they want you to make a choice, but now you won’t have to. I’ve made it for you. I’ve been patient enough, and will not allow anyone else to have you.”

Shayla shook her head. “I’d never be with you.”

“Why, because you don’t love me? I don’t require it at this time. We’ll have forever for you to learn to love me. Besides, when you die you won’t remember any of this.”

Her mind raced. To know how her parents died. What they’d experienced. Knowing the truth hurt far worse. And now this thing, this ghost, wanted her dead just to be with him? Her stomach wrenched.

“You’re sick and twisted. I won’t have a thing to do with you.”

“You’ve no choice. No one will save you. No one knows you’re here.”

He closed in on her. She pressed her back flat against the door. Shayla remembered this wasn’t a man, he was only a ghost and she should be able to go right through him. She took a step forward when the large walnut desk slid in front of her and pinned her against the door. With all her strength she tried to push it away but it weighed a ton.

The ghost grinned and floated so close he was only a hairsbreadth away. She turned her face to the side, straining as far as her neck allowed. His hands pressed against her face tight, and he made her face him. She tried to pull him away, but her hands went through him. Somehow he could touch her, but she couldn’t touch him.

“Please, no. Leave me alone,” she begged.

“It won’t be this way for long. Once you’ve taken your final breath you’ll be able to touch me and pleasure me back. If you want, I can prove my love for you. I can pleasure you and show you what you can look forward to.”

“No,” she cried. “Don’t touch me.”

A frown marred his dark slits for brows. “I’ll do what I want with you. You’re mine.”

Against his ashen face, the cold black of his eyes disturbed her, like two black marbles.

Shayla saw her reflection in them. The fear on her face. His putrid breath disgusted her. She felt dizzy and wanted to retch.

“Keep away from me.”

He wrapped his ghostly hand around her neck and squeezed. An evil smile played at his lips and his eyes widened to big black saucers. He meant to kill her.

She fought him, but the desk had her pinned and she couldn't catch her breath.

“Don't fight it or it won't be as sweet of a death. I've imagined all the ways to kill you, but couldn't bear to see you bleed. Finally I realized I'd get the most satisfaction if you died by my hands.”

To prove it, he squeezed her throat tighter.

This couldn't be her fate. She tried to speak, to plead with him to let her go, but all that came out were a series of squeaks and gasps.

“It's beautiful to watch life leave a person. With you, it's almost more than I can stand. You've stirred something in me I didn't think existed. I can't wait to have you in my bed. To hold your cold, pale body against mine. We'll be together for an eternity.”

Her chest ached. She couldn't get air to her lungs. Her thoughts turned from panic to acceptance. She deserved to die this way with how she treated her parents. How she let them down and let them die. Maybe it was better to forget. Maybe in death she *would* finally find happiness.

Shayla realized it was hopeless. She stopped struggling and waited for the darkness to take her.

Chapter Five

The sight of blood on his rival's face made Bastian stop. He hadn't meant to hit Armand with such force. He let his anger and frustration get the best of him.

"Okay, this is stupid," he spat and backed away. "I could beat you to a bloody pulp and you know it."

Armand wiped away the small slit of blood from the corner of his mouth. "Sounds to me like you're giving up, coward."

"Hardly. But I'm not willing to hurt Shayla further by using you as a punching bag."

The vampire stood and cast him a cold stare. "It was a lucky punch, but I guarantee next time you'll get yours."

Bastian realized they could go round and round all day, but in the end, it didn't accomplish the goal. Through all their petty quarrels, Shayla's well-being kept getting lost. He decided to swallow his pride.

"Look. We both love her. We both care about her and want the best for her. Otherwise, we wouldn't be putting ourselves through all this. Neither of us wants to see her upset."

Armand folded his arms. "We've established this."

"I think it bears repeating. You heard her yourself. She wants us both. Like it or not."

"I'm trying to forget that part."

"Well, you can't." He thrust his hands on his hips. "For someone who absorbs poetry, I'm surprised you aren't more sensitive to her needs."

Armand's eyes widened. "I am. Believe me, I am."

"Are you prepared to lose her?"

"Not a chance."

"If we don't find a way to get along, we're going to find out the hard way what it's like to be without her. I'm not willing to find out how that feels."

Armand waved his hand. “She’s just messing with us. Getting us back for hounding her about her decision. She’ll make a choice, and it will be the right one.”

Bastian wasn’t so sure. “Shayla isn’t like that.”

He started to say something else when he heard a muffled cry from the doorway. “Did you hear something?”

“No. I—”

“Shh. Listen.”

The little girl ghost from the gardens ran toward them, rubbing her red, puffy eyes.

