



The Vampire Oracle:

AWAKEN

By

Eliza Gayle

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Awaken

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my childhood friend, Brian Lewis. I can't thank you enough for writing the lyrics to Awaken for me. They are perfect, and I love them. This book will forever be one of my favorites thanks to your contribution. Enjoy, my friend.

Awaken By Brian Lewis

I'm not sure about this
I'm not sure about anything anymore
I fight to look inside
I want to run and hide
Feel like an eagle that's forgotten how to soar.

How am I standing
How am I standing here with an ache in my heart
Who are you and who am I
I should know but don't dare try
If I wake up from my dreams, will we be apart?

If I awaken it'll all be over
If I awaken it'll all begin
If I awaken it'll be to my angel
If I awaken it'll be to my sin

I'm all out of time

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I'm all out of yesterdays
Feels like my pulse has been stilled
And my grave has been filled
Will you come to wash my tears away?

I want to taste
I want to taste your every breath
In my dreams it was you
Always safe in your eyes of blue
For an eternity I'd gladly face my death

When I awaken it'll all be over
When I awaken it'll all begin
When I awaken it'll be to my angel
When I awaken it'll be to my sin

I'm not sure about this
I'm not sure about anything anymore....

Chapter One

For six months now, Abby Douglas had been living in the dark. No memories, no friends and no family. Until today. She placed the lone tarot card on the table in front of her, the image haunting her. The woman depicted on the card had her eyes. The same haunting violet eyes Abby saw every morning in the mirror. Her finger grazed the edge of the card, her eyes closed, sparking the voice in her head.

Awaken. It's time to wake up, my sweet.

"Abby, you gonna take care of your table over there sometime tonight?" Barb's smoke-roughened voice pierced through her thoughts. She blinked up at the woman, momentarily dazed. "You okay, Abby?" Abby shook her head to clear her thoughts, erasing the voice.

"Yeah, I'm fine." She grabbed up the card and thrust it back into the unmarked envelope. It had arrived in the mail this afternoon with no return address, no letter inside or any other indication of who'd sent it. The only clue was a postmark from El Dorado Springs, Colorado. A long way from Savannah, Georgia.

"Well, your break's been over for ten minutes and those fellas over there are getting antsy for some drinks, shug."

Abby glanced over to her table at the four cowboys waiting on her. She recognized three of her regulars. She couldn't help but smile. Those men came in nearly every night, sitting at the same table, always trying to

convince her to join them, one or the other asking her out on a date and generally giving her a hard time. The fourth man she couldn't be sure about, as he had his back to her.

"Sorry, Barb, I just lost track of time. I'm on my way over there now." She grabbed up her order tray and the envelope, hurrying over to the table.

"Hey guys, how's it going tonight?" The men turned at the sound of her voice, their gazes skimming over her body in tight jeans and a black tank top and lingering in all the wrong places before eventually resting on her face.

"Ooh, there she is. There's our sweet little Abby."

"Y'all flatter me. Now what can I get you tonight?" She turned toward Steve first, starting with him. One by one the men ordered their regular two bottles of ice cold Bud for each. She didn't even bother writing it down.

"What about you, sir?" She faced the fourth man she still didn't recognize.

"Sorry about that, Abby, we didn't even introduce you. This here is Caleb Barrett, an old friend of ours from way back who just got back into town today. Caleb, this is Abby Douglas. The reason we all come in here every night."

She guffawed. "Y'all come in here every night because this is the only bar in this town and you don't feel like driving into Savannah." She flashed them a sweet smile before turning her attention back to the stranger. His black cowboy hat tipped as he stood for the introduction. He towered over her by a full eight inches, she guessed. Shoulders broad with muscles rippled beneath his shirt as he moved. An air of authority and dominance cloaked his every move.

His long, strong fingers swept the hat from his head, revealing black, wavy hair. The kind of thick hair a woman liked to run her fingers through. His piercing blue eyes caught and held hers as an untold spark ignited between them. Her mind went blank.

His eyes raked over her body from the top of her head down to the boots on her feet and back up, lingering on the bare expanse of her

neckline. She wished she'd worn her hair down instead of in her standard work ponytail. When he focused on her face, the sensual lines of his face struck her again. Handsome yes, but not in a traditional pretty boy way. He was dark and...she searched for the right word to describe him.

Dangerous.

"It's my pleasure to meet you, Abby." The underlying sensuality of his words captivated her, the husky tone causing her nipples to peak and her belly to clench with need.

"What can I get you from the bar, Caleb?" she muttered hastily, afraid to say more.

"Scotch, neat."

She nodded and forced herself to look away.

"I'll be back with your drinks in a few, guys." She rushed off, gulping in air as she went and attempting to clear her mind.

* * * * *

Hours later, Caleb still sat at the table waiting for her. She'd delivered them drinks all night without so much as another word. She seemed afraid of him as she ran around the room avoiding eye contact. He watched the band setting up on stage, and wondered if he should head home. He could try again tomorrow. Then he saw her walk on stage. She'd let her hair down, and the fall of straight black silk fell nearly to her waist. She still wore the same skintight jeans that molded long, lean legs, the jeans he imagined peeling from her body as she writhed and begged for him to hurry up.

His cock lengthened, pressing tight against his zipper as images of her naked body spread out before him entered his mind. His fangs descended at the thought of piercing into her creamy thigh and taking her essence into his body.

"Hey, Caleb buddy, you're about to see what really brings us out to this dive night after night." Caleb fought the urges rushing through him as he focused on his friends again. "Abby is one hell of a singer."

Caleb looked back to the stage as Abby stepped up to the

microphone. When the band started a slow melody, the crowd fell silent, waiting, every eye on the enchanting woman about to sing to them.

She swept her eyes around the room, briefly connecting with him before her eyes slid shut and the first line of lyrics slipped from her ruby lips. *"I'm not sure about this. I'm not sure about anything anymore. I fight to look inside."*

The dark voice from the small, beautiful woman whipped through him, heating his blood and flooding his mind with lustful images. Images of their two bodies intertwined across blood red silk sheets. His fingers wrapped in her long hair, pulling her head back, exposing her pulse at the base of her pale throat. Her arms wrapped around his back, urging him forward. Those haunting amethyst eyes imploring him to take her as his hips surged forward, burying his cock to the hilt.

Shaking his head, he forced the all-too-real images from his mind.

"Who are you and who am I?" Her velvety voice reached for him as her eyes opened, releasing a small tear. Caleb watched the tiny drop track down her cheek. He fought the urge to run to the stage and drag her away. The compelling need to claim her came from deep within his soul.

Mine. All mine. The thought shocked him with a certainty he didn't understand.

Caleb managed to force his gaze away from the stage to look around the room at all the people sitting enraptured as Abby crooned to them.

"If I awaken it'll be to my sin." Her voice called to every person in the room. Luring them to her. She had a rare gift indeed. As a vampire, he should be able to resist a mortal call. Why her? What made her different from all the many others? Why now? He tried to hold onto those questions like a lifeline but found it impossible to resist her. He turned back to face the woman of his desires, only to find her staring straight at him, focused and sure.

"Always safe in your eyes of blue. For an eternity I'd gladly face my death...."

With a start, he realized her song belonged to him. But how could that be? They'd just met. As the song faded into the final chorus, he

wondered about the images he'd seen. He'd felt the smooth, satiny skin of her leg wrapped around his naked hip. Her spicewood scent filled his mind with reality. Fiction? The past? Or the future....

The crowd around him erupted into thunderous applause. He watched in amusement as a blush crept into her cheeks. She seemed quite the contradiction, one minute a shy country girl waiting on tables then changing to a sultry singer with a stunning talent. He couldn't wait to unwrap her story. Slowly. One layer at a time. There was definitely more to Abby Douglas.

His interest stirred, he looked around the bar, taking in the rough-hewn furniture, some of which was in disrepair. Many in the crowd were also a little rough around the edges. A puzzle for certain. After the show, he would find out firsthand what a woman like her was doing in a place like this.

* * * * *

Abby tipped the bottle, taking a long pull of cool water. First something cool, then later she would soothe her throat with some warm tea and honey. Tonight had seemed particularly difficult for her. Something about Caleb's presence in the audience troubled her. She couldn't explain exactly what. It had taken every ounce of her willpower not to squirm under his stare.

"Great set as always, Abby." The drummer of the band rubbed his hand along her arm from shoulder to elbow, the stroke of his fingers a little too familiar but nothing she wasn't used to. This was Brian after all. She watched him get in the pants of every willing female groupie all the while trying to get her to jump in bed with him as well.

"Thanks, Brian." She offered a shy smile as he continued touching her. A low rumble sounded from behind her, startling her. Brian's hand jerked from her arm as she turned, coming face to face with Caleb, a black look aimed at her band mate. The look in his eyes was angry and hostile.

"What—what are you doing back here? This area is for employees only." She hated how tripping on her words gave away his effect on her.

She needed to take some time and pull herself together.

"Abby, I doubt my coming back here to congratulate you on a tremendous job would be that much of a violation. In fact, I think my timing was perfect." He shot another dark scowl in Brian's direction.

"Time for me to jet, Abby. You going to be okay?"

"Of course she will, why wouldn't she?" Caleb's threatening tone skittered down her back like a sudden chill sweeping the room. A flicker of apprehension crossed Brian's face, yet he stood his ground, not backing down. It took a slight nod from her before he decided it was okay to go.

When her friend walked away, she turned and focused her gaze upward, taking in the stern demeanor emanating from Caleb.

"Was that really necessary?"

His face softened at her question. His eyes darkened as he stepped closer, invading her personal space. "How can I do this with your drummer hanging all over you?"

Without giving her a chance to respond, he dipped his head close to hers, pressing his lips firmly against hers. His kiss seemed urgent and exploratory as his tongue probed at her mouth, coaxing her to open to him. The soft and firm pressure of his mouth melted her on the spot. She briefly thought to resist, but how could she? On a sigh she opened, allowing him entry. She marveled at the taste of his kiss as she fell deep into the drugging embrace of his arms.

His hands moved along her back in a gentle caress before sliding up to her neck and tangling in her hair. Her body tingled with the sharp sensations his fingertips created along her scalp. One hand fisting in her hair, he tugged her head back at a slight angle, giving him easier access to a deeper, more intimate kiss.

Fighting the onslaught of desire for this stranger, she pulled away from his mouth. "Stop—I can't."

His arms tightened around her. "Why not?"

"I don't even—I don't know you." She placed her hands against his chest to push him away, which was a huge mistake. The thin shirt he wore did little to hide the feel of rock hard muscle and warm male flesh. Her heart tripped. She longed to run her fingers along the bare skin, feel the

heat, press her mouth to that spot to see his reaction. Weary of being alone all the time, she contemplated letting go, for once taking refuge and comfort from where she could get it. Caleb wanted her, and she didn't want to say no. She allowed her hands to roam across the plane of his chest, admiring every inch as she went. When the pads of her fingers grazed across a hardened nipple, a sharp, low hiss emanated from him. A smile spread inside her at his reaction.

Looking into his eyes, she saw dark desire welling there. His look was so intense he appeared fierce. Was that why the mysterious card showed up in her mailbox today? Possibilities and scenarios ran through her mind, distracting her from Caleb's powerful pull, the reminder of the card forcing her out of the moment.

"Look at me, darlin'." Caleb's husky voice pierced her thoughts, capturing her attention.

"I am looking at you."

