

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Bar None

BRIGIT ZAHARA

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After a very upsetting day, Sera heads to Bar None and the solace of the joint's owners, Nate and Fab, her two best friends who, oh yeah, just happen to be vampires.

Beautiful, well built and in possession of breathtaking animal magnetism, both Nate and Fab can have any woman they want. But Nate told Sera that sex with a human fires a vampire's bloodlust to the point of frenzy, making it clear that a romantic rendezvous with him or the unusually self-controlled Fab is out of the question. Not that Sera, or any other hot-blooded woman, for that matter, wouldn't be game to take the risk.

What do you do when you're in love with two men, but one of them won't touch you because he's afraid he might "love" you to death? When Sera realizes both guys want her as much as she wants them, she teams up with willpower-wizard Fab to convince Nate that a hot, sexy threesome is well worth the danger.

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Bar None

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BAR NONE

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Chapter One

Nate awoke to the taste of iron on his tongue, an ache in his groin and a sore mouth.

He'd been biting down, his vampire canines digging into his bottom lip so hard that he'd drawn blood.

Must've been the dream.

Again.

Since meeting Sera, Nate had dreamed of her nightly—hot, burning, tormented dreams of them together, dreams that varied only in the locales and positions but never in the actions themselves or the extent of the passion embodied by their movements. Dreams that would never come true.

He glanced down the length of his naked torso, his supernatural gaze easily discerning the haughty angle of his painfully stiff cock in the darkness of his vertical coffin. His erection was a thick, long testament to his love and hunger for Sera as it jutted out into the dense black air that encompassed him.

Closing his eyes, he let his mind drift back to the most recent nocturnal vision that had inflamed his heart and body...

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Sera and Nate were in the bar, the crowded city pub where they routinely met. Only this time they were alone. The evocative bass line of an R&B song pounded out, sultry and slow, in the background. Sera was bent over the edge of the pool table lining up a shot, her red mini slip dress riding up enough to reveal the gentle curve of her backside where it met the top of her thighs.

She wasn't wearing panties.

Nate's cock twitched and hardened in a heartbeat. It took everything he had not to lunge at her right then and there and sink his teeth into one of the plump, smooth globes that taunted him from beneath the cover of crimson silk, moaning as her warm blood spilled into his mouth and he delicately buried his fingers deep inside the creamy heat between her legs.

Begrudgingly pulling his gaze from the tempting view, Nate watched as Sera leisurely gauged the angle of the pool cue in relation to the ball she was aiming for. He couldn't decide which made him hotter, the sight of the long piece of wood sliding back and forth within the tight V created by Sera's arched index finger and thumb, the rest of her hand resting lightly on the felt tabletop, or her close-fisted grip on the handle, pushing it in and out of her makeshift prop. When Sera looked over her shoulder and winked at him, Nate couldn't hold back any longer.

He was some thirty feet away from her but in one second flat, he was directly behind her, his inhuman speed making him able to reach her in the blink of an eye. Nate grabbed the cue from Sera's hand, his powerful grip pulverizing the stick where he clasped it, the two remaining segments hitting the floor with a clatter. Whirling Sera around, he reached down, cupped the cheeks of her ass and hoisted her up onto the table as he stepped in close between her spread legs, the bulge of his massive hard-on pressing urgently against her exposed pussy.

Sera gasped. Nate knew that even beneath the fabric of his jeans, she could feel the pressure and sheer bulk of his cock. Her nails dug into his shoulders as they stared at each other. The air was heavy with the heat of the moment and the so-long-denied need to unleash their passion for one another. Who could blame them for tearing their clothes off and wildly going at it like rabbits?

Strangely enough though, from there, things went into slow motion.

Nate gradually eased Sera back onto the pool table, his eyes never leaving hers. Guiding her right leg to dangle over the edge, Nate lifted Sera's left knee up and extended her shin out, resting her ankle on his shoulder.

He smiled at her then, his fangs protruding long and hard to poke at the pliant, moist flesh of his bottom lip in a sexy mimicry of what was to come—his cock nudging the entrance to her vagina. He nibbled and licked his lower lip in an unconscious effort to express his desire and intent to do the same to Sera's pussy.

Which he could smell.

It smelled incredible.

And the scent was driving him crazy.

All he wanted to do was dive between her silken thighs and bury his face in that fragrant honeypot, drive her to one climax after another by alternating tonguing her tunnel and sucking her sweet spot.

But that would have to wait.

For now, he slipped off her shoe and painstakingly moved over every inch of her foot, his tongue snaking and swirling between each of her toes in a seductive show of what was going to go down higher up. The correlation was not lost on Sera. She moaned softly, her pelvis tensing, her entire body squirming at each open-mouthed, tongue-flickering kiss as Nate progressed up her shin to her thigh.

Reaching the desired end to his journey, Nate eyed the glistening view that awaited him. He had never seen anything so beautiful or so inviting. The female genitalia had always struck Nate as a work of art but there was something about the sight of Sera's pussy that filled him with a kind of reverence-filled yearning to sink in and be devoured, truly lose himself within the cocoon-like ripples of moisture and warmth.

Tentatively, he gently touched the glossy creases with one finger, parting the fleshy folds as he leaned closer. Sera's thighs stiffened then quivered in anticipation of his mouth. Smiling, he playfully blew along the length of her pussy from bottom to top. She trembled in response, both excited and tormented by his teasing touch.

Leaning down, Nate extended his tongue, just about coming as he touched its tip to the little swollen oval at the top of her cunt. Sera's fingers dug into his hair as he closed his lips around it and sucked gently. Within seconds, she exploded, her thighs and

pelvis quaking with one delicious contraction after another. Nate's mouth was soon saturated with warm cum as he shifted down and buried his tongue deep inside her, one thumb replacing the suction of his mouth with rhythmical strokes upon her shuddering clit. His muffled moan at the feel of her clutching, creaming canal excited them both.

When her orgasm subsided, he jerked upright and whipped out his throbbing cock. Gone was the restraint he had shown so far. All he could think about was burying his aching cock in that tight, hot hollow where only seconds earlier his tongue had been.

He shot a glance up the length of Sera's body to her face.

She was flushed, hunger blazing in her eyes. She clearly ached for him, craved the feel of him inside her, was desperate for his cock.

And by God, he was going to give it to her.

Give it to her good.

Reaching back, Nate lightly grabbed Sera's leg that dangled over the edge of the table and guided it skyward. Moving in closer, he stretched forward along her torso so that both her knees buckled over his shoulders. His thick erection bumped against the plump slickness between her legs, making Sera whimper.

Nate bit his lip to keep from making the same sound of need.

They both had waited so long to be together like this. A virtual eternity.

And if there was one thing a vampire knew about, it was eternity.

But now, the waiting was over.

Throwing off the shackles of logic and control, Nate plunged into Sera, savoring the hot suction that greeted and closed around his pulsing shaft. Distantly he felt Sera's hands caressing his shoulders, clutching his butt and stroking his hair but nothing could compete with the ecstasy of her cunt virtually sucking in his close-to-coming cock. Wildly they kissed, their tongues moving erratically as they explored one another's mouths and licked each other's necks and throats.

The scent of Sera's blood in Nate's nostrils was driving him mad. His fangs were fully extended now, the complete emergence of the little daggers indicative that Nate was ready to fill himself with blood, just as his balls pulling up tight against the base of his cock showed he was ready to fill Sera with cum. Leaning even closer, he pressed his bellybutton against Sera's, his pelvis moving against her clit with every stroke as he clasped her bottom and pushed her more fully onto his pounding cock. She quivered in his hands, her orgasm imminent.

Just as she came, Nate felt the powerful cadenced spasms that pumped semen from his tightly packed balls up into his quivering cock. Seizing the moment, he drove his teeth into the soft, pliant flesh of Sera's neck, groaning in rapture as her blood spurted into his mouth, the rhythmic jets of warmth almost in sync with the pulsing gushes from his cock as he poured copious amounts of cum into her. Beyond heaven, beyond anything he had ever known, Nate erupted, over and over and over again, filling Sera with his love.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The dream.

It was always different and yet it was always the same—Nate waking, so hard that he hurt.

But that was nothing compared to the hurt in his heart.

He glanced down again. His cock was now flaccid but his torso and thighs were covered in cum, his left hand too.

That was also always the same.

The only way he could get release was by his own hand. Sex with a mortal was the most dangerous of prospects for both parties involved.

That's why he and Sera would never be together in that way.

With a heavy sigh, he stepped out of the coffin and headed for the shower.

Chapter Two

Sera pushed against the heavy wooden door of Bar None and stepped into the sudden darkness of the windowless neighborhood pub. Standing still for a few minutes, she blinked, struggling to adjust to the dim lighting.

Of all days to forget her shades.

For the past several hours, Sera had been crying nonstop, the very legitimate meltdown having effectively removed every bit of mascara from her lashes, reddened her nose and swollen her lids to the point that she looked more like Rocky Balboa in the twelfth round than the pretty and polished advertising executive she was. A pair of dark sunglasses would have masked most of the damage—a small but nevertheless reassuring comfort at the moment. But apart from wanting to disguise her state, Sera really needed protective eye cover today for another reason altogether. With the temperature hitting a blistering ninety-five degrees for the fourth straight day in a row, the blazing rays of the late afternoon sun was positively bouncing off the tropical city's pavements, windshields, cars and anything else with a reflective surface, to blind pedestrians and drivers alike.

Glancing around, Sera realized the place was full. The blend of bodies that packed the popular watering hole was a diverse mix of post-workday professionals, students from the nearby university and a smattering of couples, the latter undoubtedly biding their time before an early evening dinner reservation. Packed was the word. Even after scanning the noisy area a couple of times, Sera was hard pressed to find a spot to sit in the entire place.

Sera.

The low familiar tone, as soft as a lover's whisper, sounded within her head. Damn but she hated it when he used that project-his-voice-inside-your-mind thing.

Skimming the crowd once more, Sera's eyes finally came to rest on Nate behind the bar, his hair still damp from a recent shower. He was standing still, deathly still, in that characteristic, statue-like manner of his, watching her with a singularity of purpose that made her feel both self-conscious and flattered. Inwardly groaning, Sera walked toward him, following his motion toward a single barstool at the far end. The last thing she wanted to do was discuss her split from her boyfriend Lance with anyone, let alone a vampire.

Even if he was one of her best friends.

Climbing up onto the tall seat, Sera plunked her purse onto the counter, initially avoiding Nate's eyes as she crossed her hands atop the snakeskin bag.

"The usual?" he asked. When Sera didn't answer, Nate's low, rich voice once more sounded inside her head, a trace of concern edging its way into the words.

Maybe something a little stronger?

Sera looked up then, her red-rimmed, blue eyes locking with his warm golden gaze that shifted to a troubled stare as he read the pain on her face. His voice turned decidedly chilly.

"What's that asshole done this time?"

"Nate..." Sera bit her trembling bottom lip, determined to keep from crumpling into yet another crying jag. The feel of his cool hand on her feverish flesh as he lightly touched her wrist was strangely soothing. "We...can you just give me a minute?"

Lifting a shaking hand to shield her eyes, Sera rubbed her aching forehead. Peeking out from the cover of her palm, she watched as Nate slowly withdrew his hand, his knuckles turning white as he curled his fingers into a tight fist. Dropping her hand to rest on the countertop, she looked at him, distantly noticing how wonderful he looked in his maroon shirt, the white skin of his strong forearms striking beneath the rolled-up edges of his sleeves. A muscle in Nate's jaw twitched as he silently watched her, the distinctive sound of enamel grating on enamel making Sera shudder.

"Stop that. You're going to chip your teeth."