Bastian bent to his knee and spoke gently. “What’s wrong little one? Why have you been crying?”

“Shayla, she’s in danger and being held against her will.”

“What?” He shot a look to Armand. “Where?”

“In the study. The bad ghost has her. He’s going to kill her. She doesn’t have much time. Please, you have to hurry.”

He didn’t know anything about a bad ghost, but a sickening feeling in his gut made him believe the little girl. “Stay here, okay? We won’t let anything bad happen to her. I promise.”

Bastian rushed upstairs and tried the door.

“Damn. It’s locked.”

Armand looked around. “I don’t know where a key would be. What the hell is going on? What bad ghost?”

“I don’t know, and we don’t have time to figure it out. The only other way in is through the window.”

Together they bolted into the next room and out the window. Bastian climbed out to the slope of the roof and gripped the exterior of the manor. It was just a few short steps, but the rain made the rusted shingles slippery. When he’d reached the window, he kicked it in and dropped in followed by Armand.

Seeing Shayla pinned against the door with the entity’s hand around her neck made him snap. He’d never seen her so deathly pale, or with such fear in her eyes.

“Step the hell away from her,” he bellowed.

The ghost turned, his face screwed up into a hideous scowl. He removed his hand from Shayla’s throat long enough to send a lamp sailing straight for them. Bastian ducked, and

watched Shayla sag forward onto the desk. He scanned the room and saw a decorative sword on the wall. He pulled it down and aimed the pointed tip toward his enemy.

“What do you plan to do to me with that thing?” the spirit shrieked. “I’m a ghost, you idiot.”

Bastian tossed it to the floor. “Fuck.” He looked to Armand. “How do I kill a ghost?”

He returned a blank stare. “No idea. You’re supposed to be the fighter.”

“I’ve never fought a ghost. Have you?”

“No.”

Bastian swung at the ghost only to have his fist go right through.

“Damn.”

A pair of bookends came straight toward him. Again he ducked. He looked to Shayla and panicked. She lay on the desk unmoving. He needed to find a way to get her away from the ghost and out of there.

More objects flew toward him, including an old telephone. All he could do was bat them away.

“Look, freak,” he spat. “I don’t know who the hell you are, or what you want with Shayla, but you’d better leave her the hell alone.”

The ghost got right up in his face. “She’s mine and belongs with me. You’ve both had your chance with her and blew it.”

A letter opener that looked more like a dagger rose from a small table in the corner and aimed right at him. He refused to duck this time. It hovered and flew toward him. The tip stopped short of piercing his side when the doorbell rang, its eerie notes echoing throughout the entire house. Armand rushed to the window.

“It’s the ghost carriage.”

What a strange time for that, he thought to himself and noticed the letter opener had fallen to the floor.

The doorbell rang again followed by loud banging on the door.

“Okay, it’s never done that before.” Bastian pointed at the ghost. “Is this one of your tricks?”

“No. Whatever you do, don’t let it in.”

“It?” There was no mistaking the sound of fear in the ghost’s voice. If the ghost was

afraid he took it as a good sign.

Bastian turned to Armand. "Right. Stay with her."

"You got it."

Bastian went out the window, and back through the next one over. He ran to the balcony just as the doors swung wide open. A flash of lightning illuminated the figure of a man in a long, black trench coat dripping water all over the floor.

"Where's the mortal," the man demanded.

"The mortal?"

"The woman. Where is she? I'm here to help."

Bastian pointed behind him. "She's up here."

The stranger moved up the stairs, his feet never touching a single step.

"I'm a doctor," he shouted as he passed. "She has precious few seconds left."

"She's locked in the study. You'll have to go in through the window."

The doctor stopped at the wall beside the door and disappeared through.

"Or not." He wondered why the ghost knocked on the front door instead of coming through, but dismissed it. All that mattered was saving Shayla. Since he couldn't go through walls, he had to make his way back through the window.

This time the roof was far more slippery. He lost his footing and clung to the window ledge.

"Fuck. Not good."

"Need a hand?" He looked up to see Armand. "Any other time and I'd be thrilled to see you fall. But now isn't that time."

His rival helped him up in time to see the doctor ease Shayla onto the floor.

"You're too late," the ghost said. "You can't save her now."

Shayla felt cold hands press against her chest and a mouth cover hers. Unable to see the face clearly with her vision blurred, she feared it was the ghost. She ordered her body to struggle but didn't have the strength to. Just when she thought she'd die, a warm breath of air filled her lungs, followed by another.

When she looked again, she saw different eyes. Kind eyes that made her trust. The darkness lifted and she felt life beckon to her. She tilted her head and saw the ghost that had tried

to kill her. She screamed.