"Not really. Your mind is elsewhere. Right here, right now, your mind should be focused on me. On this." Where his words might have frightened her, they soothed her. An intense shiver of wanting coursed through her, her instinctive response to him more powerful than she could imagine.

She stood mesmerized as his seductive mouth descended on her throat. The soft sweep of his lips against her bare skin gave her shivers along the length of her body. Cream flooded her panties as her heart rate accelerated. All thoughts of not knowing this man fled her mind as her body pressed up against his hard length. His teeth nipped at the sensitive skin of her neck, sending jolts of pleasure singing through her blood. Just that quickly, she lost the fight against her hot, hard cowboy.

With every graze of his teeth, he felt the sweet rush of Abby's blood under her skin. His fangs ached with the need to sink into her soft neck, to pierce the vein that would deliver Abby's unique flavor. A flavor he imagined would be sweeter than honey. When his cock swelled further against her belly, he silently cursed the clothes they wore as well as the public place they were in. He needed her under him now, wanted to hear her beg for more, cry with the need for pain and pleasure he instinctively

knew she harbored inside. Oh yes, she would be a treasure to a hard man like himself. An innocent to soothe his jaded soul.

Her body softened against his, acquiescing to his insistent need for her surrender. He backed her up against the hard concrete wall, shielding her from any other's vision.

Mine. Mine.

Lost in thoughts of her pliant body writhing against his own, Caleb didn't realize someone approached him from behind until he was upon him. Danger. He sensed another predator in the room. He whirled toward the presence, shoving her behind him in a protective gesture, to find the same man who'd had his hands on Abby when he'd entered the room earlier.

What the...?

How could I have missed it before?

Vampire.

Caleb saw the brief flicker of realization in the other man's eyes as he realized the true nature of him as well. His kiss with Abby had distracted him long enough to lower his shields, giving the vamp plenty of opportunity to sense him. Regardless, it was only a matter of time anyway. It took a lot of energy to hide from another vampire and was usually only possible for short periods after a feeding.

"Abby, we go on again in five." The pointed look thrown in Caleb's direction by the other man made him snarl. The energy coming off him was arrogant and something else.... Something suspicious.

"No problem, I'll be ready." Her hands pressed against his back, trying to push him, but Caleb refused to budge. Despite the searing heat from her body pushing at his control, he stood his ground and stared down the other vampire, waiting to see what the other man had in mind.

Several tense seconds later, Brian blew out a breath. "All right, Abs. I'll be in the next room waiting for you if you need anything." With one last hard glance at Caleb, he turned and strode from the room.

"Your little friend there is feeling mighty protective of you, Abby. Anything I should know about?" He turned back to her, staring down into the clear violet of her eyes. He knew his sexual pheromones were at their

peak when she repeatedly shook her head, trying to clear her mind of them.

"He's harmless. Overly friendly at times, but harmless." There was a silky, sexual layer to her voice when she spoke to him. He found it impossible to resist as he recaptured her lips again, crushing her to him. Her sweet scent washed over him once more, urging him to take her here and now. It had only been two nights since his last feeding, but tonight he was starved and only Abby could sate him. His control slipping, he brushed his hand against the curve of her breast, his fingertips grazing across a hardened nipple.

A sharp gasp rewarded his efforts. He had to feel her wet heat surrounding him now, ached to pound into her again and again. His hands slipped under her blouse, seeking her bare skin. The smooth silk against his own undid him. In a frenzied state, he reached for the waistband of her jeans, releasing them at preternatural speed. The scent of her arousal flooded his senses in his haste to touch her wetness.

"Abby, it's time." Brian's voice from the next room shocked them both back to awareness as they sprang apart. Ragged breathing filled the room.

"I—I have to go." She struggled to regain her composure. "Only one more set, then...."

He nodded his head, shocked by his animalistic behavior. Abby shoved her blouse down and fastened her jeans. A quick brush of her fingers through her loose hair and she looked like the incredible singer again. "I'll be right back." With that, she turned from him and strode toward the stage.

Caleb blinked. What the hell just happened here? One minute he was stealing a kiss backstage, and the next he was about to throw her against the wall and fuck her. He shook his head, trying to forget that his cock was now hard enough to drive nails into brick. "Snap the fuck out of it, Caleb." He paced across the room, considering the last fifteen minutes. His attraction to Abby could certainly muck up the ease of his mission if he wasn't careful. Something about the damn woman and her voice set him on fire.

As the band started the next tune, he decided he needed some fresh air to clear his head and get his mind off his dick. Caleb headed out the side exit as the first strands of Abby's voice filtered across the crowd.

* * * * *

For the next several hours, Caleb watched the bar patrons leave, some likely on their way home, and others in various stages of drunkenness groping each other on their way out the doors. When some of the band and employees began to leave, Caleb perked up, looking for Abby. He'd watched the waitresses and other band members trickle out, but after fifteen more minutes he still saw no sign of Abby. Nor Brian. He pushed off the tree he'd been lounging against as the door opened once again and tinkling laughter spilled out along with two figures. The couple remained wrapped up in each other as they made their way across the parking lot.

A red haze of anger settled over his vision at the thought of Abby hanging on the bastard vampire or his hands touching any part of her perfect skin. Muscles tensed in his neck and shoulders as the urge to attack his own kind swept through him. *Mine. Mine.*

As the couple walked into the golden glow of the parking spotlight, his vampire senses told him it wasn't Abby. The vibrant red hair of the girl with Brian looked like a girl he'd seen hanging around backstage earlier. Some of the tension seeped from Caleb, although his instincts still told him something was definitely off.

Where is Abby?

Without warning, a vibrating, buzzing noise emanated from the couple as they both began digging through their belongings.

Brian pulled a cell phone out of his pocket and flipped it open. "Yeah." Even with his sharpened hearing, Caleb couldn't pick up the other end of the conversation, but the change in Brian's body language put him on high alert. "Don't worry. Everything will be fine. She's all taken care of."

Caleb's mind screamed with the implications of that last statement.

Was he referring to the redhead or Abby?

"I'm on my way now." Brian clicked his phone closed and turned back to the girl. "Get in the car now." The not-so-subtle change in Brian's appearance and manner worried Caleb. He watched them both climb into the dusty old pickup truck, and he debated whether to follow. His gut told him there would be trouble tonight, but leaving Abby unprotected wasn't an option. With a final glance over his shoulder at the vehicle speeding out of the parking lot, Caleb strode to the door.

Chapter Two

The bastard! He'd felt her up and gotten her nearly on her knees panting for him during her break. Who knew what might have happened back there if she hadn't had another set to complete. And not five minutes later, the coward had slipped out the side door without even a wave goodbye.

"Another tequila, Danny," she hollered down the bar to the bartender, who was leaning into the other waitress's nearly exposed tits.

She'd had enough. Sick of being alone, Abby had given into the need Caleb had awakened in her, letting him touch her in places she had no idea how long since they'd last been fondled. For a while there, she had tried to fight the attraction to the dark stranger but realized she was wasting her time. Why not go for it. What did she have to hold her back?

At least one question had been answered. She could feel. For months, men coming in and out of the bar had attempted to get her interest...and nothing. No sparks, no interest, nothing. She'd been afraid she'd lost more than her memory in her accident.

What a day.

"Hey, doll, I thought we already did last call." Danny slid a shot glass with a splash of familiar golden liquid in front of her.

"This one's not for the customers." Abby picked up the glass and, before Danny could respond, swigged the shot in one big gulp. She

gagged and choked as the liquid fire flamed in her throat. She tried to speak but could only manage a weak gasp. Laughter erupted around her as Danny and the other waitresses watched her suffering.

"You ever drank tequila before, Abs? You don't look so good." Danny couldn't stop laughing as she struggled to breathe through the burn. He reached under the bar, retrieving a bottle of beer that he opened and handed to Abby. "Here, drink this. At least it's cold. It'll help with the burn."

She quickly grabbed the bottle from him, turning it up on her lips and drinking down as much of the cool liquid as fast as she could.

"I—I don't know if I've ever drank tequila before," Abbey gasped out. "I don't remember shit." Next to her, Tina burst into a fit of giggles and gathered her up in a great big bear hug.

"Abby girl, you're a total riot. It's great having you here at the Drummer, ya know." Tina slid off the stool and sashayed her way toward the employee room. It was quitting time, and employees were hightailing it out of there as quickly as they could. She, on the other hand, was in no hurry to get back to an empty house.

Once the pain in her throat abated, Abby began to feel the warmth of the alcohol spread through her body. She enjoyed the sensation of heating up from the inside out. She looked down at the empty glass in front of her and understood why people drank the foul-tasting stuff despite the burn. The heat soothed her frazzled nerves.

With the rest of the staff busy closing up, Abby reached behind the bar and pulled out the envelope that she had received in the mail. Why couldn't there be a return address? Why the mystery?

She opened the envelope and poured the contents onto the scarred golden oak of the bar in front of her. The image of herself staring back at her from the upturned card gave her the creeps.

"She's got your eyes."

Startled, she dropped the envelope at the sound of his voice. He'd snuck up on her, and she'd not heard a sound until he spoke and his warm breath tickled the hairs on her neck very close to her ear.

"What are you doing back here, Caleb? I saw you leave hours ago."

"I didn't go far, my sweet." His lips touched her ear like a whisper, faint and barely there. He sat down on the stool next to hers, and for a brief moment, she had to fight the urge to crawl into his lap. She wanted to run her hands through his thick hair while she licked and bit his throat.

Whoa. Where had those thoughts come from? She shook her head, attempting to clear the fuzzy thought but not before catching a sly, smug smile peak at the corner of Mr. Cowboy's mouth.

"Well, I'm not your sweet, and you wasted your time returning." She turned back to face the bar, staring down at the card for a brief second more before sweeping it up and into the envelope.

"What's the card for?"

She pushed the envelope back under the bar. "That's the whole problem. I have no idea. No memory. No nothing." Her stomach churned with anxiety and frustration as she fought for control of her emotions. This wasn't what she wanted to say to him. Sympathy radiated off of him in waves as he grabbed her right hand, bringing it to his lips.

"What do you mean you have no memory?" he murmured across her skin. The soft sensation of his breath tingled up her arm, touching off every nerve ending in her body. Arousal she couldn't deny tightened her nipples and moistened her sex. Looking at him through her lashes, she could have sworn his nostrils flared in awareness.

She pressed her legs together, hoping she could tamp down the raging need she now felt. His eyes darkened to twin sapphire pools, and she thought she saw her own lust mirrored in his gaze.

"Just what it sounds like. I have no memory. No recollection of any of my life. At least nothing beyond six months ago." Appalled by the husky tone of her voice, she attempted to pull her hand from his, but he held it tightly.

"You have amnesia?" He looked at her curiously. "Were you in some kind of accident?"

"Sort of. I was found passed out in my car on the side of 95 right outside Savannah. But the car didn't appear damaged, and I didn't have any injuries. Just no memory. I should be grateful to be alive, but living like this...separate from everyone else is harder than you can imagine."

He smiled at her words. "You'd be surprised what I could imagine." The brief look in his eyes flickered with pain before he could mask it. She wondered what the comment could mean, but the change in his expression dared her to ask.

"So here I am six months later, waitressing and singing, waiting for something or someone to come along and enlighten me." She bit her lip until it throbbed, wishing she could just shut the hell up. Must be the alcohol.

"So for all these months no one has come forward with any information about your past?"

"No one."

"That seems strange. After hearing your voice on that stage tonight, I would be surprised if someone wasn't looking for you."