"Tell you what I'm going to do. I'm gonna kill him," he growled under his breath, his gorgeous eyes flashing at the thrill of that thought.

Sera sighed heavily. "You always say that."

"Yeah and you always stop me."

She waved her hand dismissively. "Who knows? Maybe I won't this time."

Nate's dark pupils grew enormous within his amber gaze, the change both alluring and alarming at the same time. Again his silken tone, soft and smooth as his hay-colored hair, reached inside her mind.

Just give me the word.

Sera shot him an exasperated look. "May I have a drink first?" She glanced down the length of the bar for the regular evening bartender. "Where's Barney?"

"I'm on it," he responded to her first question before addressing the second. "He's off sick."

Nate flashed a smile then, a show of flawless white teeth that Sera immediately knew would be ideal for nibbling a nipple in passion or tearing flesh in hunger. Not that she'd ever seen him do either. Nor did she want to. And needless to say, she certainly didn't want to experience it directly.

Well, not the "tearing flesh" part anyway.

From the moment they met, Sera had been acutely aware of Nate's staggering sex appeal—breathtaking charisma that simply couldn't be compared with that of a mere mortal man. Beyond his model-perfect face and body, so heart stopping in their beauty that it appeared he had been chiseled from marble by the talented hands of Michelangelo himself, there was a tangible sexual vibe about Nate that reduced every female within a ten-mile radius to a quivering mass of hormones.

Wistfully, Sera found herself wondering yet again if Nate had ever used his one-of-a-kind animal magnetism to get laid. Undoubtedly, he turned on the charm to lure in potential "dinner companions"—those lucky ladies from whom he sipped only a little,

leaving them a bit lightheaded but never the wiser at the end of the night. Had he ever gone any farther than that? Had he ever given in to the oldest longing of all, driving his hard cock into the aching pussy of his unsuspecting “date” while he drove his hard teeth into her soft throat?

According to Nate, the answer was an emphatic “no”. Since Nate and Fab first came out to her as vampires, she had learned so much about their kind.

Sera first discovered that Nate and Fab were real bloodsucking Bela Lugosi types—albeit hiding their true identities like the rest of their breed—when she had accidentally stumbled onto a bar brawl out back at Bar None one night that got a little out of hand.

Way out of hand.

That’s when she had personally witnessed the guys’ superhuman speed, strength, fang sprouting and, oh yeah, penchant for drinking blood. As she would learn, with strong emotions like anger or passion, their ability to control themselves became greatly compromised.

By that time in their relationship, the three had become very close friends but it still understandably took Nate and Fab some mighty fast talking and many detailed explanations to first calm Sera and then reassure her that they didn’t prey on humans and weren’t dangerous. They merely stole a couple of sips here and there without ever hurting the unaware “donor”. Nate also told her that one of the many perks of their “condition” was that they could transfer their thoughts into the minds of any humans within a mile or so, give or take. They couldn’t read her thoughts unless they shared blood with her. That also applied to any vampires they had shared blood with. However, Nate also shared the arguably only downside of being a fangster...sex with a human was now pretty much impossible. Most vampires couldn’t have sex with mortals because the act itself would raise their bloodlust to a fever pitch. Unable to maintain any degree of control, they would end up sucking and fucking their human lover dry in the truest sense of the words, not stopping until there wasn’t a drop of moisture left. Anywhere. To this day, it was a claim Nate stuck to like glue.

Despite the myriad women who routinely threw themselves at him, he never took any of them up on their exuberant advances nor wavered from his assertion that he was a frustrated vampire, endlessly aching for release but never able to entertain the idea, let alone attempt it. When Sera, her eyes wide with disbelief, had shyly questioned the insinuation that he never relieved his sexual tension, Nate had given her a sexy wink, his soft, full lips spreading into a knee-buckling grin before answering in a voice rife with suggestion, “Well, not *with* anyone.”

Sera knew the feeling.

Even after three years with Lance, she’d never experienced the Big O. At least not with him. Or her other boyfriend before him for that matter. She’d only had the two relationships and throughout both she had done everything in her power to make it happen—read books, tried different techniques, even taken a few drinks to loosen her up just in case she was too tense, but nothing had worked.

Except of course when she took matters into her own hands.

Having one orgasm after the other was no problem when Sera pleased herself. In fact, it was easy. A little stroke here, a few probes there and badda boom, badda bing! Easy as one-two-three. Apart from getting the release that she needed when she went at it solo, Sera was relieved to discover that there was no physical reason for her inability to climax with a partner. It wasn’t that she couldn’t come, she just couldn’t come with someone else in the room. As neither one of her lovers were clumsy or clueless in bed, their hands and lips and cocks seeming to do everything they could and should, Sera had come to believe that it was something else. A mental block, perhaps. Maybe her failure to explode like the Fourth of July with a lover had to do with a latent unwillingness to open up, trust and just let go.

Still, for some reason, Sera strongly suspected she could really let go with Nate. There was something about him, something that went far beyond the appeal of his immortal beauty and power that touched her like none before. But clearly, that was not meant to be. After several years of fighting the urge to tear every last bit of clothing

from his sizzling bod and lick him top to bottom like a lollipop, Sera had grown accustomed to the strangely seductive power he held over women, eventually resigning herself to the fact that the two of them would never be together in that way.

She no longer cringed at the effort it took to restrain herself from kissing and touching him, crushing her breasts against his rock-hard torso and falling to her knees to suck his cock, which would be made rock hard too by her passion. But the thought of doing those things, and so much more, to Nate's eternally enticing form was never far away. As she watched him prepare a vodka martini, a departure from her usual white wine spritzer, she felt the heaviness of disappointment compound the existing distress she felt over her undisclosed breakup as it fell hard, to settle in her stomach.

Nate might be her closet confidant—actually one of two—but she just couldn't bear admitting that he had been right about Lance all along.

Not yet anyway.

"Hey Sera, how's— Whoa! Who died?"

Sera glanced up at the sound of the sandpaper-like voice. It was Fab—her other solid sounding board who stood before her, beside Nate on the other side of the bar, his dark eyes a perfect match to the color of his shaggy hair. Similar to Nate, he was a sexy, suck-your-blood stud who often lent Sera his ear and a shoulder to cry on with one major difference—Fab never missed the chance to invite Sera into his bed. It was a well-known fact that he had a crush on the slightly older woman—everyone knew it. Even Nate and Sera. But while the frisky invitations were always humorous and seemingly innocent, there was a shred of hope-ridden truth hidden within each lighthearted proposal even though, like Nate, Fab would risk raising his bloodlust to a dangerous point by having sex with Sera. But there was one major difference—Fab possessed an unusual degree of self-control. Nate didn't miss a beat as he dropped a toothpicked large green olive into the martini glass.

"Her boyfriend's going to."

Fab clapped his hands together, his face breaking into an obvious expression of glee. "Fantastic! When are we doing it?"

"Not we. Me. The planet's a whole lot better without that lowlife on it, so I'm going to off him." He shrugged nonchalantly. "Call it my gift to the world. But I'm doing it alone."

Fab's face fell, his lips pulling down into a pronounced pout. As the undead went, he was the most animated Sera had ever seen. Then again, she only had Nate for comparison and except for the occasional slip, Nate's face was always the same.

Blank.

Unreadable.

And utterly exquisite.

"That's no fair," Fab all but whined. "I haven't had a full meal deal in the longest time."

"Fabrizzio, that's exactly the point," Nate told him quietly. "You're just getting used to feeding without killing. The concept is still fairly new to you."

Of that, Sera was certain. A just-born bloodsucker buck who'd been left to his own devices by his maker, Fab had been living on the outskirts of the city, roaming the streets and killing at random when Nate found him. Unaware of a more humanitarian lifestyle—use your powers to mesmerize your prey, take only what you need then leave them blissfully unaware and very much alive. Fab had originally scoffed at Nate's preferred manner of feeding. But with some guidance and tutorage, Fab slowly came around to Nate's way of coexisting with their food supply without harming them in any way—physically or emotionally.

Accepting the drink Nate handed her, Sera took a moment to study the two undead lookers who now stood side by side. While Fab was only slightly shorter than Nate's six-foot-one, lean frame, he was just as impressively built as his mentor. Muscles rippled beneath his tight gray T-shirt, the bulges of his thighs straining just as much

against the fabric of his dark pants. And though he was almost as pale as Nate, Fab's smooth ivory skin hinted at a once-swarthy complexion.

He was still frowning.

"Yeah, but you said my level of self-control is off the charts. You said you'd never seen anything like it."

Nate appeared to be considering the argument. "That's true." He nodded. "You seem able to restrain yourself, even in the face of the most alluring temptations. Still, I think it would be unwise to wave bait in front of you. At least for now. I just don't want you to regress. I'll do him myself." Nate finished with a sharpness that left no room for doubt that the conversation was over.

"Nobody's going to kill anybody," Sera said, dropping her voice to a low tone as a young woman to her right turned to gawk at them. The woman's eyes drifted over to Fab. Without hesitation, he pursed his lips and made a soft kissing sound. Gasping, the woman staggered a little and clutched at the countertop, her gaze sliding down to dreamily lock on Fab's mouth. Like Nate, he had the power to make a mortal female damn near come on the spot simply by looking at her.

"Stop playing with the customers," Nate muttered.

"Don't you mean stop playing with my food?"

Nate slid him a sideways look that could pulverize stone. Fab ignored him. Releasing the young woman from his hypnotic stare, he leaned forward to rest against his crossed arms on the bar's surface.

"Is someone going to tell me what's going on?"

Nate looked at Sera expectantly. Rolling her eyes, she let out another long breath of air.

"Lance and I...broke up."

That was true. What Sera didn't include in the admission was that she and her now ex had called it quits close to two months ago.

“Woo-fucking-hoo!” Fab said loudly, a hard edge bordering his overly eager response. “Let’s break out the champagne.” Then, noting Sera’s wounded expression, he quickly backtracked. “I’m sorry, Sera. I really am. But you know I’ve always hated that guy. He’s never been good enough for you.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Nate murmured as he nodded to the waitress who appeared, his hands suddenly busy preparing several margaritas before she opened her mouth to request them. Sera turned and glanced around. Must be for the trio of women sitting across the way, their frequent looks and girlish titters clearly centering on the two hotties behind the bar.

“It’s...complicated,” Sera said, turning back. She took a long sip of her own potent cocktail that half emptied the glass.

Truer words were never spoken. When she had met Lance, Sera had fallen fast and hard. He was handsome, charming and seemed to be madly in love with her. What was not to love? But all too soon, the disappointments began. Missed dinner dates, canceled weekend outings, their once-lengthy phone chats abruptly cut short—each and every occurrence always followed by a sincerely apologetic Lance who swore up and down it would never happen again.

But it had.

They had even broken up once before for about three weeks when Sera had decided enough was enough. But a slick-talking, genuinely remorseful Lance had wormed his way back into her heart and her life.

For a while after that, Sera was able to ignore the nagging little voice within that whispered he was seeing someone else, time after time telling herself she was just being paranoid. Lance was a very successful but very busy man who frequently had to change his plans on the fly. That was all it was.

But when she stopped by his condo one day a couple months back and caught him going at it with some woman in the very bed where he and Sera had made love the week before, she’d thought the situation couldn’t get any worse.

It could. It had.

When Sera had finally taken one of the many calls from Lance that he had bombarded her with for the past eight weeks, just before lunch today, she'd steeled herself for yet another round of apologies and rueful explanations that were sure to follow. He had done that, to be sure, but then Lance had dropped an even bigger bomb. He'd confessed that, not only had he been seeing another woman, but as it turned out, that other woman was his wife. Wife! Sera had been stunned beyond words. What she'd thought of as a meaningful, loving relationship had been nothing more than an on-the-side fling with a married man.