“He’ll not bother you again,” the kind man said.

From his trench coat he pulled out a vial filled with black liquid. He doused the ghost with it several times. Purplish smoke rose for several seconds and the ghost cried out in hideous shrieks. Shayla watched in awe until the ghost disappeared. When the smoke cleared, she saw that the kind man had also vanished. The front door slammed closed and she heard the carriage leave.

Bastian and Armand hurried to her side, each taking her hand.

“Are you okay?”

She nodded. “Who was that man?”

“He’s the carriage driver,” Bastian answered. “Said he was a doctor. He saved your life.”

Armand asked, “Did you know about the ghost?”

“No. I mean, I knew there was something eerie in this room so I stopped coming in here. I figured it was a ghost, but he never showed himself to me before.”

“Well, he’s gone for good,” Bastian assured her. “I’m just glad you’re okay. We were worried we lost you.”

She sat up and rested her palms along the sides of their faces. So handsome. She wanted to stare into their eyes forever. Shayla had definitely made up her mind. She didn’t want to live alone or die alone.

“I want you know that I’ve made my final decision.”

Armand raised a brow. “You have? But we thought that...”

She put her hand up. “It’s all made up. You’ll have to wait until midnight.”

“Honest, you can tell us now,” Bastian prompted.

Shayla liked holding all the cards. “No, I think you can handle another half hour of suspense.”

“I don’t know. The last hour was a bit much for me.”

“Same,” Armand agreed. “Of course, you know we’d do anything for you.”

“I’m counting on that.”

Bastian moved a strand of hair from her face. “You sure you’re okay?”

She smiled. It meant so much to her that they cared about her—took care of her. The doctor may have saved her from the ghost, but Armand and Bastian were her true heroes.

“Yes,” she said, “but I know a way you can make me even better.”

Armand picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. He lay her down gently on the bed and undressed. Bastian lay down on her other side and scooted his naked body in close. Together they worked her dress up over her head. Bare and in their skilled hands, she felt surer of herself than she could ever remember feeling. She was doing the right thing.

“Fuck me good, boys.”

Bastian’s hands were everywhere at once. He was like multiple lovers in one. Always roaming, always moving. And he knew just the right amount she liked her nipples teased and nipped.

Armand made a place for himself between her thighs and worked her pussy up into a wet frenzy with this tongue.

“Yes,” she moaned. “Yes, that feels amazing.”

Her thighs shook she desired their touch so badly.

Armand dragged his tongue along her pussy from front to back and then teased her clit. She watched the way his head bobbed and dipped. Observed the sexy way his tongue made her body zing with each flicker. Her gaze turned to Bastian and how he suckled her tit. The way he teased the bud with his teeth while pinching the other. She reached down and clasped Bastian’s cock in her hand, running it up and down his hot flesh. With every stroke, he suckled her nipple intensely, slurping it and demanding it stretch until it almost pained her. At one time she’d been intimidated by the size of his cock. Concerned she’d never handle him in her pussy, let alone her ass. He’d taught her how to relax her muscles and accept him. Of course, the lube he often used helped too.

“Bastian,” she called out. “Fuck my ass.”

His brow rose. “You want it right now?”

She smiled and nodded. “Right now.”

Armand moved up and lay on his back. Shayla straddled him. “I want you to fuck my pussy hard.”

His eyes smoldered. “Then you bring that pink dream over here.”

She gripped his cock and slid easily over him.

“Damn,” he shouted. “It’s unbelievable one woman can cream so hard.”

He grabbed her hips and brought her into him, slow and easy. Nice and deep.

She shivered at the way his thick cock spread her pussy wide. Every inch stimulating her, soaking her more. They found a steady rhythm while Bastian lathered her puckered hole with lube. She loved the way the liquid helped open her up with its pleasant burn. With a couple fingers, he prepped her, but it drove her wild.

“Get inside me now,” she demanded.

Bastian spanked her ass a few times and then rested his cock against her anus.

“Now, please,” she half pled, half whimpered.

He pushed through her sensitive hole slowly, giving her time to fully accept him. When he was all the way in, he started to pump. Armand ground his cock up into her, matching the speed and depth. The double penetration sent heat blazing to all her nerve-endings. God, they knew how to fuck her.

She cupped her breast and offered it to Armand. He raised his head and took the bead between his teeth. The harder he bit, the hotter it made her. She glanced back at Bastian. His handsome face dripped with sweat, his lips curled in pleasure. It made her pussy thrum to see him so into fucking her. Worshiping her ass with each thrust of his cock. She turned her attention to Armand and the way his eyes practically glowed whenever he got excited. His dark hair clung to the sides of his face, damp with sweat. She followed the sinewy muscles of his arms. How they flexed each time he brought her into him.