She felt the flame of a blush creep into her face at his words. She loved to sing and loved seeing the audience enjoy themselves, but open praise such as this still made her uncomfortable. "Thank you."

"Seriously, Abby, your voice swept me away. Made me want to get close to you."

"Is that why you left when I started singing again?" She found it impossible to hide the irritation in her voice.

He chuckled. "I didn't leave, hon, just needed a little space and fresh air." His hands curled tighter into her hair, pulling her head slightly back. "I was too close to fucking you right there against the wall." His raspy voice spiraled through her, giving her goose bumps over every inch of her skin. "I think, Abby my sweet, that you would have gone along with it, but when your mind cleared, you might not have been too happy with me."

His arrogance should have pissed her off, but if she thought about it, and right now she really didn't want to, she'd probably see he was right. In that moment she'd wanted him and hadn't cared how or where.

"Still—"

His fingers rose to caress her lips, halting her words. "Don't even bother. We both know the truth." Giving her no opportunity or thought to protest, he swept her hands behind her back, holding them together with

one hand while the other pulled her body up against his torso. "I can't play games with you, Abby, I don't have the control for it. Unless of course you want to put on a show right here for your remaining friends." He tilted his head in the direction of Danny, who seemed to be hovering over them as he straightened up the bar from another wild night.

A tiny spark of fear, heavily laced with desire for this man, coursed through her. He was a virtual stranger she knew nothing about, yet her body clamored for him. Her anger dissipated further with every whispered word he spoke, her resolve to remain aloof broken. "No games." Her words came out in a broken whisper. Her heart pounded with every hard look he passed over her and a certain air of dominance in his every word that fascinated her.

"Are you ready to leave now?"

There was a tingling in the pit of her stomach at his question. She nodded.

"Good, I'll take you home." He released her, and the sudden loss of his body heat startled her.

"Good idea." She grabbed her belongings from behind the bar and hopped off the stool. "Night, Danny. See you tomorrow."

"Sure thing, doll. You okay to get home tonight?" He looked at Caleb when he spoke.

She laughed. "Yeah, I'm good. Nothing to worry about." The two men stared at each other for a few seconds more before Abby grabbed Caleb's arm and pulled his attention away. "Let's go before I change my mind and leave you here in the bar with Danny tonight."

Caleb allowed Abby to pull him outside and away from her overprotective coworkers.

"My ride is right over there. I can drive you home." He pointed to his low-slung, black, classic Harley Davidson parked under the main parking lamp.

"Mmm. Nice bike." He pulled her closer to his side as they walked toward his motorcycle.

"You don't mind riding on the back of a bike, do you, babe?" He wagged his eyebrows suggestively at her.

"Not at all. In fact, it sounds like a lot of fun. Something I could use a little of right now."

"Well, no worries there, hon, I've an endless supply of ideas to entertain you with."

She looked sharply at him, piercing him with those incredible eyes of hers. His heart stuttered over that look. *Mine.*

A huge grin spread across her face. "I'll just bet you do."

A low growl emanated from deep within him as he swept her into his arms. She wrapped her legs around his waist, letting him carry her the rest of the way. Her laughter continued as she rained kisses along his neck and face, her sensual scent cloaking around him like a blanket.

"Abby, if you want us to make it back to your place—" Her little teeth nipped at his skin, stopping his train of thought cold. He could smell her arousal all over her right now. His body hardened more than he thought possible as he once again fought the urge to take her right here and right now. Hard and fast, thrusting his cock deep into her moist and ready sex. When her butt hit the seat of his bike, it was enough of a distraction to pull him from his immediate urges. Taking a deep breath, he set her down and climbed on in front of her. A quick flip of the switch and the bike roared to life, vibrating solidly beneath them. A sound close to a purr eased from Abby's lips as she leaned forward against his back and tightly wrapped her arms around his waist.

"I'm ready, Caleb, let's go." With a brief and barely successful thought to control, he kicked the stand free and rode the bike out of the parking lot. A short ride later, at her direction he stopped in front of a small blue bungalow surrounded by a row of hedges.

Killing the engine, he waited for her to step off the bike. "Cute place."

"It's a rental. Barb at The Drummer gave me a pretty good deal on a short-term lease. It's actually a nice little place."

"Short term, huh? Not planning to stay long?"

She stood in front of him with a faraway look in her eye. "Not sure what I'm going to do. Until today I had no clue about my past. But someone out there knows me and they know I'm here."

"You're referring to the package you got in the mail today."

Abby inserted her key into the lock of her front door, pushing it wide to allow them both entry. "I may not know who or why it was sent to me, but I do know it was mailed from a city in Colorado. It might be worth my time to go there and see if anything or anyone there sparks a memory."

An emotion bloomed in Caleb's chest at the thought of Abby leaving for Colorado. Fear? Annoyance? Something more? No. She couldn't leave. He wouldn't let her. An alarming possessiveness for this human woman coursed through him again.

His gaze followed the curve of her spine even as he followed her into the darkened room. The outline of her full, shapely ass encased in the snug denim drew him to her like a magnet. When her hand reached for the control of a lamp, he stilled her hand with his own, pulling her back around to face him.

"Leave it off." His voice was husky, revealing his need and arousal in a few syllables. His hand trailed up her arm, savoring the smooth, silky skin of his woman. His sensitive hearing caught the increase of her heartbeat along with the accelerated flow of blood through her veins. The swish of her lifeblood called out to him. His fangs descended into his mouth with a painful ache and powerful need to feed. To taste. To claim.

"Maybe we should—"

Caleb cut her protest off with a hard, demanding kiss. His tongue forced its way into her hot, sweet mouth, seeking and tangling with her tongue. His arms wrapped around her waist, pulling her roughly against him, pressing his stiff arousal against her soft belly. He longed for the feel of her naked skin against his as he put everything he felt into the passion of their kiss. When her hands reached under his shirt and touched his skin, he jumped as if burned. When the palm of her hands grazed his nipples, his hanging-by-a-thread control snapped. A low hiss emanated from him as he grabbed the hem of her shirt, dragging it over her head. The smooth, ivory skin of her shoulders led to black lace-covered breasts. Black lace that gave him a tantalizing glimpse of hard berry-tipped nipples. With a slow trail downward, he nibbled and nipped her fair skin.

Reaching the juncture between her breasts where the bra clasped together, he broke the scrap of lace apart with his fangs.

Creamy, heavy breasts spilled into his hands, his fingers stroking along the curved undersides. Her soft moan, along with the dark look in her eyes, spurred him further. Though it wasn't as if he could have stopped now if he wanted to. And the painful pressing of his dick against his zippered pants was proof positive that he did not want to stop.

Her hands reached into his hair, gripping the locks tight, trying to pull his head closer.

His hands reached up, pulling her own from his hair. "No, Abby. I am in control of your pleasure here. Trust me to know what we both need tonight."

"But I need more, and I need it now." He tightened his grip on her hands, lifting them above her head.

"If you can't control your hands as I say, I'm sure I could find something around here to tie them up." Her eyes widened at the same time her mouth opened to protest. He put his fingers to her lips. "Be careful what you say to me, darlin. I scented the spike of your arousal at every word I spoke."

His warm breath stroked against her cheek. She found it impossible to deny the truth when the truth moistened her pussy and slickened the tops of her thighs. Her legs trembled with the force of her need for this man; it scared the hell out of her, but there was no backing down now.

"Please, Caleb, please." Her voice lowered to a hoarse whisper. "I need you." She knew right away that her statement of surrender broke a barrier between them as a glimpse of something different passed through his eyes before pure, unadulterated passion flooded out of him. Her breath left her lungs in a rush when he latched on to her left nipple. His tongue swirled around the sensitive tip before his teeth bit down enough to have her gasping over the pleasure/pain.

Abby arched her back, pushing her body tighter against Caleb's hard form. Caleb forced her legs apart by slipping his leg between hers, pushing his denim clad, rock hard cock, rasping against her covered clit. When she undulated her hips against him, seeking more sensation against

herself, Caleb pulled himself back a few inches out of reach.

He released her hands and stepped away from her. "Take off your clothes for me, Abby." His simple command had her belly clenching with desire. Eager to have his hands back on her as soon as possible, she gripped the waistband of her jeans and unfastened and removed them in record speed. She hesitated a moment before pulling her tiny lace panties off, and Caleb gave her a pointed but silent command to continue.

Pulling them down her legs, she stepped free and stood back to face him, completely nude and ready for whatever he had in mind for her. She might have been embarrassed or nervous if she hadn't been totally under his spell. At least that's what she felt like, as if Caleb had her under a sexual spell.

Caleb backed through the doorway into her bedroom, beckoning her to follow him. He pulled her into his arms, enfolding her in another soul-searing kiss as his hands roamed and explored her entire body, touching her from the curve of her shoulders along the smooth line of her spine to her ass. Her body jerked in his arms when his fingertips edged along the crease of her buttocks, teasing and massaging as he dipped toward her forbidden area.

"Breathe, baby, breathe."

She exhaled the breath she hadn't even realized she'd been holding, then took a few extra deep breaths to control her reactions.

He turned her toward the bed and backed her up against the mattress. "Lay down on the bed, Abby."

She eased herself onto the soft cotton sheets and lay back on the pillows, awaiting his instructions. She spread her legs and ran her hands up her thighs straight to her sex. When her fingers would have tangled in her jet-black curls, he reached out and covered her hand with his own. Together their hands stroked the outside of her soaked pussy, and when her finger brushed against the hood of her clit, he applied a firm, steady pressure, pushing her one step closer to the orgasm she couldn't wait to experience.

Before she had a chance to fully appreciate the tingling sensation washing over her, Caleb pushed her hand away from her sex while

continuing to explore with his own. His fingers ran through the moisture of her slit as he parted the lips, getting his first look at her most intimate of areas.

"Oh, darlin', you're ready for me, aren't you?" He didn't really pause to wait for an answer. "Mmm. So wet and creamy." He slid his fingers top to bottom, gathering her moisture. He brought them covered in her juice up to her lips. "Taste yourself for me, baby. Tell me what it tastes like." He pressed his fingers against her mouth, and she opened to him, allowing his fingers to sweep inside. Despite the awkwardness of his request, Abby was surprised to find that she liked knowing how hot she was for him as well as the fact that her obedience thus far seemed to please him.

He pulled his fingers from her mouth, sitting back a bit from her. Waiting.

"It's—it's sweet and—um, tangy." As he watched her intently, she realized he'd yet to remove his pants. She couldn't wait to see and feel more of him, wanted the feel of him over her as he plunged into her, his cock forcing its way between the folds of her pussy as she sucked him inside.

"You okay, darlin'? You're looking a little tense." His arousal-thickened voice pulled her from the runaway path her thoughts had been heading down.

"Yes. I'm fine." Her voice seemed breathless even to her own ears.

"Tell me, Abby. Tell me what you want."

She hesitated at his request, unsure what to say. "I want to see you, Caleb. All of you."

His mouth curled up at the edges, his eyes getting darker if possible. He reached for his pants without breaking eye contact, undoing the button fly one slow button at a time. A few buttons later, she realized he wasn't wearing underwear when she saw a flash of flesh nestled in black curls. When he freed his cock, its hard length bounced against his flat stomach before jutting out toward her.

Unable to resist the compulsion, Abby moved up to her knees, getting close enough to reach out and touch him. When her hand circled

around his thick flesh, a sharp intake of breath sounded from Caleb. She marveled at the feel of velvety skin encasing hard steel as she stroked up and down the shaft. His cock wept, and she swiped the moisture with her fingertip, bringing it to her lips.

