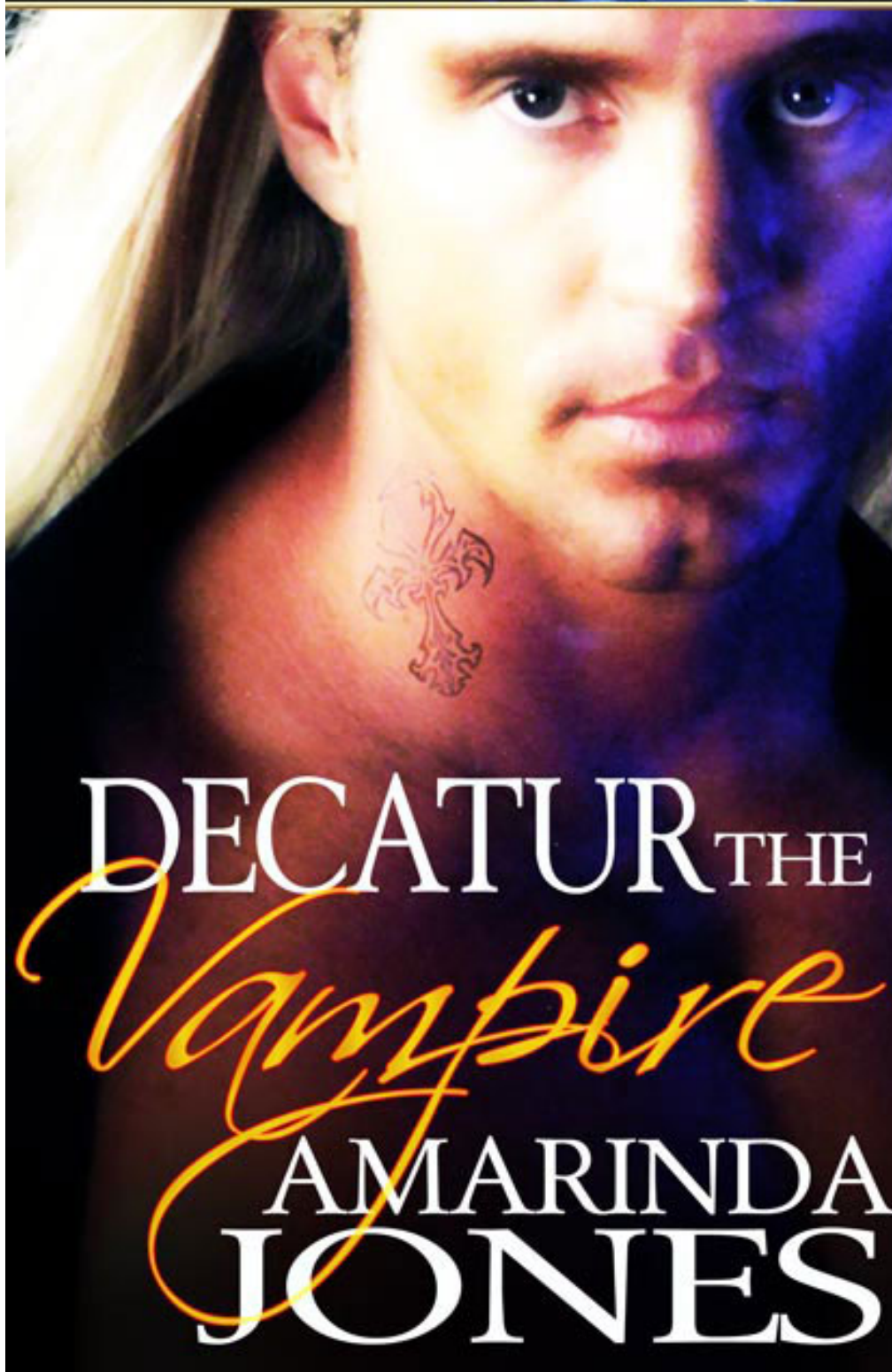


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Decatur the Vampire

Amarinda Jones

A vampire watches Marduk's every move. Decatur wants her. He needs her, and not just because a madman decrees it. In the three hundred and fifty years he has walked the planet, no woman has ever affected him like Marduk. The lust Decatur feels grips him—he's ready to take her, possess her, body and soul.

Marduk's not sure what's going on. A dream lover takes her in a way that leaves her gasping and crying out for more. And then there's the vampire. Who is he? What does he want from her and why can't she say no to the sinfully sexual pleasure he offers? Overcoming the odds against them for a love that burns like fire is her one desire.

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www.ellorascave.com

Decatur the Vampire

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DECATUR THE VAMPIRE

Amarinda Jones

Dedication

Whosoever shall not fall by the sword or by famine shall fall by pestilence, so why bother shaving?

—Woody Allen

Exactly. So have another chocolate or seven.

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Chapter One

"Jeez, let this be over soon," Marduk Howell mumbled under her breath as the man pounding his balls against her ass did not let up for one second. Her knees hurt, she was hot and sweaty and there was no way Marduk was even close to having an orgasm. *A woman just knows. This was a huge mistake.* Sex and loneliness did not mix.

"Oh man, I'm going to come."

It's good to know one of us is feeling something from this. Marduk was sure that boredom and frustration were neither sexual nor orgasmic. "Just hurry up."

"What's that, sweetie?" the man asked as his body ground hard against hers as he sought satisfaction.

Sweetie – seriously? They had met in a bar about two hours ago. Marduk had been filled with the need to touch and hold and be held in strong, male arms. Normally she was not the type for meaningless sex but sometimes cravings could not be ignored. This man – *what was his name again?* – had looked pretty good and said all the right things, at least they seemed right after two glasses of white wine. While Marduk wasn't drunk, she was lonely. *And clearly stupid.*

Marduk gritted her teeth, waiting for this incessant pummeling to be over. How was it possible to feel nothing? Oh, he was inside her all right and while it was true she hadn't had sex for a long time Marduk had a vague recollection that it felt better than this. This was just like someone continuously tapping her on the shoulder asking for attention. *You live and learn.*

Decatur's cock was hard as he watched the couple. "Oh darling, you are wasted on him." He could see her gritted teeth and the bored look in her eyes. Decatur understood sex very well. All vampires did. He understood the need to be crazy and out of control

but boredom wasn't part of it. Bored was bad and a self-defeating waste of time. "So why are you with this loser, Marduk?" Decatur wondered what she would think if she knew that not only had he been watching her for over a week but he also knew her name and was contemplating her now. "It would probably freak her out." Decatur assessed her round ass and bouncing breasts. Marduk Howell was the sort of lush, curvaceous woman he enjoyed pursuing. She was also sassy, sexy and smart—well, normally. That she had chosen this guy made Decatur wonder. "But she doesn't know *me* yet. That will change. And, darling, you will never look so jaded again." He ran his tongue over the sharp points of his fangs. Normally they stayed hidden unless he was sexually aroused or angry. It was impossible to be anything but aroused when watching Marduk.