As they brought her close to an orgasm, she heard the grandfather clock downstairs start to chime midnight. Perfect timing.

“I want you both to bite me,” she panted. “Please.”

They stopped their rhythmic thrusts but didn’t move away.

“Shayla,” Bastian started. “You can only have one of us.”

“Those are your rules, not mine. Our love is special. It can sustain a lifetime. If you both love me to the degree you’ve claimed to, than let us start that future now. I want you, and I want you both to turn me. I’ve dreamed of my lovers draining my body while an orgasm surges through me.” She paused to catch her breath. “Don’t say you haven’t wanted to know my blood on your tongue.”

Bastian groaned behind her. “I’m unable to deny you. Whatever you want, it’s yours.”

Armand nodded. “From this night on you’ll belong to the both of us. There’s no going back.”

The clock chimed for the twelfth time. This was it. The start of a new life.

Shayla piled her hair on top of her head and held it in place with one hand to expose her neck. A rush of adrenaline went through her.

“Drink me.”

Bastian sunk his teeth into the left side of her neck at the same time Armand raised his head and bit into her right side. New sensations blazed throughout her body. Each suckle drove her pulse louder. They continued to move inside her. She didn’t know if it was her imagination or not, but they felt bigger inside her. Thicker, somehow. Stretching her to full capacity. And they thrust deeper than she believed possible.

They pumped her faster, as though they were possessed. The friction against her clit had her close to sensory overload. Although the orgasm had built up quickly again, she felt her pulse slow until she could scarcely feel it. Her nipples were so damn tight and responsive that she cried out as they scraped against Armand’s chest.

They drank from her until the room spun and a powerful knot grew in her belly. She wanted the orgasm that festered inside her. It promised the most exquisite one she’d ever had.

Shayla parted her lips to release all the pleasurable sounds inside her when she realized everything had gone quiet. All sounds stopped around her. She opened her eyes and watched the room turn to a stunning shade of crimson. Armand and Bastian moved in slow motion, their long thick cocks simultaneously getting her off. She felt herself mouth that she was close to climax but didn’t hear the actual words.

Armand was the first to withdraw his fangs. She couldn’t take her eyes off the blood that coated his lips. Bastian released his mouth from the other side of her neck and she looked over her shoulder to see his lips were coated too. She felt a heaviness form in her mouth and her teeth scrape along her lips. Armand pinched her nipples, the oh-so-sensitive nipples that ached they were so taut. She threw her head back as the marvelous knot in her gut started to unravel.

“Yes, oh my god, yes, yes.”

Shayla cried out so loud that it shattered the bedroom windows.

She continued to scream like her life depended on it. The orgasm nearly blinded her with its strength, but she kept on hollering, riding out one fantastic wave after another. To sweeten the deal, she felt the force of their climaxes as well, filling her with their white heat. Filling her with their eternal promise of love. They continued to move together, as one, for several more minutes

until their pace slowed and their bodies spent.

She collapsed onto the bed crammed between their writhing, soaked bodies. A sharp stab of a pain followed that gave her a moment of concern.

“Is it supposed to be painful?”

Bastian and Armand held their wrists above her.

“Open your mouth, beautiful.”

They made a slit in their wrists and she let their liquid drip onto her tongue. With each swallow the pain subsided. She licked her lips, excited by the new taste on her palate. Somewhere between a sugary and syrupy elixir. A calm peacefulness followed.

“Will it always be that way,” she asked. “Will it always hurt?”

“No,” Armand assured her. “We’ll make sure of that.”

“How do you feel?”

“I feel on fire,” Shayla mused. “I feel like myself, only better.”

Bastian ran his hand along her arm. “Just know that we’ll take care of you.”

“Forever,” added Armand.

She liked the sound of that. Her two great loves were with her, and she’d never be alone.

They gathered her up in their arms and softly kissed where they’d bitten her.

“Mm, that feels good,” she purred.

“Hope you’re ready for a brand new experience.”

Shayla nodded. She had everything she would ever need. Best of all, she was immortally theirs.

About the Author

Born with an overactive imagination, Ann Cory has always had a love of words and putting them to paper. With the loving support of her husband and son, she is able to devote her time to the very stubborn and demanding muse.

Ann enjoys writing erotic romance where she delves into the dark realms of paranormal, vampires, shape-shifters, and urban fantasy, while adding excitement and spice to contemporary, BDSM, alternative, and historical themes.

For updates and more, please visit her Magical Seductions website www.anncory.com.

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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's 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 Hagan 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.

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Blood Quest

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.

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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?

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