"Enough, Abby." He grabbed her wrists and shoved her back down on the bed, covering her with his body with unnatural speed. She blinked, her mind wondering how, when she felt the head of him pushing at her entrance. All thoughts other than her need fled her mind as he speared her balls deep in one smooth, swift thrust. Caleb leaned down and kissed her, forcefully tangling with her tongue as his hips began a rough pumping in and out of her wanting pussy. With his second downward stroke, she burst into pieces, her orgasm taking her by surprise. She screamed into his mouth as he continued to take her over and over again. The heightened sensation of him filling her each time his balls slapped against her bottom gave her more pleasure than she thought possible.

His muscles clenched and strained under her hands as she clutched at him, pleading for more. Breaking the kiss, he nuzzled at the curve of her neck, nipping the skin with his teeth. Her mind filled with intense thoughts of hard-driving sex and blood.

Blood? What?

Again her thoughts were released with Caleb's increasingly frantic moves, bringing on another powerful orgasm to take her breath away. His buttocks tensed as a deep groan sounded from deep within him. Abby felt a quick, sharp prick in her neck when he bit at her, sucking on the skin. Her world fractured into tiny bits of color all around her as her muscles clamped onto his cock over and over again. She simply couldn't imagine sex had ever been like this. She would never forget something so full of thoughts and feelings and incredible pleasure.

In what seemed like an eternity later, Caleb collapsed against her, his forehead resting on her shoulder. They both fought to get their ragged breathing back under control. His slick, masculine form pressed down on her as a constant reminder of his dominance over her. He'd taken control of their encounter, and she'd let him.

Was this what she'd been waiting for all along? A man to guide

her? To control her?

The questions overwhelmed her as the emotional meaning of what they'd done crashed down on her. Her breathing became shallow and rapid as she fought a sudden panic rising within her. He rolled to her side, removing his weight from her body yet encircling her with his arms.

"Abby, what's wrong? I can feel your fear. Relax, darlin', and let me take care of you." He ran his hand over her head in a rhythmic petting pattern that, along with his heat and strength, soothed and comforted her. "It's normal to be anxious and overwhelmed after what we just did. Even I felt the extraordinary connection we generated, babe." His deep, scratchy voice lulled her into a sense of security as her breathing slowed to a more normal pace. Exhaustion crept up on her as he continued to stroke and pet her. Her lids growing heavy, she wondered how much time had passed since they'd gotten to her house.

"It's okay to close your eyes, Abby. Rest, sweetheart, everything will be fine, I'll make sure of it." As her eyes closed, she wondered what his declaration meant.

What would he protect her from?

Caleb watched with amusement as Abby fought sleep. Based on her natural reactions and mental reluctance to what he'd done, he doubted she'd ever experienced anyone quite like him. That brought a smile to his face. He didn't want anyone else taking control of his sweet and so sexy woman. He found that combination in her wildly erotic, and as his cock again tightened against her thigh, he had thoughts of rolling her over and taking her from behind.

Get a grip, Caleb. Don't want to scare her off on the first night.

When Abby's steady, rhythmic breathing told him that she was finally in a deep, restful sleep, Caleb rolled away from her to find his discarded clothing. Based on his fatigue and sluggish movements, he knew dawn approached, leaving him barely enough time to get home and safe before sunrise arrived.

Moments later, dressed and ready to leave, he bent to brush a kiss on her cheek when a voice in her head startled him. She dreamed, and he could hear the whisper of it in his own mind.

The Vampire Oracle: Awaken by Eliza Gayle

Awaken, Abby. It's time.

Chapter Three

"I want to taste your every breath. In my dreams it was you."

Caleb's body clenched at the sound of Abby's breathy voice that escaped from the open door at The Dirty Drummer. Damn. He was running late tonight, and she was already on stage. His black cowboy boots hit the compacted dirt of the parking lot a little harder as he hurried inside.

Stepping inside, he was taken aback by tonight's atmosphere compared to what he'd experienced before. The lights in the bar were all turned down, and a spotlight lit up the stage. His breath caught at his first glimpse of the singer onstage. Gone was the casual appearance he'd seen last night, replaced with Abby dressed in head to toe black leather. Her long raven hair framed her pale face, making her violet eyes appear luminous. Following her regally held neck, he noticed the tight, black leather bustier pushing her creamy breasts up and over the top straining to keep them contained. His mouth watered as he thought of the treasure within.

Her slim leather pants rode low on her hips, baring a tempting strip of flesh he needed to bite. He closed his mouth to hide the fangs that elongated at the very thought. The little minx on the stage gyrated her hips in a slow, seductive wag, making the crowd of drunken men cheer and whistle, making him seeing red. He had half a mind to drag her out of

the club by her hair, take her back to his place, and show her that she was his.

His? What the fuck? Why couldn't he get those thoughts out of his head?

Thoughts of her body, her scent, her innocence had plagued his sleep all day long. He'd woken with a nearly uncontrollable thirst that only she could quench. He'd been forced to hunt in an attempt to abate the bloodlust, or he would have been unable to control himself around her. And the last thing he wanted to do right now was scare the hell out of her. Funny, now he thought a good scare might do her a little good. Throw her off balance with a little surprise.

He chuckled. What a sadist he was becoming.

No, he was in control, and he would wait. He'd learned the fine art of patience if nothing else in all these years. He found a small table in the darkest corner of the room and signaled to the waitress. After ordering his scotch, he sat back to watch.

Abby had moved into a rousing country rock song that had the crowd roaring along with her. Every time her boots stomped the scarred wooden stage, the crowd stomped and clapped along with her. She had the crowd riled tonight, and appeared to be loving every minute of it. With his anger rising, he attempted to reel himself in with thoughts of the mission, the real reason he was here. He couldn't let his developing attachment to this woman interfere with finding that damn cousin of his. He'd left a trail of dead bodies throughout the Southeast, and so far Abby was the only witness they had found.

Unfortunately, she didn't remember a damn thing, likely due to a mind wipe that only the oldest and most powerful vampires could even attempt without killing their subject. More than likely Russell had been playing around with her mind, not caring whether he killed her or not. Either he'd gotten lucky and it had worked, or he'd become even more powerful than his family had thought. Either way, he was trouble on the verge of exposing them all if Caleb didn't find him and soon.

The song ended, and the band announced they were taking a fifteen minute break. The disappointed crowd loudly protested as Caleb

made his way backstage to intersect Abby as she exited the stage. The excited patrons crowded around the backstage door, so by the time Caleb made it back there, he found Abby and the drummer, Brian, huddled together deep in conversation.

For a brief moment, Caleb allowed his temper to flare as it tore at his insides like the talons of a jungle cat. He struggled with the urge to attack the man who dared to touch Abby. Technically he didn't have any rights over her—yet. But damn it, she was his, and no man and especially no male vampire should dare to touch her. Clenching his teeth hard, he forced a mask of calm over his face.

"What do we have here?" The two sprang apart like a couple of teenagers caught necking by their parents. If he wasn't so mad, he might have found that funny. Abby sprang to her feet, planting her hands on her hips and staring back in obvious annoyance with him.

"Christ, Caleb, you trying to scare me to death? What the hell is your problem?" Caleb took a step back as her voice lashed at him. Not to protect himself but protect her, because right now he wanted nothing more than to turn her over his knee and give her the paddling of her life. A lesson in humility could be effective, but he doubted she would agree with him.

"Are you angry with me?" Caleb really didn't need to ask; it was written all over her face and in the arms she crossed over her chest.

"Hell yes, I'm pissed. Who the hell disappears in the middle of the night without even saying goodbye?"

He took a couple of steps toward her, intent on making her understand.

"Abby, maybe you should calm down," Brian interrupted, stepping in front of her and blocking her from his view. A warning hiss erupted from Caleb at the intrusion. The other vampire thought to intrude again? The male was becoming quite a nuisance.

"Brian, I can handle this."

Brian eased from the room with a flicker of humor in his eyes.

"Why are you back? I thought you got what you wanted?" She threw the words at him like darts, and for some crazy reason, that amused

him. His mouth twitched with the need to grin at her. "This is funny?" She threw up her arms in frustration, and he grabbed her hands, bringing them to his lips.

"It was nearly dawn when I left, Abby. I didn't want to wake you before I did because you needed the rest. Our experience yesterday can be overwhelming the first time." Her mouth softened as she started to speak. Putting his fingers to her lips, he halted her. "It wasn't my intention to abandon you or hurt you. I merely needed to arrive home before dawn." She stood stock still, scrutinizing him. He hated lying to her but from his experience with females he knew the truth of what he was would be far more damaging than a little hurt feelings from not staying overnight.

"Give me a chance to make it up to you, darlin'. Meet me after your shift is over." His fingers strayed down the curve of her neck, following the flow of her life force. Her pulse increased as he traced a path, indicating her desire. "We can even work through your anger with me."

"You're being incorrigible." Her head angled to the side, exposing more of herself to him. His fingers hit the edge of her butter soft leather bustier, dipping perilously close to the exposed curve of her breast.

"Quite an outfit you have on tonight. Driving every man in the club wild." His touch dipped underneath the garment, stroking the soft flesh. A small sigh escaped her as her body swayed toward him.

"I'm not that easy, Caleb."

"Not easy, Abby, just irresistible." His head dipped a breath away from her own. "Meet me later tonight. I have some work to do, but I want to see you tonight. And I think you want to see me as well."

His warm breath stroked her skin like the caress of the lover he was. She found it impossible to stay angry when her body pulsed with every word he spoke. "I'm still angry with you."

"No worries, darlin', we can discuss it later tonight," he said with a smile that devastated her resistance.

"I have to get back on stage."

"It's okay, I need to get going as well. I'll meet you at your place later." His lips pressed gently against hers, teasing and nibbling along her mouth. Her lips parted to accept him, and his tongue stabbed inside,

changing the gentle kiss to a demanding taking of her mouth. His hand threaded through her hair, grasping the strands at the base of her neck, tugging enough for that subtle pain sensation to mingle with the decadent contact of his heated body against her own.

Breaking contact, he took a few steps back. "Go sing, darlin'. We will finish this later."

Her fingers touched her kiss-swollen lips as she watched him turn to leave. She didn't understand what was happening between them, a connection developing beyond the sex she couldn't seem to explain.

* * * * *

Abby stepped into the oversized glass shower in between the opposite showerheads. Double streams of water created an incredible massaging effect. This shower was the sole deciding factor for her when she rented the cottage. Well, that and it was the only prospect keeping her from being homeless.

As the heat of the shower water sluiced over her body, Abby considered the last twenty-four hours. Her incredibly sexy cowboy had invaded her life like a sudden summer thunderstorm, fast and furious. She'd willingly allowed him access to her body, and now she wondered if there was more being affected.

No, that was ridiculous.

She poured her favorite raspberry body wash into her hands and lathered up her arms and legs. Smoothing the soap all over her skin, she noticed a few tender spots from the previous night. The slight ache in her limbs didn't bother her but instead had her remembering the exquisite sensations Caleb had inflicted upon her.

When her slick fingers reached the rounded curves of her breasts, the areolas tightened with arousal as she rolled the hardened tips between her fingers. Her sex quickened with every pull and pinch, her eyes closing as the steam of the shower rose around her. Her anger at Caleb dissipated as she focused on the pulsing of her body. The entire area between her thighs throbbed and quivered with need. Abandoning her right breast,

she shifted her hand downward, seeking the heat and moisture pooling between her legs. Her fingertip slid through her cleft, spreading her liquid fire until finally plunging two fingers inside her opening.