But that was not the only shock in store.

To Sera's utter amazement Lance had suggested he and Sera continue their affair. According to him, things would be so much easier now that she knew what the situation was. While it had taken her a long minute to recover, Sera had then called Lance every name in the book, terminating the call and finally their relationship with the screamed declaration, "I don't ever want to see you again!"

Hours later, she had made her way to Bar None. Now, as she sat toying with the flared base of her martini glass, she silently offered up a prayer of thanks that Nate didn't know the reason behind the breakup. If he did, he would kill Lance for sure.

In the twinkling of an eye, Nate finished the drink order he'd been preparing. Wordlessly, he watched as the server loaded the large glasses onto her tray and disappeared into the throng.

"It's not that complicated," he replied in his usual forthright manner as he turned his attention back to Sera. "The guy's a sack of shit. You never should've stayed with him."

An arrow of rage shot through Sera. For the first time that day, she felt something other than total despair. Narrowing her eyes, she stared hard into his golden eyes.

"Yeah, well, feelings can confuse a situation. But you're just going to have to trust me on that one. I know you haven't the faintest idea what it's like to actually feel something."

"Oh burn," Fab said with a snort then withering under Nate's scathing look before leaving to take an order at the opposite end.

Nate returned his steady gaze to Sera. His expression was still once more but his eyes burned with an indefinable intensity.

"You think I don't feel anything?"

"I know you don't."

One pale eyebrow arched up to crinkle the flat plane of Nate's forehead but beyond that his face was completely motionless. "Really?"

Sera gulped down the last of her martini and pushed the glass toward Nate, indicating she wanted another. Plopping her chin into the crook of her hand, she watched as he reached for the vodka. "Hunger isn't an emotion. Besides, you just don't know what it's like to want someone, want them so bad, even though you know it can never work."

Nate abruptly stopped what he was doing, the utter motionlessness of his body drawing emphasis to what he was about to say. Without moving his lips, Nate responded to Sera's statement, his gentle voice laced with that seductive tone, flooded her thoughts.

Don't I?

Nate then did something he had never done before. He let Sera see inside his head. It was actually more than that. Using a sort of mental projection, Nate sent his thoughts to Sera, allowing her to experience what was in his mind—not only see but feel them too. There was a jumbled mass of images, flashes really, of fluid snapshots that rolled from one to the other, but oh how vivid—alarmingly lucid depictions of what Nate was contemplating, what he wanted.

There was a glimpse of Sera's naked torso as she lay sprawled on her back, her arms tossed in surrender overhead. Her breasts didn't slump into her armpits but rather stood fully upright thanks to Nate's strong hands that gently pushed them together, his tongue bathing the soft mounds endlessly, his lips finally closing around the rosy stiff tips of her nipples, the pressure of his strong lips erotically heightened by the soft nipping action of his teeth.

Then Sera was straddling Nate, her long legs spread on either side of his face as he clasped her firm butt cheeks, simultaneously pushing her down against his eager mouth and tongue while holding her steady. From her perspective, she could just barely see the top of his head, moving back and forth in a lazy, continuous motion as he tongued the length of her pussy and licked lovingly at her swelling clit, breaking into earth-shatteringly slow sucks upon the blossoming little bud before tonguing her, end to end, once more. Gradually Nate stoked the fire within, the power and skill of his mouth and tongue doing things to her she couldn't begin to imagine. Gasping, Sera leaned forward and put her hands on the wall behind the headboard, shuddering violently as Nate drove his tongue deep into her slick center. With precision and speed, he lapped at her, holding her tight as she climaxed, her sweet juices flowing from her as she cried out.

Another image erupted in Sera's mind in which Nate had her pinned against a wall, her legs tightly wrapped around his hips, his legs spread wide while he easily held her bottom in his large hands. His hard alabaster cock moved smooth and steady in and out of her throbbing pussy, the rhythm of each stroke coinciding with the torrid lapping of his tongue upon a certain shiver-producing spot on her neck. Not once did he change the pressure or speed of his thrusts. He didn't have to. Bit by bit, he chipped away at her body's resistance to response, the unhurried pumping action of his hard shaft moving deep and at just the right angle to progressively build Sera's excitement. When at last she came, she felt as if she were being blown apart from the inside. Screaming, she clutched wildly at Nate's back, only vaguely aware of the hard, thick pressure deep inside her and its relentless pulsing pace as she exploded all around it.

Nate cleared his throat, the sound snapping Sera back to the reality. Staring into his amber eyes for a long moment that felt oddly surreal in its suspension, Sera then dropped her gaze to the countertop of the bar, the heat of embarrassment flushing her cheeks a bright red as she struggled to calm her pounding heartbeat. Shifting uncomfortably, she blushed again, realizing that the material of her panties between her legs was damp.

Very damp.

"That was a cheap trick," she sputtered in a whisper, her mouth suddenly so dry she could barely talk. With a shaking hand, Sera reached for her drink but promptly spilled it. Within seconds, Nate had another one made and set closer, in front of her.

"It's no trick. You said you knew I didn't feel anything and I wanted to prove to you that I did."

Sera gulped noisily at her martini, eager to ease her deliciously frayed nerves with the anesthetic-like property of alcohol. "I told you. Hunger isn't an emotion."

"You think that was just about sex?"

Oh puh-leeze.

Mortal men went for physical intimacy first, emotional second. Could vampire males be any different?

Sera defiantly raised her eyes and stared him down. "Yes."

For the first time that Sera could remember, Nate seemed to lose his composure. He lowered his gaze, refusing to look at her while he began mixing a drink for the amorous couple to her left. From the looks of it, a screwdriver for the guy and a pink lady for the woman. But as he worked, a strange vibe radiated from him and it was one Sera didn't recognize.

"Nate?" she prompted, leaning forward in curiosity.

He still wouldn't make eye contact, his hands moving quickly as he garnished the screwdriver with an orange slice and plopped a maraschino cherry into the other, the

unfamiliar aura continuing to emanate from him as he worked. Puzzled, Sera examined the intangible atmosphere that wafted around them. It was a heavy, dark vibe, kind of like dejection or disappointment, and yet it seemed more than that. Without a facial expression to aid her—Nate was the master of “the mask”—Sera struggled to define the precise ambiance of the moment. Then all of a sudden it hit her.

He wasn’t dejected. He wasn’t disappointed. He was hurt. Sera quickly scrambled to soften the blow.

“Nate, I’m sorry. I—”

“Forget it,” he all but snapped, swiftly heading to the opposite side of the bar to wait on some newly arrived customers. Seconds later, Fab appeared before her, his dark eyes dancing as he looked at her questioningly. Sera slapped a hand to her head.

“I said something wrong.”

“You sure did.”

His words brought Sera’s head up with a jerk. “You heard that?”

“Heard and saw.” Fab smiled, motioning back and forth between Nate and himself. “We’re family. Share more than just blood.”

Sera squeezed her eyes shut and groaned. She’d forgotten about that. Fab had gotten into a bloodsucker bout a while back and Nate had given him some of his own blood to speed his recovery. They could now share thoughts. In fact, if they didn’t consciously raise a virtual mental block, they could read each other’s minds.

“Oh God,” she moaned, a wave of acute humiliation swiftly trumping the feeling of regret within.

“Don’t worry about it,” Fab said softly. “It’s not news. He’s blocked most of his thoughts about you from me but a few slipped out. I’ve always known he had it real bad for you.”

Sera gawked at him, flabbergasted. “What? Nate?” She paused, struggling to absorb Fab’s words. “Since when?”

"Since you first met."

First met.

At the thought, the memory of that fateful night rapidly played out in Sera's head...

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

It had been a cold winter night in December, the twenty-fourth to be exact, and Sera had been driving out to her estate in the country for the Christmas season. Her family, a crew of no less than eighteen, would be arriving the next day and she had a ton of work to do. Given her high-powered position with an ad firm, Sera had long since purchased a comfortable condo in the city to cut down on commuting time. However, on weekends and holidays, she always retreated to the sanctuary of her real home, as she called it.

A light rain had fallen that morning, nothing more than a sleet-like drizzle for a couple of hours, but it was enough. As the light of day died and the temperatures dropped, the normally easy-to-drive highway turned treacherous with newly formed ice. Not unaccustomed to challenging road conditions, Sera adjusted her speed and manner accordingly. Moving into the slower far-right lane, she worked to keep her vehicle from fishtailing on the super-slick pavement. Powerful gusts of wind blew across the open fields that flanked the roadway, rocking the car and toying with its equilibrium. One particularly violent air stream swayed the posh sports coupe and reflexively, Sera slammed on the brakes.

Bad move.

The little car swerved sharply, spinning out of control into a couple of full, fast rotations before skidding over the edge of the road to dive headfirst into the bordering embankment of snow. The hard, sudden impact brought the coupe to a jarring halt and Sera's head smashed into the windshield as her body lurched forward.

After that, the first thing Sera felt was a sort of dazed confusion.

What just happened? she thought as she stared out at the endless sea of white that stretched beyond the hood of her car. *Where am I? And what is that running into my eyes and mouth?*

Moments before Sera went into shock, it all came back to her—the ice, the braking, the spinning, the crash. Fast on the heels of the recollection came the horrifying realization that she was in very, very serious trouble. Hurt, stranded, and as she had just determined, without the use of her unable-to-get-a-signal cell phone. Sera's options, and indeed her future, appeared to be very limited.

And then Nate appeared.

The driver door jerked open and he was leaning into the car, his gorgeous face only inches from her own as he peered into Sera's eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked at once, startled and dumbfounded by his sudden appearance as well as the magnitude of his beauty.

His rich topaz eyes moved up to survey the gash on Sera's forehead, his smooth, flawless face contorting into a pained grimace.

"You need to go to the hospital," he said from between clenched teeth, his satiny voice out of sync with the tortured expression in his eyes.

In a flash, Sera was in his arms and they were walking. Only there was no car in sight. As the heavy weight of impending unconsciousness started to pull her under, Sera stared up into her savior's face. Indeed, he appeared to be some sort of archangel, his blond hair whipping around the chiseled planes of his flawless face, his glittering eyes focused on some far-off point. The wind that blew around them increased tenfold, Sera's body bouncing lightly within his cold embrace and somewhere up through the tangled web of confusion, she realized he was running.

Fast.

"Who are you?" Sera asked again, her voice barely above a whisper as her lids fluttered shut. The last thing she heard before she passed out was his silken voice.

"My name's Nate."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

A boisterous bit of laughter erupted from the other side of the bar, effectively snapping Sera back to the present. Shaking her head, she stared at Fab. "The car accident."

Wordlessly he nodded.

"But I thought he was just being...nice. You know, a good Samaritan. Even when he hung around the hospital and helped me home, I just thought he was making sure I was okay."

"He was," Fab said, his eyes softening as his mouth broke into a gentle grin. "But that's part and parcel when you love someone."

Love?

Did he really just say that Nate loved her?

"I don't understand," Sera stammered, her eyes darting down to the far end of the counter where Nate was busy tending to a boisterous group of students. "Why? I mean, how?"

Fab gave her a little wink. "I think it would be better if you asked him that yourself."

Sera's thoughts spun into a whirlwind.

Could it really be true? Did Nate really love her?

Sera thought back over the many instances of Nate's kindness to her, his strength, his unwavering dependability and devotion, the countless occasions on which he consoled and soothed her when she was upset, whether in regard to Lance or anything else for that matter. There had been so many times when he was there for her, ever the epitome of a friend.

More than a friend.

Suddenly, it all fell into place... Nate did love her. *Love* love. But in an equally powerful aha! moment, Sera realized she loved him right back. All this time, she had not been frequenting Bar None just to visit her two best friends. She loved Nate and had from the first moment she'd first laid eyes on him. A wave of something similar to relief washed over Sera but it was quickly smothered by worry.