Up until now, Decatur had only seen Marduk fully clothed and he had wondered what was underneath the layers she hid behind. It was better than he imagined. Full suckable breasts, hips a man could hold on to as he made love to her and thighs that made him want to bite and suck. "And how I want to suck you, darling." Decatur could almost taste her sweet flesh and that first incision into her skin and the vein beneath. And her blood? "To savor you would be ambrosia." He knew in his heart, once he tasted Marduk, he would never want another. The idea of that both puzzled and pleased him. It had been so long since any woman had moved him both physically and mentally. In his world, sex was abundant, but true lovers with minds that matched were rare.

Decatur barked out a laugh as he watched the man come against Marduk. She looked relieved as she blew out a breath that made her bangs lift. Decatur would never leave a woman to feel like that. Women were to be appreciated and savored and only when they were satisfied did a vampire seek his own release. But that was vampire code and not something all mortal men understood. "Don't worry, my darling. It will soon be different." Even as he said the words, Decatur wondered about them. *How have I gone from fighting the need for this woman to knowing it could only ever be her?* He clenched his fist and breathed deeply. As there were so many reasons she was right for him, the

reasons she was wrong were equal in number. But now was not the time to think about the prison he had been forced into. "I will escape it," Decatur declared under his breath as he watched Marduk scramble for her clothes, clutching them against her as she all but shoved the half-dressed man out the door.

Marduk slammed the door shut and leaned against it. "Never, ever, *ever* will I do that again." She smacked her forehead lightly. "You are an idiot. One cock does not an orgasm make."

Unseen, Decatur followed Marduk as she moved down the hall mumbling to herself. He found that cute. Not many women of his acquaintance chastised themselves over a simple mistake. To Decatur, that's all it was. She had felt the need for sex and it didn't work out as she planned. "It will be very different for you soon, darling." There were so many reasons Decatur knew he should walk out the door and never touch this woman. "But I like danger." That was his biggest problem. Danger had a habit of finding him and Decatur liked to play with it.

He followed Marduk into the bathroom. There she dropped her defense of clothes and headed for the shower cubicle. "Damn, I want in." That plump ass alone made his cock jerk in anticipation. With a wave of his hand, Decatur was also naked, slipping in behind her as she shut the clear glass door and turned on the shower. It would be so easy to make himself visible to Marduk, to take her in his arms and make love to her until she couldn't stand without his assistance. "Oh yeah, I want that." His heart beat frantically being so close to the lush body he longed to touch and taste. When he saw her reach for the long, thick, pink dildo that was on the shelf beside the shampoo, he smiled. "Oh darling, if only I could do that for you." Decatur's eyes locked on her gleaming, wet breasts as she turned toward him. "I love pink nipples." Once more his tongue touched his fangs and he smiled. "I can't let this lady go unfulfilled a moment longer."

Marduk stiffened. She had the strangest feeling that someone was at her back. She turned around but no one was there in the cool, white shower cubicle. "Yet I can feel someone—and now I'm talking to myself. Great. Just great." Marduk closed her eyes as the water gently massaged her back and ass. "To think I let that man—what's-his-name—do that to me. What the hell was I thinking?" Of course Marduk knew the answer to that. "I wasn't thinking. I was acting on impulse and that always ends messily." She turned around so her breasts took the full force of the water. "I need a man. A real man and not one who learned sex by numbers."

Marduk sighed and dropped her head back and that's when she felt it. She jumped forward in shock. "What the—" A nice, hard, long cock was prodding her ass. She whirled around but no one was there. "I'm clearly so desperate I'm imagining things. Want cock? Dream cock. If only it was that simple." It wasn't like Marduk was looking for forever. "I just want a screaming, hot orgasm that drives me to my knees begging for more." Marduk turned back and reached for her pink imitation cock and soaped it up. "Is that too much for any woman to ask for?" She looked at the soapy plastic in her hand. "I want so much more than pretend."

And that's when she felt the cock once more against her butt. There was no mistaking the feeling. Marduk shrieked and spun around on her heel. In so many ways she wanted to see a man all hot, wet and naked behind her. She wanted a cock but on her terms. But there was no one. Marduk blew out a sigh. "Get a grip, woman. It's not like sex has ever been that good anyway." Occasionally it had come close to being average but most of the time her faithful pink plastic friend had gotten her where she needed to go. "Okay, just shower, have another glass or three of wine and go to bed."

This time when her ass collided with the cock that was not all she felt. There was also the warm, soft feeling of a man's breath against her neck and large, strong hands sliding over her wet, slippery hips. Marduk was paralyzed by both fear and excitement. A more rational person would have snapped off the water and gotten out of the shower and assessed the situation. They would not have pushed their ass back for more. And

she got it. Those unseen hands descended on her pussy, accepting her submission. "Who are you?" The words came out in barely a whisper as her legs parted instinctively. The hand holding the vibrator shook as Marduk felt the heat of a male body suddenly slam tight against her. "Oh boy." This was what she wanted. Hard, male strength completely overwhelming her. Marduk wanted to be taken by man who knew what he was doing when it came to fucking a woman. She pushed back into the muscled expanse as what felt like long fingers began stroking her clit. Marduk moaned. She was so needy she was happy to give in to whatever this was. It was a dream then so be it.

"It's not a dream, darling."

Marduk gasped at the low, male voice that reverberated against her ear. "I—"

"Sshh."

Did dreams shush you? "But—"

"Don't think. Just be."

That sounded so good. It felt so good. *And why am I accepting this?* Marduk didn't believe in ghosts or the supernatural. Why now and why her? *Unless I'm dreaming. That has to be it.* "Who are you?"

"I am the only man who will ever love you." He wrapped one arm around her waist as the fingers on his other hand stroked her clit. "Just give in to what you feel."

Oh, I want to. "This can't be real." Nothing this good could be.

"Why not?"

The tongue that stroked the skin of her neck made Marduk close her eyes and sigh. *Who cares if it's real?* The talented fingers between her legs made her tremble with wet, hot need. "Because I'm going to come." The sound of his amusement made her shiver. It was so possessive and sexy.

"Is coming a bad thing?"

"I never come." Well, technically she sort of came when she did it herself but to Marduk that wasn't sex. That was desperation fueled by hormones and too much chocolate had the same effect on her.

"Ever?" He stilled his fingers and sounded surprised.

"No, and it's just typical I'm hallucinating." Marduk's butt ground against her invisible lover's cock and balls. *Whatever that wine was I was drinking, I'm buying more of that tomorrow – maybe a case of twelve.* The pink vibrator fell to the floor and rattled around madly on the tiles.

"You're not hallucinating either." Once more his fingers toyed with her clit.

"Then how come I can't see you?" Fantasy sex was one thing, reality another.

"When the time is right I will come to you."

Come to me? Once more she shivered as what felt like teeth grazed her neck. "Um – as it's my dream –" She hesitated and thought. *If this is a dream then asking for sex won't hurt and if it's not a dream then – well, I still want sex.* Marduk knew in her heart that whoever this was or wasn't, be it a real person or a phantom, she had the chance to ask for something she craved. "I need."

"What, darling?"

Oh, that voice. And what's with the teeth on my neck? It was kinky yet hot. *Oh, what the fuck. I'll just say it.* "I want cock."

"Where?" His voice was low and husky.

"Everywhere."

He chuckled. "Hungry?"

"Oh yes." Marduk did not fight the hands that pushed her against the tiles. Her stomach contracted as the cool, shiny surface made a sharp contrast to the heat that was melding itself to her back. *Now this is sex. This is what I want.* She pushed her butt back in invitation. "Dream man, please fuck me."