She imagined Caleb's oversized cock stabbing in and out of her pussy as she did the same with her hand. Her muscles clenched down on her fingers as the tension rose to a sizzling level within her. Knowing her orgasm was imminent, Abby rubbed at her clit with her thumb as she increased the tempo with her fingers. The intermittent pressure on her nub along with the fucking of her pussy pushed her to the edge where she quickly succumbed to the pleasure and thoughts of Caleb touching her.

Lights exploded behind her eyes as she came on her hand, screaming out, "Caleb! Oh yes!" Her body slumped against the tiled wall of the shower as she rode her fingers and orgasm to the very end, frantically pumping and drawing out every ounce of pleasure. Finally weak kneed and sated, she contemplated finishing the shower or sitting on the bench for a rest.

"Finish your shower, Abby." Caleb's voice pierced her thoughts, cramping her chest with momentary fear. She swung violently around to come face-to-face with the man of her dreams standing in the shower entrance, casually leaning to the side with his shoulder propped against the wall.

"What—how—when—" she stuttered around her thoughts, unable to put together a coherent thought. Her body still thrummed from her release and the shock he'd given her with his unexpected appearance. "You watched me?" A heated blush crept along her skin as she imagined what she'd looked like masturbating in the shower.

"Of course I watched you. And what a sight it was. So beautiful to watch you finger fuck your pussy. And a major turn on." His voice was low and rough as he spoke. "You've given me all sorts of ideas." A sly smile formed that made him appear impossibly more attractive.

"I don't know what to say."

"Say nothing, Abby. Finish your shower." His eyes burned into her with his command, that subtle strength emanating from within. She turned back toward the hot shower spray, refilling her hands with her

luxurious soap. Once again she lathered up her body, trying hard to forget the luscious man standing behind her watching every move she made.

Caleb shifted position, seeking relief from the increasing pressure of his hard dick scraping against his pants. Catching Abby giving herself an orgasm in the shower had nearly been his undoing. The sweet scent of her arousal filled the steamy room as she'd plunged her fingers into her cunt, her limbs shaking as her release washed over her.

Damn! I have to fuck her. Now!

His fangs ached with the need to feed again despite the hunt he'd just come from. His body was out of control around her, and it drove him crazy. So much for easing the urge that one sip last night gave him. Watching her finish her shower, he noticed her movements were jerky and fast, a dead giveaway she was uncomfortable with his watching. He smiled. It was good for her to be nervous around him. It would keep them both on their toes.

Abby turned off the water, and the silence that followed brought him out of his dark thoughts. She stood in front of him naked and wet, her hands and arms nervously fidgeting. "I need a towel." She held a look of trepidation in her eyes as she waited for him to move.

"Stand right there and don't move."

She started to open her mouth to say something, then she stopped, watching him intently. He turned and grabbed a bath sheet from the oak wall cabinet outside the stall. He contemplated his options for a moment before stepping into the shower so close to her body that the heat radiated against his clothes. "Turn around and face the wall." With little hesitation, she did as told. "Closer." Again she followed his direction.

"Put your hands on the wall above your head, darlin'." She slid her hands up the smooth, wet tile, stopping them a foot above her. "Now spread your legs a little for me." He moved closer, reaching the towel up to her hands to begin drying her skin. His movements slow and controlled, he stroked the towel down her arm and back, admiring the sleek curves, feminine musculature and the kissable ivory skin. Not to mention the unique scent she gave off every time he came near her.

As he traveled south with the towel, her body shifted closer to him,

pushing herself harder into his hands when he reached her round, delectable ass. His finger slid through the crease while images of his finger fucking the tight hole swamped his brain. Later, he reassured himself. Plenty of time. When a breathy sigh escaped her, Caleb knew she was his totally and unconditionally, even if she didn't know it yet.

"Turn around, Abby."

"Yes, Caleb." Her plump breasts brushed against his chest as she moved, her hard nipples poking at his shirt. His body clenched, and it took every ounce of restraint he possessed not to push her against the wall and thrust his dick into her sweet cunt, at the same time burying his fangs in her neck, satisfying every urge he possessed.

As he rubbed her front dry, her limbs trembled with every caress until he could take no more. Dropping the towel to the shower floor, he pressed his hands on her shoulders, applying enough pressure for her to move downward. With the instinct of a true submissive, she sank to her knees with no protest.

She looked up at him with expectant eyes. "May I?" Just the fact that she asked drove him closer to the edge as he nodded his ascent. Her fingers reached for his buckle, and with the hands of an expert, she unfastened his pants, sliding them down his legs. Stepping out of them, he kicked them to the side. Needing more freedom, he swiped his shirt over his head, throwing it alongside his jeans, leaving him standing there in his tight boxer briefs.

Abby's mouth watered at the sight of his nearly naked self. Dear God, he looked even better than she remembered from last night, all velvety skin over iron hard muscle. Touching the waistband of his briefs, her heart beat rapidly as she peeled them from his hips. His huge cock sprang forward before bouncing against his rippled abs.

When her hand encircled the girth again, she was amazed by the size. Lust for more of him filled her as she watched his eyes flicker closed. Opening her mouth, she edged forward, sliding his cock head deep inside her. Her tongue skimmed the sensitive underside of the shaft as his fingers tangled inside her hair, pulling her farther onto him. The salty taste of his pre-cum exploded on her tongue as he pushed at the back of

her throat. She relaxed her throat to prevent her gag reflex from kicking in before he withdrew all but the tip.

With a groan and a thrust, he plunged back into her mouth, allowing her tongue to swirl and suckle his flesh. Push. Pull. Her sex clenched continuously as he continued fucking her mouth, driving her mad with the need to satisfy him. Her own pleasure built along with his, and his thrusts lengthened as she accommodated more of him.

"Oh, Abby! You're going to make me come." Her fingers curled around his tightened scrotum, rubbing the softer skin and globes within. His cock swelled and pulsed with each brush against her tongue. His hands tightened on her hair, pulling so tight her eyes watered.

"Ahh." His final groan echoed through the room as his hot seed spurted into her mouth. She continued to suckle and stroke as his body shook from release. Her pussy contracted as her own juices coated her sex, ready to be taken by the still hard cock she'd wrapped her lips around.

He pulled her head back, forcing her off his dick to look him in the eyes. He wanted nothing more than to sink his fangs into her neck and drink his fill. Not just mark her this time but claim her. "You are such a sweet girl, Abby."

He pulled her to her feet and ran his hand down her soft, nude form to her soaking pussy, pushing two fingers in her opening as she gasped in his ear. "Tell me. Tell me exactly what you want." He stabbed his fingers in and out, hard and ruthless as she gripped his shoulders, his thumb circling her clit but never getting close enough to push her into orgasm.

"You want me to stop?" She shook her head against his chest. "Then tell me now, dammit!"

She lifted her head, looking him in the eye. "I want you, Caleb. Please fuck me."

His heart stuttered at her words. They were perfect. How could this be happening? His little mortal with the perfect voice matched him in every way. No, this could not be possible. He released his fingers, bringing them to his lips. Her scent and taste were intoxicating, making him crazy, and his dick thickened for more. He effortlessly scooped her

into his arms and carried her from the bath.

"This is going to be a long and delicious night, darlin'."

Chapter Four

The afternoon sun streaming in her face woke Abby from her deep sleep. The damn dream again. She lay there thinking it over. One word. Awaken.

How the hell was she supposed to know what that meant? She rubbed her eyes and forced herself to roll over. She landed on the cold empty spot in her bed and realized that Caleb had again left her in the night. Almost a week of nightly sex and submission, and he still left before she woke. So strange. Stretching her arms and legs, she reveled in the total soreness of her body. She'd never considered a man could last that long or that many times, for that matter. But Caleb's hunger for her was insatiable, and she loved every minute of it.

Right now, she desperately needed caffeine. She eased off the bed and sought her robe and slippers. As she headed toward the kitchen, the aroma of her desperate craving hit her square in the gut. Caleb was a coffee god and brewing some right now. She walked through the door with a silly smile plastered across her face, thrilled he had finally stayed for a morning after and there would be coffee involved. She stopped short. The room was empty. But her coffee maker percolated with a piece of paper propped against it.

I set the timer on the coffee maker, thinking you might appreciate some when you woke this afternoon. Last night was incredible, and I will be seeing you

tonight at the club.

Well, a note was improvement. She poured herself a cup and settled in at the breakfast bar with the morning paper he'd also left for her. She attempted to read the headlines but couldn't stop thinking about her dream and that damned card she'd received. She'd wanted to take off days ago, but every night Caleb had come to her, and she found his need impossible to resist. They aligned so well together she'd finally decided to quit fighting it and see where it went. Setting her cup on the bar, she spied the white envelope peeking out from under a stack of unopened mail. She'd almost forgotten about the card and what it could signify. *Answers.*

She pulled the card from the envelope and set it on the counter in front of her. Sipping from her mug, she thought again about going to El Dorado Springs. It seemed a long shot, but the voice in her head wanted her to remember something. She put her head in her hands. Focusing on her memory, she took a deep breath and concentrated. As usual after a few minutes of intense breathing and concentration, she gained nothing but the start of a burning headache at the base of her skull. Frustrated, she pushed the card back in the envelope and went to get dressed. Her shift at the Drummer started in a couple of hours, and she wanted to get there early tonight. She needed to talk to her boss about some time off.

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Caleb woke with a start. Tangled in the sheets of his bed, he recalled the restless sleep he'd endured. His instincts had hummed all day long, telling him something was up. It was times like these that caring for a human drove him crazy. She was safe from his cousin during the day, as he too suffered lethargy during daylight, forcing them to sleep or at the very least rest to restore their energy levels. He kicked clear of the bedding and padded to the closet to dress for the night. His cousin was close. He could sense it.

First things first. He grabbed up his cell phone and punched in the number for Abby. Fuck! Voice mail. Checking the time, he confirmed she would already be working her shift and not carrying her phone.

Unfortunately, the tingling at the base of his skull served as a constant reminder that something was up, and he needed to know she was okay.

He punched in another number, and after several long rings, a female voice finally answered. "The Dirty Drummer."

"Evening. I'd like to speak with Abby, please."

"She can't take personal calls while waiting tables, shug, unless it's an emergency. Is this an emergency?"

Caleb relaxed. "So she is waiting tables right now?"

"Well, yeah, hon, that's what she does here when she ain't singing, and it's a little early yet for the band."

"No worries then, I'll catch up with her later. Thanks for the help." Caleb ended the call and finished dressing. He needed to patrol the town and see if he could locate his wayward cousin or any other of his kind that might be up to no good.

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He tunneled his fingers through his hair in frustration. He'd ridden the roads of the town for hours now attempting to locate Russell and the trouble he continued to sense. All for nothing. He was no closer to finding him or any of his potential minions. Watching the clock, he knew he didn't have long before Abby's shift ended. No way would he let her leave there unguarded with Russell somewhere in the city, so he turned his motorcycle back and headed in the direction of the bar.

Leaving his bike about a block away from the building, he decided to approach on foot and in the shadows. The wind kicked up, and Caleb stiffened in alert. He scented his cousin on the breeze. But more than that, he detected the distinct aroma of blood. To humans, blood took on a scent like copper. But to vampires, blood was sweet, a little like honey. Different with every person, but sweet all the same.