Now that she knew they loved each other, what should she do?

Turning, Fab headed in the direction of Nate but the two passed one another midway, in essence changing spots so that now Nate stood in front of Sera.

"Another martini?" he asked. He was looking at her full-on now but there was not even the slightest hint of his former distressed state. Sera swallowed hard, her heart hammering in her chest.

"Nate, I owe you an apology. I—"

He held up his hand to interrupt her, his warm eyes brimming with something Sera couldn't identify. "It's okay, Sera. Really. I know you're upset about what happened with your boyfriend." Nate semi-choked on the word. "But I do think it's for the best. In time, I hope you will come to agree with me on that. Right now though, I gotta go."

"Nate!" she called out, but just as suddenly as he had appeared into her life, Nate disappeared.

Chapter Three

Over the next couple of hours, Sera had a few more martinis, hoping that the stiff drinks would provide her with a little “liquid courage”. But instead of feeling empowered or even drunk, all she felt was relaxed and in control.

Control is good.

Waving Fab over, Sera leaned toward him, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial level. Though his superior hearing ensured he could hear her from across the room, Fab bent down and tilted his head to one side in a practiced mimicry of human gestures.

“I need your help.”

Fab didn’t hesitate. His voice sounded in her head.

Name it.

Sera opened her mouth to speak but instantly wavered. She knew she wanted to do this and she knew she would need Fab and his reputed powers of self-control to even attempt it. But God, it was so hard to ask. Squaring her shoulders, she dove in.

“I-I want to be with Nate.” Sera held her breath, hoping Fab would catch her drift. She didn’t want to have to spell it out. Slowly, she exhaled as she read the look of comprehension glowing in Fab’s eyes.

Fab watched Sera for a long moment, secretly hoping that his thoughts weren’t apparent on his face. As vampires went, he was pretty transparent and he didn’t want Sera to see how her words had impacted him. On one hand he was glad that Sera finally realized Nate’s feelings for her and vice versa.

What disappointed Fab however was that Sera was still in the dark about how he felt about her. Nate had fallen fast and hard when he had rescued her from the storm but Fab had only recently begun to carry a torch for Sera.

For some time, she had been one of the regulars who stopped in for an after-work drink once or twice a week. She was pretty, smelled good and was intelligent. So were a lot of other women in the joint. They routinely shared a number of heart-to-hearts with him. That too, Fab experienced with a handful of other clients. But one day Sera had done something that set her apart. When one drunken female customer had torn a strip off Fab for refusing to serve her another drink, Sera had passionately taken the bitch on, verbally backing her down. Her devotion didn't go unnoticed. Fab was touched. And from then on, he was hers.

Only she didn't know it.

And now that she was confessing her desire to "be with" his best friend, she probably never would.

Sometimes, life sucks.

Even when you're a vampire.

"Cool," he said softly, smile slightly.

"But..." She scoured her mind for the right way to phrase it. "I want you to be there."

Fab's eyebrows shot up in astonishment. Sera bit her lip, worrying she had worded her intent wrong.

"You know," she added quickly. "To keep Nate from..." she couldn't verbalize it. She could barely even think it. Turned out, she didn't have to. Fab's in-her-head voice echoed her worst fears.

Killing you?

Sera barely moved her head, but even so, Fab recognized it for what it was—agreement. When he didn't respond right away, Sera sped on in a flurry of explanations. "I know it sounds crazy. It's insane, it's weird, it's just—so much to ask. But I just can't think of another way. Can you?"

Fab's dark eyes glittered as he examined her face. His gravelly voice reached Sera's ears this time. "Nope."

"So then, is it, like, okay? I mean, will you do it?"

Fab looked down then. Reaching across the counter, he took one of her hands in his and held it loosely, his thumb stroking over the little bumps of her knuckles. His touch unexpectedly sent shivers of pleasure down her spine. "This is something you really want?"

Sera's voice was barely audible. "With all my heart."

He glanced back up at her, his eyes glowing with warmth as his smooth, full lips spread into a sexy smile. "Then I'll be there." Bringing her hand to his lips, Fab placed a soft kiss on her warm skin. "But..."

"But what?"

"Do you think you can handle it?"

Sera cocked her head to one side. "What do you mean?"

"Nate hasn't been with anyone in that way, for a very, very long time."

"Yeah, so?"

"Let's just say that a mortal man on a massive overdose of a stiffen-your-prick prescription wouldn't hold a candle to what he's going to be like."

Sera let out a long breath. That hadn't occurred to her. Not that it sounded like much of a problem. "I just hope he'll, you know, agree to it."

Fab nodded in immediate understanding. "Yeah. He won't like the idea. At all. But I can help you with that too."

"What do you mean?"

"I can tell you what to do to weaken his resolve and push him over the edge."

While the thought of Fab playing director to her proposed seduction of Nate was strangely exciting, there was another part of Sera that felt as if they were ganging up on him.

"Isn't that like fighting dirty?"

Fab shrugged. "Kind of. But you know what they say. All's fair in love and war."

Sera frowned, worrying her lip between her teeth.

"Besides, it's necessary," he continued. "You wouldn't be able to get him on your own."

Sera stiffened, misinterpreting Fab's statement as a slight against the power of her own sex appeal. With a low laugh, he swiftly explained. "Hey, you're hot. And very, very desirable. Don't get me wrong. But you've got to know that while my self-control is superior to Nate's, he is not without some degree of restraint. If you went after him on your own, he would find it hard, but in the end, he would win out. He would refuse to respond."

"And with you guiding me?"

Fab chuckled low. "He's toast."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Sera, I've seen some of his thoughts of you. I know all the things he wants to do to you, all the things he wants you to do to him. Trust me on this. If you do as I say, Nate won't be able to stop himself."

A cold shiver ran down Sera's back as her gaze fell to her hands, the excitement-laced trepidation making her fingers tremble. "That's what I'm afraid of."

The feel of Fab's cool flesh on her cheek and chin urged her eyes back up to his face. He was smiling that warm, sunny grin again but his eyes were serious and intense. "Sera, I promise. I won't let him hurt you."

"I'm still a little afraid."

"I know you are, honey. But that's what I'm trying to tell you. You don't have to be. I'll never let anything bad happen to you."

"But what about you? He can hear what you're thinking. He's going to be furious."

“Not if I block him. By the time he figures it all out, the deed will be done and he’ll be thanking me for my involvement.”

Sera tried to calm the butterflies that thrashed around her stomach in an absolute frenzy. It sounded good on paper. Now all that remained was whether or not she would have the nerve to go through with it.

“You’re forgetting something else.”

With a little jerk, Sera looked at Fab. “What?”

“Nate doesn’t want to hurt you. Yes, his instinct to kill is very powerful, but so are his feelings for you. That will help tip the scales in our favor.”

Our favor?

The pronoun immediately caught Sera’s attention but with a mental shrug, she decided it was appropriate as it would take teamwork to get Nate to give in to his feelings for her.

After briefly discussing a game plan and meeting time, Sera pushed away from the bar. Jumping down off the stool and grabbing her bag, she headed for the ladies’ room, casting one last glance in Fab’s direction as she went. With a breathtaking grin, he gave her a reassuring wink.

As usual.

Fab could always be counted on to make Sera smile, warm her heart and bolster her spirits.

Once inside the restroom, Sera scrutinized her face in the large mirror that hung over the row of sinks.

Ugh.

While her face was no longer puffy and red, there was no doubt that she had looked better. Retrieving a makeup bag from her purse, she quickly touched up her foundation, applied a little blush to the apples of her cheeks and finished off by brushing some

black mascara over her already long, dark eyelashes. A swipe of pink over her full lips completed the emergency makeover.

Removing the clip at the base of her neck that had held her hair back in a sleek ponytail, she shook her head, allowing her long, dark tresses to flow about her shoulders. Working along the row of buttons that ran down the front of her gray suit jacket, she opened and then removed it to reveal a soft pink camisole underneath, its satin finish constant except for the V of ivory lace that framed her cleavage. Reaching up and under in an age-old move, she removed her bra and put it her purse. Without her jacket, the gray pencil skirt and snakeskin pumps now seemed less office-like and more sexy casual. Sucking in a deep breath, Sera headed out.

Instead of turning right to go to the bar, she went left, walking up the winding staircase that would lead to the suite over the bar where Nate lived. Former proprietors had used the smallish three-room space included in the purchase of the bar as an office and storage room but Nate had turned it into his residence. While it didn't have a real kitchen, it did have an area that, for all intents and purposes, functioned as one. There was a small fridge, microwave and a table for two that was pushed into one corner and worked as a kind of breakfast nook. In the other room was a hide-a-bed, armchair, armoire, coffee table and TV, the third space was a bathroom. The suite's ideal feature however was that it was completely void of light. As the downstairs bar was also windowless, Nate was able to go from the darkness of his suite into the darkness of the bar, even during the day.

Sera rapped lightly on the door and waited. Nothing. She had just raised her hand and was about to knock once more when the door swung open. Nate stood before her, still dressed from work, only now he looked somewhat disheveled. His hair, always brushed back neatly off his face, fell in unruly strands across his forehead and cheeks. His shirt was pulled out of his black dress pants and was unbuttoned all the way down. The sight of his smooth, bare, muscular flesh mesmerized Sera, especially the little dusting of hair that appeared beneath his bellybutton and disappeared under the

buckle of his belt. His pale feet were bare. Dragging her eyes back up his body, Sera's gaze locked once more on Nate's mouthwatering chest and the pair of erect nipples that immediately made her salivate. It was only when he spoke that she finally got around to looking him in the eye.

"Sera..." His voice was low but not without a trace of surprise. "What are you doing here?"

"I want to talk to you."

Nate shifted a little uncomfortably, closing the door a little behind him as he stepped out into the hall. "Yeah, well, you know, now's not really a good time."

Sera gave him another once-over, far faster this time. "Were you...sleeping?"

Nate gave a short laugh. "It's eight thirty."

"Oh."

For a long moment, Sera just stood and stared at him while she silently wrestled with what to do next. He was obviously putting her off, not wanting her to come in and yet she had to try to explain why she'd said what she had before they could move ahead.

Just then, a woman's voice floated out from inside the suite. "Where's the wineglasses?"

Nate's eyes never left Sera's face as he answered. "I don't have any."

"No problem," the woman said. "We can just campfire it and pass the bottle."

"Oh," Sera said again. Only this time, it was with a note of understanding. Terrible, bubble-bursting understanding. "I didn't realize you had...*company*." That last word came out in a kind of sneer and then straight away, her eyes started to sting. Nate's fabulous form blurred into a wavy, watery image. Mumbling a hushed, "I'm sorry," Sera spun on her heel and raced for the stairwell. Nate caught her before she reached it, his cool hands lightly but firmly clasping her wrists.

"Don't go."

Sera shook her head quickly, the movement loosening the tears from her eyes to trail down both cheeks. Avoiding Nate's gaze, she tried to pull away.

"No. It's okay. If you have—" She couldn't decide how to phrase it. "Things to do...with her...then I'll just..." Biting her lip, Sera stopped herself before she really put her foot in it but an unexpected wave of agony welled up inside her, threatening to flow over into all-out sobbing. Damn it. Why was she acting like a jilted lover?

Maybe because she was one.

Lance hadn't wanted her enough to make her the only woman in his life and now the brand-new hope of finally realizing her love for Nate—a long-denied wish that had been reignited by Fab's well-intentioned information—was being crushed underfoot too. It was all just too much to bear for one day.