"I plan to but not yet." His hands moved up to cup her breasts.

Oh yes please. The fingers that gently pinched her nipples made her push back against her lover. *Wait a second. Not yet?* She was ready now. “Why not yet?” *Why am I whining?* Marduk was not a whiner by nature but then nature had never presented her a moment like this only to take it away.

“It’s not the right time for us.”

Marduk’s hands slammed against the tiled wall. “Are you kidding me? I’m naked, you’re naked as far as I can tell, and I’m willing as are you by the feel of you.”

“And I love that you are.”

“So?”

“Not yet.”

Marduk stamped her foot on the wet tiles. “This is so typical. I can’t even have an orgasm in a dream.” She was annoyed when he laughed and tried to free herself from him. “Oh yeah, really funny. Let go.”

He pulled her close back against him. “Darling, I will make love to you and you will come.”

“But not yet?” That was like holding out a chocolate bar to a hormonal woman and then snatching it back. *Bastard.*

“That’s right.” His mouth nuzzled her neck.

“As a dream lover you suck.”

He laughed, his hand sliding down between her legs. “You’re so wet.”

Marduk jumped as one long finger dipped into her vagina. While that felt good she wanted more. “You can leave now.” It’s wasn’t like anything was going to happen. “I want to wake up from this dream.”

“Upset?” He continued his slow, steady motion in and out of her body.

Her hands moved down and removed his. Fantasy was one thing. Reality another. Marduk wanted either everything or nothing. “No, why would I be? Sex is usually crappy so it’s not like shagging a dream lover would any different.”

"One day very soon you will see me. We will meet and you probably won't like me. I'll probably annoy you and yet you won't be able to stop looking at me and wondering, 'Where do I know him from?'" He rested his hands on her stomach. "And then I'll lift your hand to my lips, look into your eyes and kiss your palm and you'll know who I am and why I waited. I want you to come to me because there is no other place you would rather be. I want to be the only man for you."

Marduk gulped. Right then she knew he meant those words and that he was speaking the truth. "Um—" *What the hell do I say to that?* No smart-ass answer came to her lips and that was unusual for her.

"Yes, darling?"

Darling. That alone made her needs wobble in anticipation. "So, no sex?"

"No, not yet."

Marduk blew out a sigh. *I'm going to wake up tomorrow as cranky as hell, and it will be everyone's fault but mine.* "This has been a crap night." She tried to pull away but he held her tight against him. The hardness of his cock made her sigh in frustration.

He stroked the hair from the side of her face. "May I taste you?"

May I? That was sweet and strangely old-fashioned. "One minute you want me and the next you don't and now you want to taste me?"

"I'll always want you, darling." His lips descended on the flesh of her neck.

That felt good. Hot, soulful kisses that were sweet yet sexy. *And bloody confusing.* Before she had time to think or speak, the kissing changed to a deep, sucking sensation that made Marduk moan. She closed her eyes and her hands gripped the forearms that held her body close to his. The suction was different yet exciting. She felt a surge of energy shoot into her body. When his teeth broke the skin, Marduk cried out in surprise. This was not at all what she expected.

"What—oh my—"

A sudden heat rushed up her spine as his lips sucked and teased her skin. It felt like he was drawing a part of her into him and that in turn she was becoming stronger for it. Marduk pushed back against him, not understanding why. All she knew was this was more than just sex. This was a bond, a connection to who she was and would become.

"Darling." His mouth lifted from her neck.

"Yes." Her voice was rushed and breathless. Marduk wanted to ask so many questions and yet she feared the answers.

"You belong to me."

Yes. "Um—" *What the hell was that brand of wine?*

"I know you don't understand but you soon will."

"When?"

"I'll come for you."

Chapter Two

"He asked was I looking at his ass." Marduk Howell took the lid off her salad and grimaced. *Oh yuck. Boring.* At six o'clock that Monday morning when she made it, Marduk had the best intentions of eating it. Then it had everything to do with working off the pizza and garlic bread she had scoffed down the night before. But six hours later the salad looked dull and unappetizing and all her good intentions were shot to hell. Anyway, how realistic was it to start a diet on a Monday? Surely there was no point starting something on a day that was prone to be crap. No one liked Mondays or dealt with them well and being virtuous just sucked. With that thought in mind, Marduk slapped the lid back on the container and got up from the lunchroom table. *I need chocolate and I need it now.* Thankfully the lunchroom of the Danby Dance Shoe Company had three machines that dispensed empty calories at the push of a button. The whole "ass" incident had totally thrown her. Yes, she had been looking at his ass. In fact she had been staring at it and thinking about what had happened the night before in the shower. Marduk still couldn't get that out of her mind. *It felt so real.*

"And what did you say?" Chrissie Moleta's gaze followed her friend to the snack machine.

Marduk dug into her pants pocket for change. She always carried loose coins in case chocolate emergencies like this came up. It was better to be safe than sorry. "I said no, of course I wasn't looking at his butt." Marduk wasn't surprised to hear the snort of disbelief from the other woman. "Well, I didn't want to look like I was lusting after a man I didn't know. That would look tacky and desperate. I may be the latter but I'm certainly not the former." It was so long since Marduk had decent, real sex she was convinced sex was vastly overrated anyway. At least that's what she told herself. "Do you have a ten-cent piece?" She was just that amount shy of buying the king-size

Snickers bar. Unlike sex, chocolate was always available and she knew where she stood with it. There was no issue about being too fat or thin. Chocolate accepted you for who you were and was guaranteed to please and while it didn't give you an orgasm, it made you feel damn good.

"I haven't got any money on me," Chrissie responded, her sandwich long since forgotten. "But you *were* fixating on his ass. I saw you staring at him."

"Well, it's pretty bloody hard not to when the photocopier is almost beside my desk." Okay, so that was a lie. Her desk was no closer to the copier than anyone else's and to look at his ass, she had deliberately walked over to the nearby fax machine and pretended what she was doing was vitally important to the company. Actually, the fax she planned to send was blank and an irrelevant time waster and a reason to sneak a peek. The fact was the blond photocopier guy had caught and held her attention every time he entered the office. So far that had been three times today. Not that she was counting or anything. "I must have another ten cents." Marduk scrabbled through her pocket once more. *Yes! Five more cents. Five to go.* "I had no option but to look at his ass." What else would any red-blooded woman do when a hot guy bent over and his trousers tightened over the flexing muscles of his butt? Okay, yes, she had been still lust-crazed from her dream lover and maybe she hadn't been thinking straight but who would be after last night's incident in the shower? Marduk still wasn't sure if it was as real as she thought. If not for what appeared to be a love bite—or was it an errant mosquito bite?—on her neck she would have sworn she had dreamed it. Not that she could tell Chrissie about any of that. She would think her mad.