To his relief, what he identified was not human. Blood of a vampire was on the wind. What the hell? He picked up the pace, going behind the building in time to see a shadowy figure stab another in the neck. He ran to the two men, delivering a sidekick to the abdomen of the attacker. The

figure stumbled back in surprise as Caleb went after him again.

"What the fuck is wrong with you, Russ? What are you doing here?"

Russell charged at him, his fist plowing into his face, slamming against the bone in his cheek, ripping the skin open from cheekbone to lip. Caleb flew back, slamming into the building wall, momentarily dazed. Russell took advantage of his delay by grabbing his shoulders and hurtling him toward the wooded area behind the bar.

Caleb smashed into a tree, knocking his head hard on a low lying limb. He bounced forward, landing face first in the dirt. Breathing through the shocking pain, he spit blood onto the ground. Fury sped through him, fueling him beyond the pain of injury. Baring his fangs on a throaty growl, he sprang back into action. He raced around the corner of the building to find the parking lot....

Empty? What the fuck? He twisted left and right, scanning for Russell. Nothing. He kicked the trash can standing next to him, cursing his failure, when he remembered the other vampire. Twisting to the right, he bolted behind the low wall next to the back entrance of the building. Shit. The male vampire lay in a bloody heap by the door where he'd been thrown after being ripped at the neck and staked. The sounds of his last breaths gurgled from his torn throat. He was too late.

What a fucking mess. Now he would once again have to work cover up for his cousin. *This kind of shit sucks*, he thought as he rolled the dying vampire over and—

Shit. Shit. Shit. It was Brian, Abby's drummer. He'd known there was likely a connection, but hell, he didn't expect this. *Wonder what Brian did to piss off Russ so bad*. He reached around the body and picked up Brian's bloody drumsticks.

"Caleb?" At the sound of her voice, he shifted his body to hide the worst of the damage to her almost dead friend.

"Abby, what are you doing out here? I thought you were working inside."

"I came out here to look for Brian, we are waiting for him to go—" Her face paled as she walked into the light. "What the hell happened to

you? Were you in a fight? Are you okay? There is blood all over—" Her eyes fixated on the ground behind him as she realized a body lay there. She stumbled backward away from the bloody scene.

"Is that—? Dear God, is that—?" Looking panic stricken, her eyes dilated and widened. Caleb quickly sent out a mental push to calm her. Her mind resisted him as he gathered the remainder of his strength, forcing his persuasion on her.

"It's okay, Abby. I'm fine. Your friend Brian was attacked. I did my best to help him, but I was too late."

"What do you mean too late? He's— He's dead?"

Caleb pushed at her mind some more, infusing her with calm. "Everything is fine, darlin'. Just a terrible, random tragedy." He spied tears as she nodded her head in agreement.

"But I don't understand. Who would do something like this? How are you involved?" Damn, her mind was so strong, resistant to his suggestion. How the hell could Russell have wiped her memories like he had? Taking away one event, such as a feeding, was fairly doable, but suppressing every memory was a little bit different.

"You need to go back inside and stay there until I come back for you." She stood still, staring up at him as if unsure of his request. "Abby, go inside and finish your shift. Let me handle this for you and everything will be fine." Several long moments later, she turned away with a final glance down at the body behind him. As she faced the building, a subtle pop and rustling came from behind him. Damn. Brian's final breath led to his body disintegrating to a fine ash. Pushing harder at Abby's mind, he kept her walking toward the door. Caleb breathed a sigh of relief when she disappeared inside.

As he headed back to his bike, he thought of Abby and the voice that had bespelled him from the first time he'd heard her sing. But even before that, when he'd spied her brilliant violet eyes under the feathery fall of her raven-colored hair, his body had reacted and he'd known. For the first time in his long life, he wanted to claim a mate. Him, Caleb Barrett, the perennial loner. He shook his head in denial. Not possible. Besides, he had a job to do.

At least he knew Abby was safe for the night. He'd managed to injure Russell before he'd escaped, and the male would need time to rest and heal before he could go after Abby. This close to dawn he would seek out shelter right away and stay there until sunset tomorrow. His own head pounded from the fight. His injuries weren't severe, but he would still need to feed before sunrise to regain his strength. The need to feed had him thinking of Abby again and her sweet, life-giving blood.

Chapter Five

Abby wandered the room, going from table to table, cleaning up the night's mess left by the customers. Without Brian to play the drums, the band had opted not to go on, and instead the jukebox had continued to play all night. Many of the customers had complained and pleaded with her to sing, but for some reason she'd not felt up to it. Sadness weighed at her, and she wasn't sure why. Caleb hadn't shown up tonight, but she didn't think that was the problem. Sometimes he waited for her at her place. She was going to have to tell him tonight that she was leaving. She'd spoken with Danny this afternoon and let him know she was leaving town for a while.

A couple of hours later, Abby stepped out into the cool night air behind the bar. Her last shift finally behind her, she headed toward her car. Next to the low wall near the door, she froze. *A dead body.* She'd seen a bloody body here. She racked her brain, and a familiar, aching buzz pounded through her head. The same pain she got every time she tried to concentrate on missing memories. Caleb. She'd seen him here tonight. Standing over a man's body. Pieces of the night's events returned to her as she remembered seeing Caleb looking battered and weary. Caleb's huge muscular body had blocked the full sight of the man on the ground, but she'd noticed a familiar leather jacket.

Oh dear God. Brian. A sob burned in her throat. The last time she'd spoken to him, she'd been giving him a hard time about his latest sexual

conquest. The man's sexual appetite had been insatiable, one he'd tried to fill with a constant flow of beautiful women. As usual, he'd blown her off with a few words and a lot of sexual teasing thrown in her direction. It was hard to accept that she would never see him again. She stood riveted to the spot for a long moment, facing the horror, when a taste of wet salt trickled into her mouth. Her fingers reached up to her cheek, shocked to find them soaked by tears. Sadness enveloped her as her feelings for her lost friend ran rampant through her.

"Abby? Are you okay?" Barb's voice from beside her scared her as she took several steps in the opposite direction. Her heart raced in fear. "Abby? What is it?"

Abby shook her head, unable to speak. Her pulse beat in her ears as she waved off her co-worker and took off for her car.

"I'm sorry, hon, I didn't mean to scare you," Barb yelled at her across the few cars separating them.

She hurriedly dug through her bag and fished out her keys. Her head darted from side to side as she searched for the sudden sense of danger that filled her.

Wrenching the car door open, she threw in her purse and slammed the door closed behind her. She started the engine and rushed out of the parking lot, leaving Barb to probably wonder what the hell had happened.

* * * * *

Abby sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the packed luggage sitting at the door waiting for her. All night her dreams had haunted her with blood, violence and Caleb. Leaving him wouldn't be easy, but she thought it best this way. She needed to find the truth about her past, and this was the only option she had. She hadn't heard from him since she'd found him standing over Brian. Even though the crime scene had been cleaned by the time she left work last night, he'd not contacted her with any further explanation. And where the hell were the cops? Shouldn't they be out looking or at least interviewing people at the Drummer? Her palms rubbed at her temples before she pushed them through her hair.

Debating whether to leave a note for Caleb, she went about tidying her bedroom and gathering the last of her belongings she needed for the trip. Glancing at the bedside clock for at least the tenth time in the past ten minutes, it blinked 7 a.m. at her. Four hours of sleep didn't seem like enough to start a trip on, but her body and mind were too restless to wait. She grabbed up her suitcase, keys and shoes and padded toward the front door.

Spying the pad of paper and pencil on the breakfast bar, she again hesitated, considering Caleb. No. Best to break away clean, not worry about what he'll think when he finds me gone. What would I tell him anyway?

Dear Caleb, sorry I had to leave, but not knowing who I am drives me crazy, not to mention the scary ass dreams of creatures with fangs I keep having.

Oh yeah, that would convince him to wait for her. Wait for her? Where were these thoughts of attachment coming from? How was it possible that she'd fallen for him so hard and fast? Could she? No, it couldn't be. Her eyes gazed about the room at the only familiar surroundings as butterflies of nerves gripped her belly. *Stop that.* She pushed her doubts away, striding out to the front yard. She tossed her bags into the trunk and slid the top down on her Miata. The dreams were right. It was time to wake the hell up.

* * * * *

Caleb woke with a heavy sense of foreboding. He lay there, reaching out for both Abby and Russell, sensing neither. "Fuck!" Where the hell were they? Clothing himself as quickly as he could, he headed straight for the garage and his motorcycle. The sun still shone on the horizon, but he knew waiting wasn't an option. Abby was gone, and likely Russell had followed. That thought had him turning back to his private vault. The basement not only served as his bedroom during the day, it was also where he stored his hoard of weapons. He grinned to himself. Maybe he didn't really need this big a stash, but nonetheless his private collection of heavy artillery thrilled him. Some of his favorites were the

sniper rifles, grenades and handguns, one of which he slid into the holster strapped to his right leg.

Donning as much protective gear as he could, including his favorite pair of Oakley Monster Dogs to shade his sensitive eyes, he raced into the dusk outside, heading for The Drummer. With Abby carrying his mark, he would be able to track her, but if he had an idea of where she was headed, it could save him a lot of time. He thought about the night's events and regretted not going to Abby. Obviously his persuasion had not had much of a lasting effect, and her fear had won out.

Thinking about where Abby might run, he quickly processed what he'd learned about her since they'd met. It had been quite a shock to him to learn that her memory was gone and she'd been rather resistant to his persuasions. He chuckled to himself. *Figures my mate would be most resistant to me.* And if he knew nothing else at this point, he was certain she was his mate. He would find her and make her his despite Russell's plans to prevent otherwise. She was his. No other male would be wise to touch her at this point. None that wanted to live, anyway.

Caleb drove through the night, arriving in Hollyridge nestled in the mountains of Tennessee at two in the morning. Abby's essence was strong here, and he knew she would be nearby. Driving through the quiet streets, he pulled into what looked to be the only gas station in town. He removed his helmet and went inside to ask around and pick up a few extra supplies he might need. The attendant of the store stood close to the register and watched him like a hawk as he approached. Caleb imagined a six-foot-four-inch man dressed in head-to-toe black leather wasn't a usual occurrence around here. His tongue ran along the tips of his sharp fangs; he didn't know the half of it.

"Good evening," Caleb said. "I'm new in town, and I'm trying to find someone. My girlfriend arrived here today, and I'm afraid she's in some trouble. She is tall with black hair and violet eyes, her name is Abby. Have you seen anyone like that today?" The attendant shook his head, but Caleb had spotted the quick aversion of his eyes before he answered. The man lied.

He stalked around the store, picking up the items he thought he

might need to capture Russell. That was the plan anyway, unless he'd dared to touch Abby. Then he wouldn't care. Russell would be hard pressed to live through the night.

"Is there a bar here in town? Somewhere a weary traveler could enjoy a drink?"

"Sure there is." The attendant relaxed as he began to process Caleb's purchases. "About two miles up on the right you'll find the Iron Thunder Saloon. You don't have much time, though, they close up at three."

"Thanks, man." He grabbed the sack the man handed out to him before striding back outside.

On the short ride to the bar, Caleb realized he would definitely find Abby there. Should have known.

Pulling into the parking lot, he heard the unmistakable sounds of a live band playing a song he knew he could never forget. Her song. Obviously the call to sing was strong within her. Why not? Her talent was amazing.

He walked into the joint on the final notes of Abby's voice, stilling his heart for a brief moment. Her siren song swept through him, capturing his very essence as her own. Looking toward the stage, he caught her eye on the last bar. The crowd broke into thunderous applause, and Abby walked from the stage.