Nate's soothing voice caressed and calmed her all at once, his golden gaze glowing in the dim light of the hallway.

"Sera," he cooed softly, a tender, scolding tone making the utterance sexier than ever. "I don't want to 'do things' with her. You know that."

"Do I?"

"Of course you do. The only thing I was planning on doing was getting a little snack."

Nate examined her face in silence for a long moment, a slow understanding lighting his topaz gaze. They had gone over this but he felt the need to reiterate the facts.

"I've told you before. I can't do that."

Sera did know that but a little part of her still doubted it.

"Can't or won't?"

"Both."

"Huh?"

"I can't, therefore I won't."

Sera was certain they were still talking about Nate's dinner date, who was just beyond the door, so his answer to the next question was all important.

"But you want to?"

Nate flinched slightly, very quickly regaining his ever-present sense of tranquility before he answered.

"Yes. Very much so."

Sera felt as if someone had punched her in the stomach. She knew it was silly to think Nate had never wanted to make love to any other woman but thinking it and hearing it were two different things.

Then all of sudden, everything changed.

With you.

His low rich voice slid softly into her mind.

I want to with you.

That last bit brought Sera's head up with a jolt. Sniffling, she watched as Nate released one of her wrists. Then raising a long pale hand, Nate delicately brushed the tears from her face. "But you already know that. And you also know it's never going to happen."

Never?

Fab's cockiness had convinced Sera that they could win Nate over. All of a sudden Sera wasn't so sure.

She just stared at the ground as her eyes filled with tears once more. The tone in Nate's voice was thick with discomfort and concern. "Sera, don't do that. Please." He lightly rubbed her shoulder in an awkward attempt to console her. "Hey, why don't you come in for a little while?"

Sera brusquely wiped the tears from her cheeks. "But what about your...guest?"

"I'll get rid of her."

Sera gasped, her eyes widening in horror. Nate chuckled as he gently touched the small of her back and began guiding her toward the suite. "Not that way. I'll just make an excuse for why she has to leave."

And that he did, effortlessly delivering some story about an emergency that had come up which his sister, which Sera had come to advise him of. While the woman looked more than a little suspicious, she quietly gathered her things and, after planting a fleeting kiss on Nate's cheek, left the apartment.

At last they were alone.

Chapter Four

"Soooo..." Nate began, leaning against the back of the sofa, one foot crossed over the other. As always, he looked positively edible, every inch of his hard, ripped body, whether exposed or not, calling to Sera in a way that was impossible to ignore. "Are you going to tell me what brought you here in the first place?"

Sera swallowed hard, silently wondering where all the moisture in her mouth had gone. Trying to be casual, she laid her purse and jacket on the nearby armchair.

"I just think we need to clear up a few things."

"Okay."

"Well, it kind of has to do with what we were talking about out in the hall."

Nate's posture stiffened a little but his face didn't change. "Go on."

"Nate, I never knew you felt that way about me. I'm sorry I didn't. And I'm sorry I misunderstood your...motive earlier."

"It's okay."

"No it's not," Sera persisted, her eyes beseeching his. "I feel that way too."

"I know."

"You know?"

"Sera, I'm not blind."

Sera just gawked at him. She knew he couldn't read her mind as they hadn't shared blood — only transfer his thoughts into her head. So how did he know how she felt? Was it that obvious? Had it been all along?

"What's your point?" he urged, his voice a little tense.

"My point is...what are we going to do about it?"

Nate looked away and crossed his arms, his nostrils flaring a little as he squinted. "I told you. Nothing."

Move closer.

Momentarily baffled, Sera stared at him in confusion. "What?"

Nate's gaze was fixed on some far-off point. "I said we're not going to do anything about it."

All of a sudden it dawned on Sera. It was Fab's voice in her head, not Nate's. He must be near, perhaps just on the other side of the door. Sera felt very reassured. And safe. Even so, Fab's next words were edged with impatience.

Move closer to him. Now.

Sera took a couple of small steps forward, closing the space between her and Nate. Snapping his head around, Nate stared hard at her, his eyes smoldering with a mixture of emotion.

"What are you doing?" he demanded hotly, the little tremor in his voice revealing the chink in his armor.

Don't answer. Just take another step closer.

When Sera hesitated, Fab told her about Nate's response to her.

Just being this close to you, alone, has made him hard.

Without thinking, Sera's gaze dropped to Nate's crotch. She sucked in a soft breath at the sight of the huge bulge straining against the dark fabric of his pants.

Trust me. I can read his every thought about you right now and lemme tell you, you got him on the ropes.

Clearly, Fab was reading Nate's mind and had some valuable "inside information".

Touch him.

No sooner had Sera wondered "Where?" than Fab's ready response reached her.

Anywhere. But do it fast.

Reaching up, Sera brushed back the strands of blond hair from Nate's temple, letting her fingers trail down the side of his face to stroke the twitching muscle in his jaw. He hissed, sucking air in through his clenched teeth as if her touch burned. His hands dropped to his sides and he clutched the edge of the sofa. The sound of material tearing perplexed Sera for a second until she realized his powerful grip was ripping the fabric from the couch's frame. Pulling his head back, he tried to evade her fingers.

"Stop it!" Nate growled, his eyes flashing like a cornered wild animal's. He was trembling somewhat but Sera couldn't be sure if it was from repressed desire, repressed anger or repressed hunger. After all, she had interrupted his supper. Panicking, she froze.

Don't stop. Blood is the furthest thing from his mind. He's just fighting his desire to kiss you. Give him what he wants.

Sera stepped closer but in a flash, Nate leapt over the sofa to land silently on the other side. Spinning around, he sat down, his head falling into his hands.

Get over there.

Following Fab's instructions, Sera raced around the couch and came to a halt in front of Nate. He didn't look up. His fingers dug hard into his scalp as he ran his hands through his hair, a winded sigh escaping his lips.

Give him something to look at. Take off your top.

A surge of fire shot through Sera, dampening her panties and quickening her pulse. Wordlessly, she yanked her camisole over her head and tossed it aside. Nate glanced up, his breath catching in his throat at the sight of her bare breasts.

Closer.

Inching forward, Sera moved into the space between his spread legs so that the plump, rosy nipple on her left breast was within inches of Nate's face. He squeezed his eyes shut, scowling darkly as Sera reached around and held the back of his head with one hand while she lifted her breast toward his mouth in offering. Teasingly, she brushed the aching, taut tip back and forth against his parted lips.

Good.

While unable to access Sera's thoughts, Fab had a ringside seat to the action via Nate. Caught up in the emotion of the moment, he had apparently forgotten to block Fab.

Shaking with repressed want, Nate's mouth automatically opened, his eyes drifting shut as his tongue reached out to delicately lick the protruding little point. He flicked it back and forth a few times, the sharp gusts of air expelled from his nostrils raising the hair on the back of Sera's neck. When Nate's hands clamped onto her hips, Sera sighed, her head falling forward, her torso curling around him as her fingers massaged the nape of his neck and twisted hotly in his hair. But suddenly, he pushed her gruffly away as he recoiled against the sofa back. Stunned, Sera stared at his beautiful face, now a twisted mask of torment.

Go for his nipples.

In a panic, Sera kicked off her shoes and dropped to her knees, stretching forward along his partially reclined torso to fasten her lips around one of the pale diamond-hard peaks on his chest.

"Ahhhh..." Nate's entire body tensed as one hand gripped the back of Sera's head, trying to pull her closer and push her away at the same time. Sera braced herself in vain, knowing she was no match for his strength but at the very least, she wasn't going to be shoved off without a fight. Firmly sucking Nate's erect nipple, she lightly caressed his marble-smooth pecs and rippling six-pack abs, all the while conscious of the hard pressure of his enormous erection as it pushed against her stomach.

Fab was all over that.

Rub his cock.

Quickly complying, Sera let one hand meander down to Nate's crammed package, her palm moving up and down over the bulkiness. Instinctively, Nate's hips flexed forward, his head flopping back as he groaned loudly.

"Oh God," he panted. "Sera, I'm begging you...stop!"

Don't.

Nate's entire body trembled violently now with the strength it took for him to resist Sera's ardent efforts. A low rumble began in his chest then the strangely exciting sound grew in volume until it erupted into a full-blown growl. Grabbing Sera roughly by the shoulders, Nate twisted her body up, around and down onto the couch, his own form crouched in a pre-pounce position at her splayed feet. It had all happened impossibly fast. Just as speedily, Nate ripped Sera's skirt off to leave her completely naked except for the pale pink thong that covered her by-now-saturated pussy. Diving between her legs, he nuzzled her thighs briefly before moving to drink in her scent, his nose bumping seductively against her veiled mons.

Don't move.

A continuous low snarl was coming from far back in Nate's throat now, a decidedly animalistic sound that both frightened and excited Sera. Bunching the front of her underwear in one hand, Nate gave one powerful tug and in an instant sharply tore it from her body. With his strong hands then pressed against each inner thigh, effectively holding her open, he dipped his head down and placed the tip of his tongue at the creamy opening to Sera's vagina. Then, at an excruciatingly slow rate, he began his ultra-leisurely ascent, the single solid lick that moved from the aching far end of her pussy all the way up to its throbbing top. It seemed to take an eternity. Sera moaned as she closed her eyes, trying to keep her thighs from trembling, but try as she might, her legs shook noticeably within his gentle grasp. When at last Nate's tongue slid over the pulsing little nub shrouded in curls at the summit, the sluggish, steady pressure wreaked havoc on every nerve in her body. Sera clenched her teeth, working hard to muffle a ragged scream.

But Nate didn't stop there. On he licked, up through the soft tangle of down, across the flat plane of her abdomen and down into the creased indentation of her bellybutton. Finally reaching the end of his tongue's torrid trail, Nate paused, drawing back a bit. Sera opened her eyes and gasped at the sight of his fully elongated fangs, the sharp

points pressing into the swell of his bottom lip. His eyes glowed with a dangerous light as he studied the even, flat flesh on Sera's belly.

Shit!

Without warning, Nate plunged down, his hard teeth driving into her smooth skin. Sera howled, her lower half bucking against Nate's immovable torso. By the time Fab came crashing through the door and grappled Nate to the ground, he had bitten Sera three more times – once on the inner thigh, once on her right breast and the last time, on her throat.

Flashes of frenzied, blurred movements and an ear-splitting collection of snarls and shouts quickly ensued, then everything came to an abrupt halt. Fab stood near Sera, his back to her in a clearly defensive posture. Across the way, a wild-eyed Nate glared at him, his body in a lunge-ready position, his lips smeared with red. Shaking uncontrollably, Sera held her breath as the clock ticked out a long moment. And then another. Everything was eerily still. Nate's eyes darted back and forth between Fab and Sera as he clearly grappled with his bloodlust as well as the situation at hand.

Then, as was one of his more annoying habits, he whirled about and disappeared from the suite, slamming the door behind him as he fled.

Sera immediately fell apart, breaking into loud, gasping sobs as the shaking that vibrated her whole body intensified to that of a convulsion. In the twinkling of an eye, Fab had her cradled in his lap, whispering softly into her hair as he rocked her gently.

"Sssh, sshh, sssshhh. It's okay, it's okay," he said, tenderly stroking her back and pressing soft kisses into her temple.

Sera couldn't stop quaking but the gentle strength of Fab's arms about her slowly started to dispel her terror. Until she recognized the smooth feel of his tongue sliding along the still-oozing gash on her throat. Thrashing wildly, Sera let out a piercing scream as she frantically thumped at his arms and clawed at his face.

"Easy, Sera. Easy now," Fab said quietly, effortlessly clasping her wrists in one hand to restrain her. "I wasn't drinking. I was sealing your wound."

Sera let out a little scoffing snort but another shudder of fear ripped through her. "Yeah right."