"Oh, what a load of crap." Chrissie looked at her in amusement. "Besides, you have to physically get up from your desk and turn a corner to get to the photocopier from where you sit, or stand on your chair to see it or—"

"The point is—" Marduk interrupted, well aware that she had made an effort to see the man rather than merely glance up and keep working like any good, dedicated employee would. Not that she was one of those. She was more the I'm-just-here-to-pay-

the-bills kind of worker. This was not a career, it was a mortgage payment. "Even if I was staring at his ass, what of it?" She was a grown woman who understood the consequences of her actions. Yes, Marduk had embarrassed the hell out of herself when he caught her staring at his backside. Her face still burned from the look he had given her. If she had to describe that look in one word she would have called it smoldering. Yeah, that was it. The man was smoking hot. And his eyes—they were the darkest eyes she had ever seen. Kind of strange considering he was blond and yet they fitted that strong face perfectly. There was something about him that made her keep staring long after the ass incident was over. He was sexy more than handsome, raw rather than just good looking. He was the sort of man you dreamed of throwing you over his shoulder and stalking off with you with the intention of making love to you until standing was not possible. There was just something about him.

But he didn't do any of that. He had simply asked in a deep, husky voice, "Were you looking at my ass?" Part of Marduk wanted to say, "Yes, I'm a bad, bad girl. Please punish me," just to see what his response was. The other, smarter part of her brain ordered her to lie and then walk back to her desk as if nothing had happened.

"It's just a male ass. We see them all the time." You could justify anything if you really wanted to.

"Sure, sure," Chrissie responded, with a grin on her face. "And there's five cents under the machine."

Marduk wasn't too proud to drop to her knees when chocolate was involved. After a little maneuvering, she managed to secure the coin. Once on her feet, she slammed the coin into the slot and pressed the button. The Snickers bar moved forward then stopped. It was stuck. "Bugger..." Marduk put her hands on either side of the machine and shook it. "Besides, men look at women's asses all the time and it means nothing. It's just momentary sexual attraction." She shook harder but the chocolate bar refused to budge. "Give me a hand here."

Chrissie got up and wandered over. "Photocopier guy is certainly hot." She shook the machine in time with Marduk.

"Oh god yes." Marduk stopped shaking and started kicking the metal to free her purchase. There something cathartic in that. After a few more well-aimed blows, the machine spat out the chocolate bar. "Ha! Toy with me?" Marduk grabbed her prize. "I think not." She ripped the wrapper off and inhaled the scent of chocolate. This was her happy place. "Anyway it was just a moment. It's not like it meant anything to either me or the photocopier guy. It's not like I know him and he's probably forgotten me anyway." Marduk bit into the chocolate and sighed. *Oh yeah, baby.*

"Well, technically you could say you know him. He's been here a lot today."

"To fix the photocopier. That what photocopier guys do."

Chrissie conceded that. "It's a piece of crap machine."

Yes it was but the Danby Dance Shoe Company was on the skids. The economic crisis had hit some Australian companies hard. Danby was one of them. The bosses thought they would be able to ride out the slump as the theory was that people tended to keep spending money on entertainment to keep their spirits up. That was a crap theory that was proved wrong in Danby's case. People simply didn't want to dance or exercise and if they did they were not buying new shoes to do it in. Because sales were bad, nothing in the Brisbane office was being replaced. Everything was about making do. Staff was cut to the bone and those that were there were doubtful how much longer they would be. The only saving grace with the photocopier was that it was under warranty so it was one of the few things that got fixed.

"So what did he say after your denial on the ass staring?"

Marduk swallowed her mouthful of chocolate. "That was the weird thing. He just said, 'The truth will out.'"

"What does that mean?"

"I have no idea. There are so many odd people around. Anyway, it's not like I care." Her past relationships with men had always been odd, erratic and bordering on

difficult. On the whole, the idea of being celibate for life was appealing. It meant not dealing with men who thought her too overweight or too opinionated or who wanted to do odd things to her that she suspected were illegal and not even possible unless she could unscrew her legs. "Men are strange." And the blond guy was bound to have some weird quirks. The ones that looked the most interesting always did.

"Some are," Chrissie agreed as she sat back down at the table. "I think he was interested in you. I saw him glance your way several times."

Okay, Marduk had felt that too. It was good to know she had not imagined it in a moment of hormonal rush. "Don't be insane. He's just so, so— And I'm not, you know... Why set my hopes high for something I can't have?" She slumped down on the opposite chair and took another big bite of chocolate. Suddenly Marduk felt depressed. At thirty-four she was all alone with no hope of a decent man. Ninety-five percent of the time this didn't bother her. However at times like this, when she saw men like the photocopier guy, Marduk felt a little blue.

"Who says you can't?"

"It would be like mating outside your species." Like attracted like no matter what propaganda there was about opposites attracting. Did anyone ever see George Clooney with a plain girl? That was a big no.

Chrissie shook her head and picked up her sandwich. "Don't be silly. He would be lucky to have you."

Marduk snorted. "Now you sound like my mother."

"Well, mothers always know," Chrissie mumbled through a mouthful of cheese and lettuce on white bread.

"Photocopier guy is hot and hard-bodied. Men like that don't go for women like me." She was short, with boring brown hair and, as her Great-Auntie Joan liked to say, chubby. However Joan considered buxom a good thing and made a point of telling Marduk how "chubby" she was every time she saw her. *Women in my day had real breasts and hips like yours. None of this flat-chested, whippet-hips nonsense. Men like an ass to hold on*

to. Auntie Joan was an expert on men. She had been married six times and enjoyed countless “liaisons” as she liked to call them on a regular basis. The fact that she was eighty-two barely slowed her down. She just became more sexually inventive. *I wonder if Auntie Joan had a dream lover too? And did he really exist anyway?* One minute she had been in the shower all hot and needy and the next she had woken up alone wondering what the hell had happened.

“Men like curves.”

“Not the ones I’ve dealt with.”

“Well, that last guy who gave you the gym membership on Valentine’s Day was a wanker. I never liked him. His eyes were too close together.”

“Yes, that’s a true indicator of wankerdome.” Marduk smiled at her friend’s loyalty. “He said I was fat.” Realistically she knew she wasn’t but spiteful words always struck home. Marduk looked at the last piece of chocolate left in the wrapper. If he had really hurt her she would not be eating chocolate. She would have been at the gym trying to fit an image. *Thank god I have good self-esteem.* Marduk put the last bite of chocolate in her mouth and savored it.

“Yeah, well, he was small balled.”

“Thankfully I never got to see his balls.” Sex was not automatically a part of every relationship. Some people you wanted to jump straight away. Others you had to think about. “Anyway I’ll probably never see photocopier guy again.” Now he was a jumper.

“Yeah, that would be a shame. I’m sure we can shove something into the machine to jam it up so he has to come back out.” Chrissie looked at her with a plan in her eyes. “That Celtic cross tattoo on his neck was lickable.”

Yeah, it was. “It’s actually an ankh.” Her friend looked at her vaguely. “It’s an Egyptian sign that’s all to do with eternal life and stuff.”

“Well, I liked his stuff a lot.”

So did Marduk but liking was not having and wanting something you could never have was unrealistic. The chocolate was finished and the salad remained. Marduk knew what she had to do. "I'm going to get change for the machine." It seemed like a three-chocolate-bar kind of day to her.