Without pause, he went after her, determined to stop her. He made his way through the crowd with little effort as the patrons sidestepped away from him. He caught up with her as she stepped outside the back door.

"Running away again, Abby?"

She froze mid step at the sound of his voice. "What are you doing here, Caleb?"

"Did you really think I was just going to let you leave like that? Have you learned nothing of me since we met? I'm not the kind of male who lets go of what's his."

She turned to face him. "What's yours? What exactly do you mean by that?"

He grabbed at her shoulders and pulled her roughly to him,

dragging her soft female form against his hard male flesh.

"Do you really want to get into this here? Why don't we go for a ride and find a private place to have this conversation."

A slight tremor from her body ran against his burning skin, causing the tension between them to ratchet to an all new level. Hers due to the fear he sensed, and his from the anger and pain her reaction created.

"I—I don't think that's a good idea, Caleb. I'm tired from the drive and the work tonight and need nothing more than a solid eight hours."

"What are you afraid of, darlin'?" he drawled.

"Don't, Caleb. Don't try to make me feel bad for being afraid of what I think I saw last night."

He lowered his lips a breath away from hers. "What is it you think you saw?" His warm, mint-scented breath touched her skin, sparking a totally different reaction from her.

"I don't know, Caleb, all these strange dreams and blank spots. You standing over Brian's body, and a voice constantly telling me to awaken. I don't know what to think anymore." Embarrassed by the tremor in her voice, she turned away from him, wrenching her arm from his grasp.

"Abby, do you trust me?"

She hesitated. Did she? The emotions and reactions that had flown between them every time they made love couldn't be a mistake. She fought against the warring emotions, the fight between trust and fear.

Caleb held out his hand to her. "Come with me, Abby. You can trust me. I'll show you the truth you seek."

Could it be that simple? Would her feelings toward him release her? Or was there something she missed altogether?

"You can trust me, Abby. I'll tell you everything I can. But right now we need to get out of here because it isn't safe."

"What do you mean not safe?"

"Exactly how it sounds, darlin'. What happened to Brian wasn't a random killing. There is a male after you. And he isn't far." The grave danger echoing in his voice shocked her.

She grabbed his hand. *Faith*. She had to have faith in not only him but her own instincts as well. "For some crazy reason, I believe you, Caleb."

But you better have some answers for me pretty damn fast."

"Becoming a demanding little thing, aren't you?" The edges around his sexy eyes crinkled with his smile. Looking like a cross between the devil and a savior, she wondered how she could ever deny him.

Minutes later, she found herself snuggled against his body on the back of his motorcycle heading toward the edge of town. She could get used to this, she mused. His broad shoulders blocked the wind from her as she scooted forward, pushing her body against his. The engine roared like a very large kitten beneath them, but she could have sworn she heard a growl from within him as she snuggled tight against his body. At the edge of town, he turned off the main road headed into the woods. The sign they passed pointed them to the lake. Her body involuntarily shivered. She wasn't sure being alone in the dark with her sexy cowboy was such a good idea. Every time he touched her, she would forget everything except pleasing him and how much she needed his touch.

"Are you cold? I can stop and give you my jacket."

"I'm fine." Besides, she loved the way his torso looked wrapped in the black leather. If she got cold, she would just get closer.

When Caleb stopped in a small clearing at the edge of the lake, she swung herself off the bike and away from him and removed her helmet. Sexy and dangerous seemed to be a lethal combination for her, an irresistible lure. Standing at the water's edge, she marveled at the beautiful sight of the water so still and shiny it looked like cut glass spread out before her. The bright moon offered plenty of light for them to see. She noticed from the corner of her eye Caleb searching the area; even as he walked toward her, he noticed everything around him. He even carried his tall frame in a loose, defensive manner. He really did expect trouble.

"Talk to me, Caleb. Tell me what's going on. Why am I in danger?"

He paused, his crystal blue eyes piercing through her. Under his scrutiny, she felt vulnerable yet somehow protected.

"I suspect it has something to do with your memory loss, Abby. It didn't take much research to learn that in most cases of nonphysical trauma amnesia, it's due to some form of mental trauma." His fingertips

touched her forehead, tracing down her cheek to her lips. His rough fingers stroked across her parted lips, dipping beyond the entrance to her mouth.

His movements made it difficult for her to think straight. His every touch set her aflame. This crazy need she felt for him every time she saw him overwhelmed her senses and overrode her common sense. She just wanted to live in the moment, and in this moment she wanted nothing more than to be devoured by her cowboy.

"Unless your memory returns, we may not know exactly what your pursuer wants."

"I don't know how to do that. The doctors tell me it will come back when I'm ready. Which sounds like a ridiculous thing to say. I want to remember and I want to remember now."

"Are you certain about that, Abby? What if the truth is more painful than you can imagine? Are you really prepared for that?"

"I don't care how painful the memory is; not knowing is driving me crazy."

Caleb's lips caressed her own with quick, feather light kisses, bathing her face with his warm breath. "Be sure, Abby, be sure. Once your memory returns, you will never again forget what it is you wanted to forget in the first place."

Her heartbeat quickened at the slow, sexy timbre of his voice. Even if her head could deny her feelings, her body gave her away. Her nipples tightened and ached against the flimsy lace of her bra, and her panties dampened from the hot moisture of her arousal. She clenched her vaginal muscles and thighs in a useless attempt to control her body.

His nostrils flaring as if he scented her lust, along with his intense look and features, gave her the impression of a true predator. One looking to devour her. From the clenching jaw to the hard swallow causing his adam's apple to bulge, he looked every inch the man on the edge of his own control. Her unusual thoughts were shaken loose when his lips pressed roughly against her own, his tongue plunging inside to plunder her depths.

He brought his arms around her shoulders, pulling her hard

against him. His hands slipped underneath her shirt, pulling it up and above her bra, exposing her to the cool night air.

"Caleb, we are —"

"Shh," he whispered quietly against her mouth, his tone of command unmistakable. "Trust me." His hand slid up her spine, grasping and releasing her bra, allowing her breasts to spill into the hand that had traveled to her front. A tremor of nervous energy went through her as he gently squeezed her left breast before grasping the stiff nipple between his thumb and forefinger, giving a tight squeeze along with a slight tug. Her moan flooded his mouth as her hips ground into him. Her desperate need reached a fevered pitch in an attempt for more of him.

Caleb allowed his right hand to slide down across her denim-covered ass to the edge of her short skirt. As his fingers disappeared under the hem, he heard the acceleration of her heartbeat, the flow of her blood. Tonight she would feed from him so that he could get a glimpse into her memory. He needed to know what Russell wanted from her. In order for her to feed from him, she would have to be enthralled by him, and thus far she'd managed to resist him pretty damn well.

His best shot at success was during an orgasm, the very thought of which made him nearly forget his mission and blindly fuck her to sate the unreasonable need he felt for this woman.

His fingers slipped straight past her panties to her slick and ready pussy. He slid through her swollen folds with ease, plunging two fingers into her passage. He abandoned her nipple, pushing her back against the tree behind her. With a growl, he dropped to his knees, pushing her skirt up and her legs slightly apart before he placed his mouth on her bare mound. Her hips bucked into his mouth as his tongue swirled around the labia, avoiding her sensitive clit. He wasn't ready for her to come yet. His free hand tightly cupped her ass, holding her in place.

His fingers began a steady in and out motion, dragging her fluids across every nerve ending he could find. His tongue licked and swirled over her clit and surrounding lips, bringing her close to orgasm over and over but always decreasing the pressure right before he thought she would go over.

Distracting her with a push of his mind and by adding a third finger to her quaking pussy, he sank his lengthened fangs into the vein of her inner thigh, drinking deeply of her honeyed blood. Strength and love for his mate flowed through him, energizing and overpowering him. The need to take her both in body and spirit rode him like a fire burning out of control. Forcing himself to stop before taking her too far, he licked at her wounds to stop the flow of blood.

"Dear God, Caleb, please. Please let me come." Her fingers tangled in his hair as if using him to keep her from falling. She too seemed at the point of pain, her need was so great.

She whimpered in protest when Caleb suddenly stood, lifting her off the ground, balancing her against the tree and pushing her knees up and wide, exposing her totally to him. Bare and up against a tree, bark pressing into her skin, Abby shook with the anticipation of Caleb filling her, and her pussy wept in response. With a single rough thrust, he sank his entire length into her. His fingers dug into her thighs as he drove into her thrust after thrust.

He leaned forward and covered her mouth with his own, devouring her in a fierce consuming kiss. Skin to skin, he took her over the edge. Her scream from her orgasm was muffled by his mouth and a strong flavor she didn't recognize but needed nonetheless...a taste of honey and spice that bloomed within her as her body convulsed around him.

She saw flashes then, pictures of a past she had forgotten. Not clear pictures, but fast glimpses of a handsome man with blond hair and a ruthless smile. Fragments of thoughts swept through her as Caleb came inside her, spilling his seed deep within her. Emotions of fear, satisfaction, lust and love surrounded her as she realized it was Caleb's emotions overtaking her, making her feel. She was all caught up in a jumble of sex, memories and emotion driving her to an edge she'd never seen before.

Looking into Caleb's eyes, Abby opened her emotions to him, letting him feel her own and all that entailed. Fear, longing, need and, yes, more love than she could explain. His muscles tensed against her as they rode the wave together as one.

His hips thrust one final time before he finally collapsed against her. Tears sprang into her eyes as she became overwhelmed by love for the man along with unbidden memories she couldn't quite get a handle on.

"Ahh, Caleb, very nice. Looks like you haven't lost your touch."

Caleb twisted at the male voice, to see Russell standing in the clearing by his bike. Blocking Abby's body from his cousin, he withdrew from her as quickly as he could, setting her onto the grass.

"Run, Abby. Run away from the clearing as fast as you can. I'll take care of Russ."

"What?" Her look of confusion and pain stabbed through him like a hot lance. She scrambled to cover herself before jumping up against his back. "What the hell is going on here and who is...."

He turned slightly back to see what had interrupted Abby and was surprised to see her pale, shocked face bathed in moonlight, her eyes wide, fear stark in her features. Even if he couldn't already feel her fear, there would have been no mistaking the look on her face.

"Abby!" he yelled in hopes of breaking through to her. "Go now." For a few long minutes, she continued to stare past him toward Russell before he blocked her vision with his body and hissed at her one final time. "Go!"

Giving him a strange, blank look, she turned and ran into the woods.

"You're too late, Russ." He stalked toward the other vampire, ready for the fight he knew was coming. "Her memories are now my memories, and I know what you did."

"Her memories? That's what you think this is about?" A strangled laugh came out of Russell, stunning Caleb with the hysterical sound of it. Further evidence to him that Russ had indeed gone insane. It would at least explain why one of the finest warriors he'd ever known had gone on a killing spree. The other vampire moved even closer, giving Caleb a glimpse of a dagger in his hand.

"What the hell are you doing, Russ? You planning on stabbing me with that?"

"Not you, dumb ass. Your woman. She is yours, isn't she?" The feral gleam in his cousin's eyes gave him pause. He didn't like the intent he saw there. He had to protect Abby and would at all cost. "You're planning to take her as a mate, aren't you? Feeling that uncontrollable grip of love that makes it hurt to breathe?"

"Russ, don't you get it? It doesn't matter anymore. I know everything Abby knows, so there is nothing to gain by killing her. I know you killed that innocent woman, and I witnessed you kill the drummer."