"It's true. Our saliva has incredibly powerful healing properties."

Sera only stared at him suspiciously.

"Would you prefer I let you bleed to death?"

Sera glanced down her naked body, wincing at the river of red that flowed from her left breast to the puddle of blood pooling on her abdomen and then to the bloody marks inside her right thigh. "No," she murmured.

"Thought not."

Tilting her slowly back, Fab resumed lightly licking Sera's neck. Beneath the sliver of pain created by his tongue's contact with the cut on her throat, Sera shivered at the unexpected surge of pleasure, a soothing, sensual sensation that rose up in response to the cool, rhythmical lapping upon her flesh.

"This looks good," he said in a low voice before shifting her weight in his arms and dropping his head to her chest. Ever so gently, Fab skimmed around the circumference of the gash on her breast with his tongue, tracing the discolored impressions Nate's normal teeth had made as well as the two deep punctures of his vampire canines. Again, he licked cautiously at the red-rimmed holes, his head moving back and forth as he cleansed and closed the wound.

"There's a bit of bruising here," he said, touching a semicircle of purple that had begun to appear to the left of her nipple. "I'm going to try a little deep tissue massage." Sera drew in a ragged breath as Fab then opened his mouth wide, only to delicately close it around her entire areola where he began to suck softly. Tensing, she shuddered as the pain once more shifted to a sweet, syrupy pleasure that started in her stomach and snaked down, soon coming to a pulsing stop in her slick pussy. The pronounced pull upon her nipple was beyond exquisite, the power and skill of his mouth forcing her body to respond. With a soft whimper, Sera clutched his shoulders, her pussy pounding as hard and fast as her heart.

"Fab..." she whispered, squeezing her eyes shut and willing herself to ignore the sweet sensations.

"Hang on," he murmured, her nipple erotically caught between his teeth. "Almost done."

As he continued massaging her with his mouth, Sera distantly wondered if a woman could have an orgasm from such indirect stimulation. It seemed like an awfully far stretch but as Sera recognized the telltale signs of her toes curling and her pelvis tensing, she began to think that maybe it wasn't that implausible after all.

Next Fab moved down to the mark on Sera's stomach then to her inner thigh. Tonguing it gently for a spell, he then closed his lips around the gash to suck it slowly. Sera's body trembled in response, her hands shooting down to tangle in his hair as she unconsciously sought to redirect his mouth to a more central location. Even so, the forceful surge of desire she felt made no sense whatsoever to Sera. Within the past twenty-four hours, she had just undergone a painful breakup with one man, an equally painful botched seduction of another and here she was, squirming with need in the arms of a third. But her body was not intellectualizing her impulse to seek out the sweet soothing sensation of sexual healing, only screaming at her to surrender to the moment.

When the frustrating feel of Fab pulling away from his choice vantage point seared Sera's heart, she wildly reached out for him. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she raised herself up to plant a sizzling kiss on his parted lips. Like smoke, Fab's hands drifted across Sera's hips and around her back to return the embrace, his lips beneath hers, opening to encourage the entry of her thrashing tongue. He moaned softly, kissing her back, his own tongue now dancing with hers, his lips urgently pressing into her pliant flesh as his head turned from side to side heightening the pull on both their mouths. Then as he trailed soft kisses across her cheek, one hand moving up to gently caress her hair, Fab murmured in her ear, the clearly dissuading tone of his voice making Sera's heart sink.

“No, Sera,” he said, his hands reaching back to pull hers from around his shoulders. “Not now.”

Sera stared at Fab’s face, so unlike Nate’s in its structure and yet so similar in its devastating beauty. A tidal wave of mixed feelings threatened to rise up and burst out. Pressing her lips, which still tingled from Fab’s kiss, tightly together, Sera tried to regain some control. Finally she croaked out a response.

“Why?”

“Because I’m not the one you want.”

Sera opened her mouth to speak but promptly shut it. While she would have agreed with him earlier in the evening, Fab’s actions of the past couple of hours had made her see him in a different light.

True, he had always been as kind and loyal a friend to her as Nate, but Sera had a kind of tunnel vision when it came to love. If her sights were focused on one person, she was completely oblivious to anyone else and their feelings for her until the truth was staring her smack in the face. It had happened with Lance, way back when she had truly loved him and before the cancer of doubt and suspicion and betrayal had eaten away at her adoration. Then with Nate, that ever-present but slow-to-emerge emotion of genuine passion. And now Fab—dear, sweet, funny Fab who never failed to lighten her mood, brighten her day and warm her heart. With a sort of wistful realization, Sera suddenly understood that, though Fab had always positioned himself just outside the spotlight of her affection, undoubtedly because he knew of Nate’s feelings for her, she had always loved him too. How could she not?

And yet, what did this now mean? How could she be in love with two men at the same time? Even more pressing, what should she do about it?

“That’s not exactly true,” she said with a shy smile, quickly deciding to come clean. She was lying here, naked in his arms. Might as well bare her soul too.

Fab glanced down, smiling too, as he shook his head. Having tasted Sera's blood, he was now privy to every thought she had. However, unlike his species, she was powerless to block him from stealing her mental musings.

"That's very...flattering."

"Fab, I'm not just being complimentary."

"I know that. Now. And I can't tell you how good that makes me feel." His dark eyes burned with an enticing combination of warmth and want. "But this isn't the time or the place. Believe you me, there is nothing I'd rather do than make love to you. I know I could control my bloodlust but the timing's all wrong."

Sera was tempted to say "to hell with the timing" but only continued to stare at Fab's handsome face as he resumed speaking.

"I just feel I would be...taking advantage of you."

Go ahead. Take advantage of me. Please.

Fab chuckled as he read Sera's thought. He lightly stroked her cheek with his index finger as he peered into her eyes. "Tempting. Very tempting. But you've had a lot to take in. I think maybe you should just call it a day."

"But—"

"When it happens for us, I want it to be because you're freely giving yourself to me, not just reaching for me on the rebound."

Sera winced and looked away. Part of what Fab said was true. Yes, she had realized her latent feelings for him, emotions that perhaps played some secret part in cranking up her desire to bond her body to his. But another part of Sera had responded to Fab on a purely physical level out of need—a burning, aching need to put the pain of the day behind her and lose herself in the bliss and fervor of lovemaking.

"You're right," she mumbled, suddenly very conscious of her nudity. Awkwardly, she tried to cover her bare breasts with one arm. Immediately Fab responded, disappearing from her side.

"Here," he said, lightly tossing her discarded camisole at her from a few feet away. "I think your...uh...other things are history," referring to her shredded skirt and panties that lay tattered on the floor. "But I'll get you a pair of Nate's sweats to throw on. They'll be too big but they're better than nothing."

Rummaging through the armoire near the entrance to the suite, Fab returned with a pair of soft black workout pants. He turned his back as Sera stood up and quickly dressed, yanking the drawstring of the oversized sweats as tight as possible to keep them from sliding off her narrow hips.

"Okay."

Fab pivoted around, stifling an appreciative laugh as he caught sight of her. "Sexy."

"Shut up." Sera's reply was tinged with amusement.

"No, I mean it. Women in men's clothes can be pretty...hot."

Tell me about it, Sera thought to herself.

Despite all that had happened, she couldn't help but notice a little flutter of excitement at the feel of Nate's crotch, or rather where his crotch had once been, pressing snugly against her bare pussy.

See what I mean?

"Fab, get out of my head!"

"Sorry."

Dropping down to one knee, he rolled the too-long pants up a couple of times to make a rather thick cuff at each ankle. "There. You're good to go." He stood up and looked at her directly. "I'll drive you home now."

Sera waved him off. "Oh no, it's okay. I'm not that upset. Well, not anymore."

"I know but you've had a few martinis."

"I'm not drunk."

"No," Fab replied calmly. "But if you got stopped, you'd blow the dial right off the meter."

Sera knew he was referring to a breathalyzer test but there was something decidedly erotic about the words “blow” and “right off the meter” when coming from his lips. Or was that just the way she heard them? Shooting a quick glance in Fab’s direction, Sera flushed, knowing that he had probably just eavesdropped and heard her thoughts. But he just moved across the way to hold the door open for her.

Sweet, sexy and a perfect gentleman, she thought with a secret smile.

As she passed by him, Sera caught the flicker of a grin that touched Fab’s mouth.

* * * * *

Nate was running like the wind.

Check that.

He was running faster than the wind.

He was nothing more than a blur of movement as he burned down one back alley after another, desperate to put some distance between him and the scene he’d just left. His muscles ached but he wouldn’t stop.

Couldn’t.

With his superior strength and speed it would be some time before he grew too tired to go on but he really didn’t want to leave the city. Slowing to a light trot, he finally came to a stop and, bending over, rested his hands on his thighs much in the way an exhausted runner does after a marathon. In a way he felt just as drained. He could run himself into another state but to what end?

There was no running away from the way he felt.

Straightening, he glanced around as he started to walk. Nate didn’t recognize the neighborhood he was in...some east-side ghetto. A gang of dirty-faced kids no more than eight or nine years of age played around a fire hydrant, hitting it with sticks. Maybe they were trying to get the water out. It might be well after the supper hour but it was still blistering hot. Thankfully the sun set early in these parts, otherwise Nate’s impromptu jog would have turned him into a crispy critter. Two Asian youths with

shaved heads and a plethora of tattoos eyed him warily as they brushed past, the smell of their cigarettes filling Nate's nostrils and making him dizzy for a second. A once-posh sports car with a flat tire, abandoned by the owner, had been stripped clean of all sellable parts, leaving pretty much only the frame intact. There was no doubt about it, this part of town was dangerous.

But then again, so was Nate.

Especially when he was hungry and angry.

And right now?

He was both.

What the hell had Fab been thinking, cornering him like that? Even if he'd had good intentions, which was still up for debate, it had been a dumbass stupid thing to do. And Sera? What could have possessed her to throw herself at him? He'd known her for almost three years and she simply wasn't the type of woman to enter into a sexual relationship lightly.

Nate froze as the magnitude of the revelation hit.

That could only mean one thing.

She was in love with him, a fact that both pleased and distressed Nate.

Since he'd met her, Nate had loved Sera. Pure and simple. Fast and hard. No two ways about it. Learning that she loved him back and to the extent that she was prepared to go through with such a cockamamie plan warmed Nate from the inside out. But given his inability to control his bloodlust, there was no way they could take their mutual feelings to the next level. To the physical level. No matter how much they wanted each other, Nate would have to do the right thing.

Leave.

Nate didn't trust himself around Sera and now he couldn't trust Sera or Fab around him so he had just better remove himself from the equation. Bar None would manage okay without him. Fab would step in with no questions asked. He owed him as much.

And Sera?

She'd just have to get along without him.

That resolved, Nate broke into a jog again. Given his newly decided game plan, he'd loop back around, take the main street that would connect with the interstate and, on second thought, head out of town.

No point in looking back.

And he didn't.

Picking up the pace, he was soon running at a superhuman speed, almost oblivious to the feel of tears on his cheeks.

Chapter Five

"What about Nate?" Sera asked as they sat in the underground garage of her condo complex, the engine of her car idling quietly as the strains of Norah Jones' *Come Away with Me* drifted from the radio dial. "Does he know how you feel? About me, I mean."

Fab cut the engine and handed Sera the keys.

"If he didn't before, he probably does now."

"What makes you say that?"

"We can always block our thoughts from each other—it's kind of like putting up a psychic wall to keep 'inquiring minds' out." He laughed. "But it takes a conscious concentrated effort. If we are distracted in any way, lose our focus, the other can sneak in."

"And gain access to all your thoughts and memories?"