* * * * *

Decatur had barely been able to control himself when he realized Marduk had been staring at his ass. When he turned around and caught her in the act, the flush of red that rose into her cheeks was so sexy and cute that he wanted to lift Marduk over his shoulder and carry her from the room and away from all the problems they had or would face. "And there are going to be problems." He was trapped by a madman and Marduk was unwittingly caught up in the madness. *I should walk away. I should leave her alone.*

He stared down at the woman lying on the bed. "But I can't." He had told himself not to come to her that evening but it had been impossible to stay away. The bedcovers were twisted and thrown to one side and Marduk was naked. "Beautiful." There was no other word for Marduk. That she slept that way intrigued him. Not many women did and it told him a lot about the raw, sensual needs of Marduk. That she had wanted to give herself so willingly to him last night had made him mad with need to touch and taste whatever she would allow him. It had been almost impossible not to slam his body into hers. "But I want more." Just the taste of her sweet blood on his lips had almost driven him crazy with lust. It had taken everything he had not to push her back up against the wall and fuck her until she couldn't stand.

While Decatur was aware that some women found vampires irresistible, it was important that Marduk accept him as a man and a lover first. That she had been purely turned-on by who he was and had wanted him and made no pretense about it had been refreshing to him.

Because of that he didn't rush in as he normally did and take what he wanted. Decatur wanted to analyze the lady in the clear light of day. How she reacted to other

people, situations and him. There was no need for an overt sexual rush. The chemistry was simmering away. The need to understand Marduk as a whole person caught at Decatur. After hundreds of years, encountering all types of women, he'd found Marduk was different. That she had lusted for him through pure need was exciting. As much as he wanted her body he also wanted her heart.

Decatur groaned as she shifted in bed and her legs opened to reveal the curls of her pussy. He was no saint. He wanted her but it had to be mutual. Maybe it wasn't fair her not being able to see him but he knew few things in life were fair. He had promised himself he would just look and not act. "Promises are damn hard."

He sat down on the bed and rested his hand lightly on her stomach. Decatur loved the real curves and valleys of this woman. Marduk was a real woman and not a simulated replica of one.

"Who's there?" she murmured half asleep as she rolled closer to him.

"It's me, darling." When Marduk snuggled against his side, Decatur held his breath and sought for control. The need to take her in his arms and make slow, deliberate, never-forget-me love was overwhelming.

"Oh...um...okay...hmm..." Marduk curled her legs unconsciously toward him and sighed. Then suddenly she opened one eye. "Oh, holy crap. It's you!" She sat up in stunned realization and looked around her, hands feeling for the man she knew was there somewhere.

When Marduk touched him, Decatur smiled. "Surprised?" He loved the way her bare breasts jiggled as she reached over and tried to cover herself with the twisted bedsheet.

"I'm losing my mind."

"No you're not."

She scrambled back up toward the headboard, clutching what covering she could. "Yeah, I am because I can't stop thinking about an invisible man."

Decatur grabbed her ankle before she could get too far away. "Where are you going?" Neither of them could escape the other. They were inevitable.

"I don't know." Marduk looked around her in confusion. "Who are you? Why me? And why am I talking to someone who doesn't exist?"

The answer was simple to Decatur. "Because you need me." *As I need you.* No matter what else they would have to face, that was the reality of the situation. *We are meant to be.*

"I need no one, mister." She slapped at the hand on her ankle. "This is so weird."

Decatur grabbed both her legs and pulled her toward him. There was no way he could not make love to her this night. To deny himself would be like denying air to breathe. "Weird how?"

"Well, duh, I can't see you." Marduk held on to the bedding to avoid sliding forward.

"Therefore I don't exist?" *Damn. I love spunky women.* He gave one hard pull and she landed in a heap on top of him. Decatur pushed the hair from her face. "Are you fighting me because you can't see me?" He rolled them over so he was on top.

"Well, yeah."

The more she squirmed beneath him, the more excited Decatur got. Usually women fell into his arms without thought or effort. That he had chosen to use one of the few powers he had, invisibility, made this one of the most exciting conquests of his life. "So losing control with the unknown scares you?"

"Call me crazy but it does."

"What else do you feel?" *Can you feel how madly my heart beats for you and only you?*

"I feel nothing else." That was a lie of course. Marduk could feel cock. Hard, long, delicious cock. *Yum.* To admit anything else would be crazy. She could not see the man who held her but she could feel him lying between her legs. Every part of that made

Marduk feel aware of the fact she was a woman made for just this moment. This man. "I can't believe in this happening." *When did my dreams become so real?*

"It is." His hands cupped her breasts.

Oh boy. "Why me?" This was the best dream of her life or she was hallucinating. Either way worked for her. She spread her legs and let him sink down into the space between. It would take so little for the cock she could feel to slide inside and fill the hollow ache within.

"Why not you?" His mouth descended onto her breast, teasing the nipple with his tongue.

Marduk's back instantly arched up at the delicious tug of his mouth on her breast. "Stop it. I can't concentrate when you do that." Her hands slid over the firm, warm flesh of a broad male back.

"You're not meant to, darling."

This was madness. She knew what she felt but how could it be real? Seeing was believing. Was feeling just as good? Marduk pushed at what felt like his shoulders. "Why me?" she repeated. If she had been able to look into his eyes she would have known the answer. But he was asking her to trust her on nothing. It was not something she was capable of.

He held fast to her. "Because I am the only one for you as you are the only one for me."

The sincerity in his voice made Marduk want to buy whatever he was selling. "I don't even know your name." The stroking touch of his hands was making the need to know his name rapidly less important. *Besides, this is my dream. I can make it up as I go along.*

He chuckled at her words. "Is my name important?"

Well, it was if they had a relationship but then this wasn't one of those. "What is this?"

"Lust." He leaned down once more and licked her nipple.

Marduk shivered and clutched at him. "Y-yes." Lust was good.

He reached down and pulled her legs up to his shoulders. "And love."

"If this is love you wouldn't be invisible." *But then this is a dream. Isn't it?*

"You think too much."

The lips she felt on her lower stomach made her squirm in delight. "It's who I am."

"And this is who I am. I'm just as real as you." His words were punctuated with slow, burning kisses that teased the top of her pussy. "Now just relax and enjoy."

Oh, I want to. I really do. "Do you do this a lot?" Please go lower. Much lower.

"Sex? Oh yeah." And in answer to her unspoken words, his tongue flicked once then twice over her clit.

It was impossible to stop the shriek that sprang to her lips. No man had ever done that to her before. "O-oh god, don't stop." Her lover responded by fastening his mouth on her clit and sucking hard. In order not to frighten the neighbors, Marduk bit down hard on her bottom lip as she swallowed her scream. His mouth devoured her flesh as if only she could give him the sustenance he needed. "Are you invisible because you're ugly?" The words came out in a breathless rush.

His mouth left her clit after a long, slow, lingering kiss. "Would that matter if I was?"

"N-n-no." Looks were irrelevant to her. *But, damn, I want to see this man.*

"So why are you fighting this, darling?"

"It's weird—good but weird. A normal person doesn't have an imaginary lover." *Who licks her pussy like she was the best thing he ever tasted.* Marduk parted her legs as far as she could. She wanted everything she could get.

"You're normal and I'm very real."

Yeah, he felt real. "Um, Harry?"

"Yes," he replied in amusement.

"Is that your name?" It was hard trying to carry on any sort of conversation with an unknown, unseen man who had his head between her thighs.

"It will do for now."