"Dammit, Caleb, are you that fucking blinded by a wet cunt? I didn't kill her, your bitch did."

Caleb stopped, totally confused. He couldn't figure out Russell's trick, where he thought he would get with these lies.

"Still don't get it? Well, how about I put it in plain English for you. I did not kill Marissa. I loved her—she was my mate. We had planned our long lifetime together, and your woman came upon the exact moment I was turning her."

What he said couldn't be. He'd seen Abby's memories, and Russell had turned on Abby like a rabid wild animal. Caleb watched Russell relax his stance, although his gloved grip on the dagger got tighter and he stabbed it around in the air seemingly unconsciously.

"This is the same one, you know." He raised the blade into direct line with Caleb's vision. "The same one your bitch stabbed me with. The steel blade I could handle, the problem was the silver in the handle that had seeped into my bloodstream. It weakened me. I couldn't fight back. I couldn't finish the feeding." A twinge of truth rang through him at his cousin's words. Could it be? Russell's earlier rage seemed to be subsiding, to be replaced with a pure sadness even Caleb couldn't deny. A few minutes more, and he would have no trouble overtaking the other male. He needed to keep him talking.

"Tell me what happened, Russ."

"I drained her, Caleb. You know the ways. Drain them to the point of death and then rebirth them with your own blood. Just as I drank the last drop from Marissa, Abby stabbed me in the back with this." He waved the dagger wildly, getting agitated again. "If she hadn't stopped me, I

wouldn't be alone right now without my mate."

A grief stricken wail filled the air around them as they both turned to see Abby standing there. "No, it can't be true." She walked forward toward them, and Caleb, using a preternatural speed, grabbed her before she could get too close.

It was that weakened moment that Russell used to make his move. Before Caleb could turn to protect himself, sharp claws scraped across the front of his neck, and the familiar, sweet scent of blood filled the air. He twisted and turned, trying to escape Russell's wild grip, but he held on. They both went down to the ground hard, Caleb slamming his head on the gravel.

Twisting his head, Caleb's fangs caught the flesh of his cousin's arm, ripping into it, scraping against bone and filling his mouth with the male's blood. An anguished male scream sounded right next to his ear. Bucking against his heavy body, he flung Russell across the clearing. Caleb ran after him as he sprang back from his landing in the soft grass.

Abby watched the two men fly at each other and crash to the ground in a jumble of limbs and leather. She turned her head, searching for something to use as a weapon, when she spotted her dagger on the ground. She hadn't even realized the vampire had dropped it. She picked up the blade Marissa had given her. The last gift she had given her. Her warning that she carry it at all times ran through her head again. *Come on, Abby, you never know what might be out there. Do this for me. Take it and promise you will carry it at all times.* She had thought Marissa paranoid that night, until she'd come upon the creature attacking her friend. Or at least that's what she thought she had seen. When he'd turned and she'd seen the blood and fangs, she'd panicked, stabbing him to the hilt of the weapon right in the chest.

She turned back to the men, prepared to save Caleb by any means necessary, but the two men were wrestling and fighting around on the ground at a speed her eyes could not track. It was impossible to tell who was who in order to offer any kind of help. With every blow, more blood flew, and she noticed their leathers looked slick with one or both of their blood. She watched mesmerized as the two snarled, baring fangs, looking

every bit like the wild beasts they were.

She shivered at the thought.

Vampires. The very word invoked a fear she'd buried and now couldn't hide from. But this was Caleb she was thinking about. The man who awoke in her a primal need and desire. The man she loved. And he loved her every bit as much as she did. She had to help him, couldn't let the other man take him away from her. *Dear God, Marissa, it's my fault you died. You were to become a vampire.* That thought gave rise to another that hadn't even occurred to her yet. The whole situation with death and vampires surrounding her seemed so bizarre.

Caleb broke free from Russell's grip around his neck, stumbling backward toward Abby. He would protect her. The warm flow of blood slid down his throat from the damage he'd already sustained. He would need blood soon, or he would be in trouble. Time to end this mess with his cousin.

"Enough of this bullshit, Russ. If what you say is true about your life mate, then the family will take that into consideration when judging you."

"You think I give a shit about that anymore? I don't care about anything anymore except making her pay for what she did to Marissa."

"Be reasonable, how would Abby have known what was going on? How could she? It was a horrible accident. One you both will have to get past."

"I'll get past it when she's dead, cousin. Not before." Catching him off guard, Russell leaped past Caleb and captured Abby around the neck. His sharp-tipped claws encircled her throat, squeezing hard and nicking her skin. Abby's fresh, dark red blood spilled through Russell's fingers, enraging Caleb. The scent of Abby on his cousin pushed him past the edge. Rushing to save her, Caleb stopped short when he saw Russell's eyes bug out and his body jerk unnaturally. His cousin's fingers loosened from her neck and fell with the rest of him to the ground, where he saw the answer. Abby's dagger was buried in his cousin's chest, blood oozing around the handle. He grabbed for Abby as she began to fall.

"I've gotcha, darlin'."

"I'm sorry, Caleb, I didn't have a choice." Her hoarse whisper broke him. She worried about him when a madman had nearly crushed her throat.

"Don't worry, Abby. You did what you had to. There was no getting to him."

"Will he die?" They both looked at his still form on the ground.

"Probably not. Depends how much silver is on that weapon. He'll probably heal in a few weeks just as he did last time." He snuggled her body closer to his own, savoring her fresh, womanly scent, reassuring him that she would be okay. "But remind me to never piss you off, darlin'."

* * * * *

Abby opened the door of her cottage to the familiar scent of raspberry candles. Her favorite candle scent. Her heart tripped in her chest as always at the knowledge that Caleb was waiting for her. Two weeks had passed since she'd gotten her memory back, and she still had moments of grief and guilt over her friend. But she had acknowledged the hard truth that she had reacted as anyone would when faced with a monster in the night. No, not a monster, a vampire. Caleb certainly wasn't a monster, and Russell could hardly be blamed too much for his grief stricken actions.

Her feelings for Caleb had only grown since then, and her body ached with a painful need for him every night. One she was about to get taken care of. Her thoughts strayed to their many nights of mind-blowing, gut-wrenching passion they had shared. Just thinking about it had her pussy moistening in preparation for her male. Her tight nipples pushed against the lace of her bra, aching for Caleb's touch.

She walked into the soft glow of her bedroom lit by hundreds of candles, which revealed Caleb kicked back in her reading chair. His lust-filled gaze met her own as she walked over to him. His need was written all over his face and in the already extended fangs peeking out over his bottom lip.

"Caleb..."

Before she could say more, he was in front of her, trailing kisses along her cheek down to her neck. As always with him, she felt the arousal build to a dizzying height, a level she couldn't comprehend. Never in her life had she given up such control during sex, but with Caleb she reveled in it, loving every minute of his domination over her. She gasped as his lips pressed against the sensitive dip of her shoulder and the now familiar desire to surrender washed over her.

"No!" She pushed him away, gulping in deep breaths in an attempt to calm her racing heart. Before they went any further, she had to tell him.

"What's wrong, darlin'?"

She smiled at him. "Nothing is wrong, Caleb, there's just something I want to say before I get lost in you."

"We have plenty of time for talking later." He pulled her back against him, grinding his hard cock against her belly.

"Seriously, Caleb. I have something I need to say."

"Then by all means, let's have it." He didn't release her, but he stood still, waiting to hear what she had to say.

"I love you, Caleb. I think I have from almost the beginning. I don't want to be without you. I heard what you said to Russell. More than anything, I want to be your mate."

"You are, Abby. Oh, darlin', I love you too." He captured her lips with his own, slipping his tongue between the seam of her lips to devour her. He swept across every available spot, sending arcs of electricity between them. Every time he touched her, she thought she might combust. After several minutes of savoring his taste and enjoying their amazing connection, she pulled out of his embrace.

"Caleb, please listen. I don't think you're hearing what I'm trying to say."

She was right. Despite the melodic tone of her voice, he could barely think beyond his need for her. His cock was so swollen it dug into the zipper of his jeans.

"I want to be like you so we can be together always."

His heart skipped a beat at her words. Did he hear her correctly? Did she just offer to become his vampire mate?

"Abby, are you sure about this? The sacrifices you will make?"

"Yes, I have thought of little else this past week. I'm certain that being with you always is more important than anything else."

His fangs ached at her words, his hunger rising up and threatening to overtake him before he could be sure this was what she really wanted. His years of control began to slip away at the thought of her sweet, honeyed blood filling his mouth again. He could think of nothing he wanted more right now than to take his mate. The mere thought of Abby suckling at his vein had him perilously close to coming right in his jeans.

With her simple words, Abby had committed herself to him in an irrevocable manner. "Abby, once done you can never change your mind. Never go back." He held his breath, watching her reaction, waiting for her change her mind. For long moments, he stared into the depths of those violet eyes that had captured him the first time he saw her.

"I won't change my mind. Coming to terms with what happened with Marissa has been both painful and eye opening. I must move on. Accept the unacceptable and focus on what really matters now—you. I trust you, Caleb, trust that you will lead me in this journey. That our love is solid and true and in it I will find the strength I wasn't sure I had."

He swept her into his arms and carried her to the bed, laying her gently before him. He prayed for the control to make this as painless as possible for her, but the beast within demanded more. Demanded its mate now.

Abby removed her clothing while he clawed at his own, ripping fabric in his rush to be free. He stared at her naked body lying there waiting for him. His body hummed and ached for her, but more than that, he struggled with the knowledge that she had made this offer, this decision all on her own. For him. Unable to wait any longer, he moved over her, spreading her legs wide. His fingers found her pussy wet and ready for him before he took his swollen cock in his own hand, guiding it to her heat. With a slow, single movement, he slid into her tight heat, forcing her clamping muscles to take all of him. Her warm palms wrapped around his buttocks, pulling him tighter against her with every thrust. When her fingers slipped through the cleft of his ass, he had to

fight his body not to come yet. His mouth sought her breast, licking at the creamy flesh before clamping down on the dark, hardened nipple. She raised up against him, a moan spilling out. His hips pumped faster, rougher, the beast within him in control now as the sound of her blood flowing through her veins beckoned him. His fangs scraped against the pale, creamy flesh at her breast before sinking deep.

White hot, searing pain shot through her at the same time her orgasm exploded. Pleasure the likes of which she had never known overtook her as Caleb drank from her. Pull after pull, his mouth and lips worked at her body while his hot, heavy cock pumped her body from her first orgasm to the next. His body stiffened over hers as his own release blasted against her womb. He pumped into her while continuing to suckle her breast. Abby opened her eyes as the room around her started to fade. Surrounded by Caleb's love and energy, her life force began to weaken.

Sensitive to every heartbeat now, she felt the slow down as she continued to slip away. Once drained, she knew Caleb would feed her his own life giving blood, and after a restful sleep she would be his forever. Finally she had found what she was looking for. The love and belonging she craved. She'd just needed to be awakened.

The End

Author Bio

From the moment she read her first erotic romance novel a couple of years ago, Eliza knew she had found her niche and realized that her dream was passing her by. So after years of thinking about writing, she finally grabbed her laptop and wrote. Eliza lives in beautiful North Carolina and spends her days dividing her time between writing erotic romance, creating book videos, and working as a Manager of Marketing and Promotions.

She likes her stories hot and spicy, whether they be contemporary, fantasy or paranormal, and will write in whatever genre her imagination has conjured that day.

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