"No, no. Just what we're thinking at the moment. That's how I knew of Nate's feelings for you. He guarded his thoughts about you fiercely but on occasion, he slipped, usually when he was with you, and I was able to see what he was thinking."

"So why do you think Nate knows how you feel about me? Did you slip?"

"Not until tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"You know when we were...kissing? Well, I kinda dropped the ball, let my guard down."

"And you think Nate got a glimpse then?"

"He certainly could have. But if not through me then—"

"What?"

"Nate tasted your blood."

"So?"

"Even if he didn't get inside my head, he most definitely can get inside yours now."

Sera gasped as the memory of her heated moments with Fab played across her mind's eye.

"Oh my God. What will he do?"

"I don't know."

"Can't you read his mind?"

"Nope. Locked up tighter than a drum right now."

Sera blanched at the thought of Nate being hurt or furious or any one of a number of things, and all because of her. She'd made such a mess in the wake of her breakup with Lance—hurting Nate, possibly forcing a wedge into his friendship with Fab and now she quite possibly stood to lose the two men she had just recently come to realize she loved with all her heart. Fab's gravelly voice halted her frenzied worrying.

"Sera, listen. We aren't going to sort it all out tonight so take my advice. Go upstairs, have a hot bath and get a good night's sleep. We'll figure it out in the morning. And I promise you, there is a way to work things out."

Fab leaned over and gave her a soft, lingering kiss on her lips, his dark eyes shining as he pulled away. "Now skedaddle."

Reluctantly, Sera got out, then gasped at the sudden appearance of Fab at her side.

"What are you doing?"

"Walking you to the elevators."

"Oh. Good."

Sera was silently grateful. The access-code entry system to the underground area had blown a fuse the day before and the automatic garage door was now frozen open, allowing anyone admission to the lower level car park. All the tenants were up in arms about the breach in security but the building's manager had said he was doing the best he could to get the problem rectified.

"But how will you get back to the bar?"

He gave her a sexy little wink. "You know us vampires. We're pretty fast on our feet."

The ding of the elevator signaled the end of their evening.

"Well, good night, Sera." He bent down and brushed his lips against hers once more.

"Good night."

Turning, Fab sprinted toward the street. Outside the night was dark and cold. The strong wind whipped his shaggy dark hair about his perfect face, bringing to him the scents of the city, some too subtle for humans to detect. There was the rancid smell of the sewers far beneath his feet, the gentle aroma of the approaching rainstorm still off in the distance, the dander of the neighborhood animals, and mixed in it all was the pervasive fragrance of nearby humans. Breaking into a jog, he headed for a back street where he could really turn on the jets without attracting any unwanted attention.

En route, he passed a black cat perched atop a garbage can, its yellow eyes narrowing as he jogged past. He smiled at the cat, even as it arched its back and let out a seething hiss. Neither of them saw the dark figure lurking in the shadows by Sera's building, watching.

* * * * *

For the next few weeks, Sera got back into her usual routine, or rather an amended version of her customary schedule. Certainly she went to work at the ad agency every morning and put in a grueling day trying to turn unappetizing products into absolute must-haves for various target audiences. She went to the gym on her lunch hour and stopped to pick up a few staples at the corner store on the way home. But new to the agenda was repeatedly dodging Lance's insistent phone calls and ignoring his messages and emails as well as an end-of-the-day pit stop at Bar None to see if Nate had resurfaced. For the first few days after he had taken off, Sera had just assumed he

needed a little time to think things over. But when days turned into a week, then two, then three, she began to wonder if he would ever return. For his part, Fab said he hadn't heard a word nor could he get a line on where Nate was or what he was thinking. As unofficial second-in-command at the popular pub, he had pretty much taken over in Nate's unanticipated absence.

Also part of Sera's new routine was an accompanied ride home each night. Like clockwork, Fab left the bar in the capable hands of Barney—one of evening bartenders—to drive Sera home in her car, then “fly” back. While she didn't need a chauffeur, it gave the two of them a little one-on-one private time to chat. Or whatever. Not that things ever got to the “whatever” point. Since their steamy encounter in Nate's apartment, Fab and Sera had exchanged only a handful of parting kisses in her car each night, each one growing increasingly hot and heavy. But it never went beyond that.

This night was no different.

After pulling away from Fab's fabulous lips and reaching for the door handle, Sera paused and turned to look at him once more before she got out of the car.

“Do you think Nate's gone for good?”

Fab slowly shook his head.

“I can't see it. I'm sure he's just trying to sort it all out before he comes back.”

Sera nodded and then with a smile stepped out. Fab, as always, was by her side in a flash, the back of his hand bumping lightly against hers as they walked to the elevators. When they stopped and were waiting for the lift to arrive, Fab entwined his fingers loosely through Sera's, his thumb moving around hers in a slow, lazy circle as he stared, unseeing, at the movement.

“Do you ever wish we could go back to the way things were?”

Sera's head jerked in surprise, the astonishment evident in her voice as well.

“No. Do you?”

Fab looked at her then, his eyes glowing with warmth but a glimmer of concern darkened his face.

"No. I just wondered if you did."

Sera shook her head vehemently.

"Not at all. I mean, yes, this whole vanishing act of Nate's is really hard right now but I'm sure it's hard on all of us, him included. And maybe I didn't choose the right way to come clean with how I feel. Perhaps I should have beat around the bush a little before I—"

"Plunged headfirst into its blossom?"

Sera looked shocked for a split second but almost immediately chuckled. Fab's throaty laughter joined in.

"I can't say anything though. I had a part to play in all this."

"Yes you did," Sera said, narrowing her eyes at him in mock anger. "But seriously, I'm glad we finally got it out in the open. I just think, in the long run, it will be better this way. Don't you?"

"Yes."

As the bell sounded, signifying the arrival of the elevator, Fab tenderly kissed the back of Sera's hand and bid her goodnight before turning and starting to walk back up the incline. Once inside the elevator, Sera pressed the button for her floor and watched Fab's retreating figure. All of a sudden, he stopped and turned back toward her.

"Sera?" he called.

"Yeah?"

The doors began to close, Fab's handsome form seemingly trapped in the middle of the two steel structures as they slid steadily toward one another. Seconds before they united, his sweet sandpaper voice met Sera's ears.

"I love you."

Sera frantically punched the “open” button but already the elevator had begun its speedy climb to the twelfth floor. Immediately, she began to mull over whether or not she should call Fab at the bar or wait for a better time. While he had implied he loved her when they were back in Nate’s apartment, Fab had not actually said the words. Now that he had, Sera wanted to say the words back—words that had been building and stewing and percolating inside her. It was way past due and the time had come to finally give those words breath.

Only Sera didn’t want to declare her love for Fab alone. She wanted to say “I love you” to Nate too.

In person.

Out loud.

But for now, Sera was alone and silent. All she had were memories, questions and suppositions, anxious, impassioned imaginings that silently haunted her mind as she turned the key in the lock and stepped into her darkened apartment. The loop of internal inquiries always circled back to the same two queries.

Where was her beautiful, breathtaking Nate?

And when would he come back into their lives?

* * * * *

Fab smelled the human as he strode through the car park but ignored it without so much as a second thought. Years of living and working amongst his prey no longer made his canines lengthen, his mouth salivate or his cock stiffen at the scent of their iron-rich blood. In fact, he rarely responded to them anymore unless he chose to in, say, a more intimate setting and situation.

That’s why Fab was a little surprised when he felt his gums tingling, a sure sign that his eyeteeth were starting to lengthen in arousal. Or danger. To his right, a guy stepped out quickly from behind a pillar. He had a tourist brochure in his right hand and as he flipped the two-sided pamphlet over, he moved close to Fab.

Very close.

“Excuse me, I was wondering if you might...”

Fab just caught the movement from the corner of his eye—that of the guy rapidly raising his left hand. In a heartbeat, he felt the pressure of a gun barrel against his right temple. “Fuck off and die!”

Fab instinctively flinched as the point-blank shot went off, but the bullet still caught him flush on the side of the head and broke through his flesh to lodge in his head. Staggering, he fell to one knee and teetered there for a moment before falling flat on his face as the sound of running footsteps echoed into the distance.

Strangely disconnected, Fab wasn’t so much aware of the pain as he was the gravity of the situation. He knew he couldn’t die but for the love of God, he had been shot! There was a bullet in his head! What the hell was he supposed to do?

Struggling up, Fab leaned back against a nearby vehicle, wiping at the river of blood that steadily oozed down the one side of his face. With a deep sigh, he closed his eyes and focused on a face—a face he’d known for only a few years but hoped would be with him forever. Over and over Fab mentally said the name, saying it as a plea, a prayer, a promise as his reverence slowly turned to desperation.

Nate. Nate. Nate!

As Fab’s eyes fluttered shut, he drowsily drifted into unconsciousness.

Chapter Six

When Fab next opened his eyes, the image of Sera materialized before him, a marked look of concern etched on her face. He glanced up at the black and white tiled ceiling, a ceiling he'd never seen before.

"Where am I?"

"My place."

"What happened?" he asked groggily, twisting a little to work out the stiffness he felt in his neck and shoulders.

"Lance shot you."

Fab rolled his eyes. "We should have killed him when we had the chance. Or at the very least, scared the hell of him," he quickly added as he noted Sera's frown. "Make him think about what he did to you."

Sera made a little movement with her head. "Well, he'll have time to think about it now. He's in police custody. Seems someone saw him running out of the garage with the proverbial smoking gun in his hand." Her frown deepened as she touched his forehead. "How do you feel?"

Fab chuckled. "Like I've been shot in the head. How did you..."

"I didn't," Sera said, stepping aside a little. Nate stood just behind her.

"You came," Fab said, genuinely surprised. "I wasn't sure if you would. I mean, after...everything."

Nate smiled, moving closer. "Don't be stupid. None of that matters now. You're both okay."

"Yeah. But how'd you..." Fab pointed to the wound in his temple that now was nothing more than a dent.

"I got a paring knife and some tweezers then—"

Sera raised her hand to cut him off. "Please. Spare me the gruesome details. The main thing is he got the bullet out. What I really don't understand though is why Lance did it," she said, her gaze moving from Nate to fix on Fab.

"Jealousy," Nate answered flatly. "After you ended things with him, he saw red. And it got a lot worse when he realized you were getting cozy with someone else."

Sera winced, wondering if Lance was the only one who felt jealous over her newfound connection with Fab.

"What about you?" she asked, her eyes open and honest as she turned to look at Nate full-on.

"What about me?"

"How do you feel about my...connection with Fab?"

Nate's response was low, guarded.

"You know how I feel."

"Refresh my memory."

Nate sighed, diverting his eyes for a long moment before he answered. "I love you, Sera. I always have. And I know you love me. I guess I just never realized how much until you risked your life with that boneheaded scheme."

"It wasn't boneheaded," Fab said defensively, rising swiftly into a sitting position. "It's perfect."

Nate eyed him hard.

"Perfect, huh?"

"Absolutely. You two have waited long enough. Now you can finally get together."

Nate arched one eyebrow skyward. "With you as chaperone? Yeah, that worked out real well last time."

Fab shook his head adamantly. "I was too far away. Next time, I'll be closer, better able to gauge things before they get out of hand."

Nate laughed. "So...what? You're going to stand beside the bed?"

"Well...not beside it."

Nate turned his attention back to Sera. She was blushing. But there was the hard look of determination in her eyes.

"Won't that be weird for you?" Nate asked softly, his first thought, as always, about her comfort and safety. "Someone watching us?"

Sera could see that while he was still verbally resisting the idea, Nate's resolve was weakening.

"Not if that someone was Fab. And not if he was...involved."

Nate didn't respond. He only watched her in that steady, fixed way of his that made her both nervous and excited.