What felt like the tip of a cock pushed at the entrance of her vagina. Normally it would have taken a lot more foreplay to even get Marduk wet. *But then I have not been dry since that moment in the shower. Maybe I'm in heat? Maybe that's why I stared at the photocopier man's butt.* "I just don't normally do this with a flesh-and-blood man I can see, let alone one who's invisible."

"I know. It's fun, isn't it?"

And then the fun really began. Marduk had experienced sex before but this was different. The cock that pushed into the wet core of her body felt right. It was not average or okay. It was right. It was also wildly sexy not to see but only to feel. As the length of him moved within her, Marduk felt his lips once more return to her breasts. This time they weren't soft or gentle. They were possessive and hungry. They sucked and nipped, leaving her nipples hard and wet and made her cry out for more. The rush of fierce heat between her legs as her lover plunged in and out was exactly what she needed. Marduk wanted to be taken hard and fast without time to think or worry. *I just want to feel.*

His mouth left her breasts and licked a trail up to her neck. He never once stopped the thrusting pace of his cock as he pumped away. "Darling, I need to taste. To bite. To suck. May I?"

If he had asked for her credit card and the keys to her car Marduk would have given them to him. Anything he wanted, she needed. "Yes." And then she felt it, like last night but different. It was the same rush of heat as the pressure of his teeth broke through her skin. But this was more intense. "O-o-hh..." Soft heat radiated through her veins as her lover's mouth fastened on her neck and sucked. It was the most sensual feeling in the world. She had a cock between her thighs and his mouth on her neck

taking full possession of her body. "Don't stop." Marduk had never felt so beautiful or loved before. *So this is what love feels like.*

His mouth left her neck. "You are mine." He thrust long and hard into her.

At that moment Marduk completely believed it and she grabbed hold of a man she could not see and put her total faith in him to make her feel something she never had before. As the orgasm hit, Marduk stiffened as an unfamiliar feeling took hold of her body, making her shake and cry out over and over. "I love you."

Chapter Three

"You are making no progress." Archimedes' voice was low and unforgiving.

"Fuck off," Decatur responded as he walked past him.

Archimedes arched his eyebrows at his tone. Vampires were always pissy when trapped. Decatur was no different. "Marduk Howell is supposed to be with you."

"I don't have to be with her though."

"But you will be." Archimedes had not come this far to fail. The attitude of the blond vampire would not be his undoing.

Decatur stopped in his tracks, his shoulders tense as he turned to meet the eyes of his nemesis. "So your plan works? I'm tired of whatever your plan is."

Baring his fangs, while impressive, did little to intimidate Archimedes. He'd been alive too long to be scared by anyone. "You owe me."

"You should have let me rot like the others. I did not ask you to save me."

No, he hadn't. None of the four had. "I had my reasons as you know." And Archimedes had no intention of being thwarted by a display of attitude now.

"I don't care about your reasons." Decatur glared at him.

There was such hatred in his eyes. That sort of passion was something that Archimedes could use. "You do. If the woman was of no consequence to you, Decatur, you would have taken her and used her like all of your other discarded victims." Vampires were so obvious. They sucked and they fucked and then moved on for fresh blood. That Decatur was hesitating indicated he was aware there was more at stake here. "One week has passed."

"So what?" Decatur's teeth were gritted in fury.

"You are too slow with the woman. I thought vampires never let any desirable woman pass them by. Is it that she doesn't interest you?"

"Go to hell." Decatur turned his back on Archimedes and continued on to where he had been heading.

"Been there, done that, and not about to go back," Archimedes called after him. "The truth will out, Decatur."

"You know what? Stick your truth." Decatur's voice echoed back down the long corridor.

Archimedes smiled. He did so enjoy playing with the four of them. They were all filled with rage to find themselves trapped in this situation. Archimedes had not saved any of them out of the goodness of his heart. He didn't have one of those. His thoughts focused on another of the captives. Sumerian. She was another he had saved against her will. She would vouch he was heartless. Sumerian had called him that many times. Not that her opinion mattered anymore. Archimedes would never allow that to happen again.

The great war of the immortal world had taken most by surprise but not Archimedes. He had long expected it. Too many factional powers all vying for control was a recipe for disaster. Hell wanted to rule, heaven wasn't about to let them and the vampires just wanted to do what they had done for centuries without the interference of others. The others—the witches, goblins, fairies and the like—could be swayed by greed to follow one group or another. Their survival was different. They knew they could never rule but their loyalty could be bought. So with so many conflicting agendas it was only a matter of time before the immortal world imploded. Archimedes had made his move before that happened and in doing so he was stronger than any of the other survivors.

Humans would never know or understand the full-scale destruction that had occurred. When the immortals fought each other neither group cared for the damage they inflicted. And, while it was true that an immortal could not die, they could be

horribly wounded and suffer those wounds for eternity. Everyone, despite genetic make-up, had weaknesses. It was just a matter of finding and exploiting them. Archimedes had done that and survived the war. Few immortals took him on. It was smoke and mirrors on his part. He was no stronger than anyone else. But those who loathed him, feared him, and none of them were game enough to band together to take him out. They could have done that so easily. But not now. It would be impossible and foolish of anyone to challenge him and they knew it. The immortal world was in tatters and Archimedes had kept his power intact.

“And now I have these four...” He was almost invincible. Archimedes smiled. Immortals hated to be indebted to anyone, let alone another of their kind. He wasn’t silly. Archimedes knew they were each plotting to thwart him. He would have been surprised if they weren’t. It was probably the first time in history that a vampire, a demon, a warlock and a fallen angel had to consider the merits of banding together. Not that they particularly liked each other. It was more they were stuck by circumstance to rely on the small group they had been thrust in.

The four immortals themselves were not that important. They were merely the conduits to greater power for Archimedes. His plan was to use them and discard them. Archimedes knew they were aware of that and that the end battle would not be easy but he was determined to win.

Archimedes’ thoughts turned to the mortals who were to become important to his plan. Normally he preferred not to deal with humans as they were so silly and weak. But deal with them he would as their offspring and who they would become was the key to his plan. It was amusing to think that the militant immortals were destined to mate with and produce greatness that Archimedes would then exploit. Of course none of them knew his plans. They were trapped to do his bidding and if they didn’t comply? Each of the four knew the cost of that. Killing an immortal could be very difficult, but was not impossible. Unlike other immortals these four were unique. They could be killed easily if one knew their weakness – and Archimedes did.

To his knowledge, no one else was aware of the medieval prophecy of the children of the ankh. It had fascinated Archimedes for centuries. Over the five hundred years he had walked the planet, he had searched for those with the ankh symbol tattooed on the left side of their neck. There was said to be only four of them, each unaware of the other or why they were branded with this symbol. But Archimedes knew. That's why he had collected them together. It was all about power and the giving of eternal life. While Archimedes was immortal and unable to die, there were those that he wanted to see live again. The prophecy was that the offspring of those branded with the ankh, though part mortal, would be able to resurrect the dead. There were many mortals who Archimedes wanted to see life breathed back into. They were those who had led, beaten, terrorized and entranced the world. He wanted the power of life and death, to pick and choose who lived in the mortal world. Archimedes couldn't do that now but through his immortal prisoners and those humans they were fated to be with, he could. Once those children were born, he could dispense with their parents.

So he saved the vampire Decatur, Amory the warlock, the belligerent demon Morphos and the feisty and flawed fallen angel, Sumerian. Each was marked with the ankh. Each was plotting to overthrow him and escape. But he would not allow that to happen as he knew their flaws. That was what gave him strength. While the authority of the tattooed ankh made them powerful, it also made them weak. Nothing, in whichever universe one came from, was ever bestowed without a price. Archimedes did not want to destroy any of the four just yet. That would destroy his plans. While each of them knew he had a goal in mind, they were also aware that Archimedes could destroy them. Like anyone who had lived for centuries and knew no other life, they were not about to give that up. So they went along with him until they could find the chink in his armor to free themselves.

"I just saw your vampire. He looks rather peeved."

Archimedes looked at his assistant Vulcan. He liked to understate things like that. It amused him. There could not be anyone who looked less "Vulcan"-like than the demon

beside him. His thin frame and weak features gave him the look of someone who was a pushover. But Vulcan was anything but. Few immortals, Archimedes included, knew what he really looked like.

"He'll get over it. Decatur knows he has no choice." Unlike Vulcan. Archimedes was still not sure why he was his assistant. That the fair-haired, bespectacled man had an agenda was undoubted. What it was, no one knew. But like the old saying, Archimedes believed in keeping his enemies close.

"They're an angst-ridden bunch," Vulcan observed, his eyes never leaving the other man's face.

Archimedes was unfazed at the intensity of his bright, blue eyes. They were meant to intimidate but he was not one to ever allow himself that emotion. Vulcan had been alive longer than most immortals. No one knew exactly how long. Some said thousands of years. Most would never know. Vulcan played his cards very close to his chest. *So why are you with me, ancient one?*

"Too bad." The emotional well-being of his four puppets was not Archimedes' problem. They were a means to an end. Besides, immortals never broke down as humans did. They just destroyed other immortals to disperse their rage.

"What about Sumerian?"

Archimedes' smile was thin lipped. He knew what Vulcan was trying to do. He would not allow any perceived weakness of his own to thwart his plan. "It is pointless loving someone you cannot have, Vulcan. I'm sure you know that only too well." That Vulcan flinched slightly was all Archimedes needed. Everyone had a weakness to exploit.

* * * * *

Decatur kicked a chair across the room. That he was stuck in this position made him madder than hell. He was trapped. He knew it and Archimedes was enjoying every moment of it. "Bastard."

"You allow him to get to you," said a deep, knowing voice.

Decatur turned to see the warlock, Amory. He had the ability to appear without a sound. It was unnerving and Decatur knew he should have been more watchful. He never normally let anyone approach him without his knowledge. But then, these were not normal circumstances. They hadn't been since the war.

It had not surprised Decatur that war had erupted in the immortal realm. But then he was a vampire and very little, if anything, shocked them. Vampires by their very nature were selfish, contained individuals who only did what they wanted when they chose to. They lusted after two things. Blood and sex. The petty factional wars did not concern them. But Decatur expected the war, the chaos and the smell of death. He was ready for it. He took no sides but his own. Then Archimedes came along.

"I will save you," the man with the glittering, golden eyes and skin had told him a month ago before war had broken out.

"I don't need saving, Archimedes." Everyone in the mortal world knew who he was. He was a skilled manipulator who used and abused anyone who was in a position to aid him in his quest for more power. The problem was, Decatur was neither a team player nor sycophant and he looked to no one for help.

"This war will kill many."

Death was not an issue Decatur ever contemplated. That happened to others. The Hollywood stake-through-the-heart killing of his kind was as funny as it was incorrect. "I am as immortal as you are."

"Yes, in theory, but I happen to know that which would kill you, vampire."

It took every nerve in the vampire's body not to flinch. "You're bluffing." Yet even as he said that Decatur knew by the tone of Archimedes' words he wasn't. How did he find out? Only two people knew his weakness. One was dead and the other had sworn a blood oath not to tell anyone. But then everyone had a price. Mortimer clearly had his.

"Yes, it was your friend Mortimer. He expected a lot of gold in payment." Archimedes nodded his head in confirmation. "Problem for him was his greed was his downfall and some goblins who wanted payback for a crime he had committed on their queen. Sucking and fucking their sovereign lady is a big no-no. They were happy to take half the gold to maim him so terribly that he can never walk or speak again. As for his cock, the goblins have that in a nice little jar in their temple." Archimedes shivered in mock terror. "Goblins are such nasty little bastards—but useful."

Yes, they were. Decatur had seen their deadly handiwork on other victims. They liked long, sharp knives that could cut through tendons and sinews leaving their victim alive but wishing they were dead.

Archimedes continued. "Do you want me to tell you your greatness weakness? It's actually quite funny when you think about it. Fancy a mean-hearted vampire being scared of such a small thing."

"Go away and bother someone else. I'm busy."

"Oh, but I can't. I need you for my plan."

It was then that Decatur felt the invisible noose around his neck. "I plan for no one but myself."

"That has now changed, Decatur, and I believe you know it."

And Decatur had. This was not about saving him from a war. It was about Archimedes using him to gain something. But what? Decatur was no better or stronger than any other vampire. *So why me?* Decatur had cursed inwardly as he watched Archimedes. He looked pleased with himself. He knew Decatur was cornered and for the first time in the three hundred and fifty years he had been alive, someone else knew his weakness. That was unacceptable. Decatur liked his life. He loved being immortal. To have that threatened by this man made him feel pathetic for the first time ever. Of course he would never betray what he felt. Letting your enemies know any more than they had to was asking for even more trouble. It galled Decatur that Archimedes had

him over a barrel. And he wasn't the only one. He soon found out about the other three. They were as screwed as he was. But that was their problem.

Unlike Amory, Decatur was not there to make friends. Decatur was out to survive and destroy Archimedes. No one used Decatur like this without penalty. He knew it would take a while but he would bring the golden-eyed man down.

Decatur surveyed the tall, auburn-haired man before him. He looked ordinary and average yet Decatur knew warlocks were anything but. They often pretended otherwise to gain the confidence of their targets. Decatur would never stand still long enough for that to happen. "Did I ask your opinion, warlock?" There was no point baring his fangs as it did little to deter another immortal as it would a human.

"No, but I don't need permission from you to speak."

They lived, such as it was, in a large warehouse on Brisbane River. It had every comfort but freedom. They could come and go as they pleased, do what their nature decreed but they were never free from the situation they had been forced into. Each knew Archimedes had something on them. None was sure what the others feared and each kept their own counsel. Trust was not a commodity that was bestowed freely.

"I'm not like you." Decatur was a vampire and proud of it. They bowed to no one. He would free himself from this and Archimedes would rue the day he ever crossed his path.

Amory shrugged his shoulders. "Aren't you? We all have the same symbol on our skin." He ran one finger down his own neck. "It's no coincidence we have all been thrown together. We all have secrets that could destroy us."

The warlock was right. Decatur had carried the ankh on his neck as long as he could remember. He had assumed it was something he had been born with or his parents had bestowed on him. It was too distinct to be a birthmark—besides, birthmarks were not navy blue or so defined. For years he had dismissed it as just a tattoo, yet Decatur always knew it was more than that. It was something he felt it in every fiber of his

being. Seeing the others with the same symbol had sent a chill through his bones. *So why us and why now?* The ankh meant life. Archimedes was only interested in his own and would use death to get what he wanted.