"I love you both," she tried to clarify. "Different in some ways and yet in others, the same. You have been my best friends for years now. Really, more than best friends, only I didn't see it. Couldn't see it. My eyes were filled with someone else. But now? All they can see is you two."

Nate's gaze dropped to the floor, the skin between his brows crinkling as he pondered the proposal. Without a word, Sera walked over to him and gently wrapped her arms around him, her face turning in to nuzzle against his neck. Instinctively, Nate returned her embrace, his hands lightly caressing her back as he buried his nose in the fragrant strands of her hair. The combination of her warm body pressed to his and her sweet, sultry scent drifting up from between her legs was enough to sway him. His nails dug into her skin as he moaned in submission. Sensing his surrender, Sera sighed in relief.

There was no need for Fab's step-by-step instructions any longer.

Cradling her head in his hand, Nate directed Sera's face up toward his, languorously covering her mouth with his. The kiss was deliberate, skillful, his lips moving to part Sera's, caress them, titillate with just the right amount of pressure,

moisture and intensity. They fell into a steady rhythmical sequence that, varying between soft, superficial kisses to deep, hot, wet ones, quickly grew in tempo and passion. Sera twisted her head to the other side, shuddering at the feel of Nate's hot tongue as it wound around hers, their bodies pressing harder and more insistently against one another with each passing second. His hands drifted down to clasp her bottom and pull her against the burgeoning length of his cock. Sera squirmed, her pussy now pulsing with the desperate need for Nate's touch. But she tensed a little when she felt his lips meander down to the curve of her neck, his tongue lapping seductively at the base of her throat. A dangerous growl erupted from his throat.

"Easy cowboy," Fab said, his soft command making Sera relax at once.

Nate tilted his head a little as he continued to kiss Sera's throat, his gaze lifting to meet Fab's eyes over her shoulder. With his lips never once losing contact with the warm flesh of her neck, Nate gently eased Sera around so her back snugly fit against the front of his body. Pulling her hair back, he languidly tongued the smooth stretch that ran from her earlobe down to her collarbone, his eyes digging evocatively into Fab's.

The gesture was clearly one of invitation.

Fab started to take a step but stopped himself. There was one more invitation he needed.

Sera sighed, her eyelids flickering closed as her head fell back against Nate's shoulder. A little murmur escaped her lips as his left hand floated down the front of her body to just barely graze her pelvis, his middle fingers curling under to press along the dampening center seam of her jeans while his palm bumped sexily against her mons. Claspng Sera's right breast with his right hand, Nate thoroughly massaged the full mound through her T-shirt, his thumb relentlessly moving over and around the thick, hard point of her aching nipple, the rigid force of his hard-on pushing persistently between the cheeks of her butt. Sera tensed her pelvis and arched her back, curling her right arm up and around Nate's neck in an unconscious effort to push her breast and pussy closer to his touch.

Dizzy with desire, Sera opened her eyes. She saw the look of hunger in Fab's. His black gaze danced with a fire she'd never seen. His muscular chest heaved beneath his tight T-shirt and from the looks of the enormous bulge in the front of his pants, he was hard.

Very hard.

Without hesitation, she reached out to him with her free hand.

The fire in Fab's eyes softened to a glow. He smiled. Then he stepped forward and tentatively took Sera's hand, any reservation he had dissolving at the touch of her skin. He warmly kissed the back of it, his kisses slow, measured, and passionate, before turning it to lavish more of the same on her palm. Once he had thoroughly worked over the back and front, Fab then began the most mind-blowing blowjob on her fingers. She moaned a little, stunned by the surprisingly intense sensation. Fab pulled back from sucking her pinkie.

"Just wait 'til I suck your toes."

Sera's pussy twitched at that remark. She'd never had her toes sucked before but if Fab's finger play was any indication, she knew it was going to be out of this world. Speaking of which, Nate's low whisper, his breath cool and moist against her ear, put her over the moon.

Or rather, his words did.

"There are other places I can't wait to suck."

As if to prove his point, Nate moved around to swiftly pull Sera's T-shirt up and over her head, his lips fastening around one of her nipples in a heartbeat. Moving behind her, Fab swiftly unbuttoned and pulled off Sera's jeans and panties while Nate lovingly licked her breasts. After easing her feet out of the pants, Fab stood and effortlessly lifted Sera, his hands resting easily in the crook of each knee as Sera relaxed back against his chest. When Nate sank to his knees, Fab slowly spread Sera's legs apart so that Nate's face was perfectly aligned with Sera's dripping pussy.

Unable to restrain himself, Nate dove in, enthusiastically licking the slick folds between Sera's legs as his hands caressed the smooth skin of her thighs. Sera groaned, her head falling back against Fab's shoulder and her back arching while Nate's tongue and mouth moved magically in and around her aching pussy. Gazing down at him from behind hooded eyes, she noticed how his shoulders were trembling—the steady vibration progressing to a violent shake.

"Take a breath," Fab warned, his hand reaching forward to touch and gently push Nate back.

Raising his head, Nate grimaced and closed his eyes. Shuddering, he bit his lip, his elongated fangs digging into his flesh to draw blood. Sera gasped as two streams of red trickled down his chin. When he next looked at her, there was a strange glazed look within his eyes, which were fixed on Sera's throat.

"Shake it off, Nate."

Rolling his neck from side to side, he drew in a shaky breath and blew it out hard. Several times. It took him a few minutes but slowly his fangs retracted and the warmth returned to his eyes.

"Now," he said with a smile. "Where were we?"

Dipping his head, he began licking her pussy once more. Only this time, the strokes of his tongue were slower. More sensual. Utterly sensational.

Just before she came, Sera heard another low rumbling growl erupt from Nate's throat. Fab's quick response both reassured and excited her.

"I'm here, Sera. Just let go. That's the way, Nate. Just take it nice and slow."

After a lifetime of waiting, Sera allowed her body to respond. As she exploded into a million pieces she hardly realized Nate was taking Fab's advice...instead of rapidly tongue-fucking her climaxing cunt, he was laying an excruciatingly delicious series of nice, slow licks upon her shuddering clit. To further heighten her pleasure, he had inserted a couple of fingers into her creamy core and was rhythmically sliding them in

and out. Sera groaned, her eyes rolling back as she trembled violently, grateful for Fab's powerful arms holding her steady.

It felt good, so good, but she was still eager for the feel of Nate's and Fab's cocks inside her.

Reading her mind, Fab eased her to the floor, leaning her forward onto all fours, and swiftly entered her from behind. The speed and vigor with which he penetrated Sera took her breath away. His cock was thick and hard and as its bulbous head bumped against her cervix. Sera shivered in anticipation of the pleasurable thrusting action to start.

Right on cue, Fab began pumping into her slippery pussy, his hands anchored at her hips, pulling her backward onto his rigid shaft as he drove his pelvis forward. It was the same movement that Lance had employed on many an occasion but with Fab, it felt different.

Way different.

And way better.

Nate was still kneeling in front of Sera, his own hard cock angling up invitingly toward her open mouth. With a touch of his hand on the back of her head, Sera knew what Nate wanted.

She wanted it too.

And had for what seemed like forever.

Leaning down, she clutched his throbbing shaft with her left hand, closing her fist around his swollen cock at the base. She really wanted to use both hands to stroke him but she needed to keep her right hand on the floor for balance. Fab's thrusts had increased in force and without some kind of anchor, she would fall face first into Nate.

Not a bad thing but she really wanted to do it just right.

Nate immediately saw the dilemma and, moving to brace her, he placed his large hands just outside her breasts near her armpits. The hold he had on her was amazingly

sturdy and comfortable, which rendered both her hands, and her mouth free and mobile. Placing her newly liberated right hand a couple of inches below the head of Nate's cock, Sera began slowly twisting both hands back and forth as they moved up the length of his shaft all the way to the top where she finished the journey with three of four quick, tight strokes down and up before starting the slow twist back to the top again.

The sexy sequence really worked for Nate.

Sera could feel his already super-stiff cock growing even harder in her hands. His shaft, made slippery by the number of pre-cum drops that had appeared on his cock head and dribbled down, jerked in her grasp as he pulsed his hips forward with need.

He was close.

Really close.

But so was she.

Fab leaned forward and wrapped his arms around her then gently stroked her swollen clit in opposition to his thrusts so that the little nub was getting twice the action.

Sensing the swell of another orgasm looming, Sera dove down and took the entire length of Nate's cock into her mouth. She could taste the salt in his pre-cum. It made her salivate, eager for more of the same. She gagged a little as the plum-shaped head of his shaft hit her tonsils but she quickly swallowed, simultaneously easing the reflex while her contracted throat squeezed his cock head. Quickly falling into a rhythmical pace, Sera sucked his rigid length as she pulled back, her tongue making tight, looping circles around his thick shaft before she plunged down to the base again and swallowed. With her hands, she cupped Nate's heavy, packed-full balls that were drawn up tight against the base of his cock in obvious preparation for ejaculation.

Sera glanced up the length of Nate's body. His head was thrown back and he grimaced in an expression of intense pleasure, the set of his mouth clearly revealing his long, wicked-looking vampire canines.

Sera was no longer worried. She knew that, in more ways than one, Fab had her back.

Just as Sera felt Nate's cock twitch in that telltale way that forecast he was a heartbeat away from coming, Fab groaned loudly, his thrusts switching to a supernatural speed that mimicked that of a vibrator as he poured himself into Sera's pussy. Her own climax was triggered by the feel of his stone-hard cock relentlessly delving into her creamy core, over and over again.

Nate began to vibrate, the mounting pressure in his shaft spreading like wildfire to every single nerve ending in a warm tidal wave of pleasure. As the first contraction rocketed him into rapture, the sensation of Sera's hot, wet mouth sucked his ejaculating cock and Nate let out a nearly mournful wail of release, leaning rhythmically into each spasm with his whole body. He threw back his head and groaned again, his fangs elongating as he continued to pump his shaft into the warmth of Sera's mouth. Distantly, he felt Fab's restraining hand on his shoulder. Between jets of cum, a flicker of a smile flitted across his euphoric face.

As an endless amount of Nate's warm cum jetted into her mouth to dribble down her chin, Sera shuddered repeatedly, lost in the bliss of the moment.

"See?" a winded Fab posed from behind her as they fell into a crumpled heap. "You didn't kill her."

Sera looked over and winked at Nate.

"He did. But only with kindness."

Both Nate and Fab chuckled but it was Nate who had the last laugh.

"Yeah. And we're going to be real kind to you from now on. In fact, I'm ready to be kind to you all over again."

Sera's eyes widened.

"So soon?"

Nate didn't answer.

He just sat up and drew Sera onto his lap, his large hands cupping her ass and pulling her onto his seriously stiff cock. As she arched back to take Fab's remarkably hard cock upside-down into her mouth, Sera knew she had finally found the only true loves — plural — of her life.

Bar none.

About the Author

A former operative for the CIA, Brigit Zahara previously unleashed her passion for excitement and adventure through her work, spending a good deal of her time traveling throughout the United States and Europe, with lengthy spells in New York, Los Angeles, Louisiana, Venice, London, Florence and Malta.

After Brigit took an early retirement, she then looked to her closet habit of writing fiction as a means of indulging her need for pulse-pounding action. From there, her taste very quickly turned to the tantalizing arena of erotica. Brigit has written a number of sizzling titles for Ellora's Cave. She looks forward to writing and publishing many more torrid tales of love and sensuality with this top publisher of erotic literature.

Currently Brigit lives in a seaside villa in Majorca, spending the steamy days penning even steamier stories and the cool, ocean-breeze-kissed evenings researching love scenes with her heart's destiny and husband of nearly eight years.

Brigit welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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