"Maybe I'm tired of living," Decatur told the warlock.

Amory smiled in disbelief. "Liar. You hate being manipulated as do we all."

"Yes." That was a fact. Decatur had not really contemplated the lot of his fellow captives until now.

"And the woman?"

Decatur stiffened. "How do you know there is one?" Even though his sudden rush of words confirmed it. *I cannot let Marduk be harmed.* Whatever he did now could ruin her if he didn't think before he acted.

"You are not the only one dealing with Archimedes."

"What does he want from us?" It was the first time Decatur had ever asked one of the others. He preferred to stay wrapped up in his own problems than take on those of others.

"I'm not sure but this," Amory tapped his tattoo, "links us all."

"Yes." But it did not make them brothers in arms. It just made them pawns in a game they were behind in points on. *I will catch up. I will get out of this.*

Amory slapped him on the shoulder. "Vampire, I plan to survive this any way I can. I don't like Archimedes. I hate knowing my powers are useless against him. But mark my words I will kill him."

I will beat you to it. "Good luck with that. I just want out." There was no need for any of them to know his thoughts.

"No plans of revenge? That's very unlike a vampire."

That was true. Vampires demanded vengeance for any slight. "I do what suits me and I follow no one else."

"It costs nothing to ask for help but that's your call."

"Yes it is." Decatur watched as Amory walked off. He ran his hands through his tangled blond hair. The leather tie he had used to contain the shoulder-length hair had disappeared. Decatur knew he shouldn't have acted as he had with the warlock. They were all trapped and it was making them crazy. And suspicious. Being the sort of beings they were, Decatur was sure he wasn't the only one who had thoughts about working against the others to get out. He would have been lying to admit otherwise. The tattoo bonded them by skin but not by any loyalty or kinship Decatur recognized.

The talk with Amory had taken his mind off the other pressing issue. Marduk. Archimedes was dangerous and if he knew how far ahead Decatur was with Marduk then they were both in trouble. Decatur had never planned to touch her. "But to have done anything else would have been impossible." Being with Marduk was like touching heaven. For the first time in his long existence, Decatur actually felt something other than jaded and ancient. He felt alive. The problem was that not only was he trapped by Archimedes but Marduk was as well. *If only she had not been my type.* Most women he could love and walk away from but not Marduk. "Impossible." She was sexy and luscious. Decatur sighed. He was trapped by danger and lust and for the first time in his life he had no idea how to escape the situation he was in.

That she was part of Archimedes' plan made Decatur wary. None of his four captives—for that's what they were—knew what his end goal was. And why Marduk? What was Archimedes' interest in her? What did the woman know? Was she innocent or was she aware of who Decatur was? Somehow Decatur doubted it. He had seen the hasty blush she had tried to cover when he had caught her staring at his ass. Decatur was pleased he had seen that. It was the only high point in what was a tense time in his life. Yes, he had been through worse but in those cases he had always known how to get out of the mess he was in. This time he didn't and both he and Archimedes knew it.

"Marduk," Decatur murmured her name out loud. He had made an excuse to walk by her desk and he had seen the nameplate. *Marduk Howell*. It was a unique and strong-sounding name. A lot like the woman herself and maybe that was another reason he

was hesitant to act as quickly as he normally did. This woman was different. He could see that. He had watched her carefully in between tinkering with the photocopier. From the tip of her brown wavy hair, to the buxom hourglass curves of her body, to the crazy pointed-toed shoes she wore, she was an original. Not many women chose to look as they pleased. Most women, Decatur found, regardless of century, tried to fit in with the current fashion. Marduk did not. In the last week he had seen her in all sorts of daring outfits that accentuated the lushness of her body. She appeared to be a woman who knew what she wanted and was not going to be pigeonholed into hiding her body. He wondered if she used the in-your-face approach for that reason—that attack was the best form of defense.

“But what does Archimedes want with her?” Decatur was torn between the need to stay away from her for her own protection and not embroil her in whatever chaos he himself was involved in, and wanting to get to know Marduk. That in itself was odd for Decatur. Archimedes was right. Vampires did normally suck and fuck and go on their way. Never did they stop to question their motives or what was happening. Never did they wonder about a woman and her thoughts. Women were a vice, a need, a craving. Women were not about commitment or romance. That he was analyzing the woman now was most unusual and it made him even more uneasy. And then there was the need to protect a woman he barely knew. “That is so not me.” While he would never hurt a woman, he never stuck around and worried about her welfare after their mutual need was satisfied.

Decatur rubbed his hands over his face. He had never felt so tired in his life. He had no idea what he was doing and where to go next. Yes, he would have to go back to Marduk’s office tomorrow on some pretext. Though that would not be hard considering the battered photocopier they were using and that fact that he had rigged it so the bottom tray would have a paper jam this time tomorrow.

“And I will get to see Marduk once more.” Decatur needed to work out her connection to Archimedes and why he, and not one of the other three immortals, had

been summoned to deal with Marduk. "Why me? Why her?" Yes, there was mutual attraction there. Decatur had felt her eyes on him in the office but he doubted very much that Archimedes was playing cupid. He wanted the two of them to meet for some reason. But what?

Regardless what it was, Decatur knew one thing. He had to feed soon to regain his strength. Although his origins were unknown Decatur had been all around the world in his three hundred and fifty years. It seemed odd to him that Archimedes decided to base himself in Brisbane. While it was an international tourist destination and had a parochial charm of its own, it was not somewhere he expected Archimedes to operate from. That was another question that added to those already on Decatur's mind. Why Brisbane? Did its laid-back atmosphere make it easier for their kind to hang out? People, or women in particular, certainly asked fewer questions. He had not yet found one who would deny him her body or her blood. Not that he needed other women now. *I have Marduk.*

"Feed first, think later," Decatur muttered to himself as he visualized the heart of cosmopolitan Fortitude Valley and willed himself there. In an instant he was gone.

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Vulcan smiled to himself as he saw the flash of light that was the vampire leaving the building. He was most intrigued by the four immortals Archimedes had under his thumb. All of them were bristling with such barely contained rage. He wondered which one of the four would be the one to crack first. He doubted it would be the vampire. They were always too smart to act until they knew the full story. The same with the warlock. As for the demon, one of his brethren, they were sneaky, sly beings who only acted in their own best interest. Vulcan was slightly surprised that Morphos had not yet tried to screw the other three over by making some sort of deal with Archimedes. And then there was Sumerian, the fallen angel. She had been kicked out of heaven. Few knew why. Vulcan did.

Sumerian was the wild card of the bunch. She could go either way and she was the most interesting to him. Sumerian was the reason he was there. She was the link to Archimedes. He knew Archimedes was confused by his willingness to assist him in his endeavors. Vulcan never did anything without reason. This time, the reason was very simple. Payback. The target was Archimedes. He had a lesson to learn. Not only would Vulcan screw up his operation but he would do it using the only being Archimedes cared for—Sumerian. Despite her fall from grace, Vulcan knew she would not be able to prevent herself from meddling in the lives of those around her.

“Once an angel, always an angel.” Maybe it was her perverse nature to always go against the system that attracted Vulcan. If things were different he would be with Sumerian once more. Archimedes was not the only one with a history with this lady.

* * * * *

“Decatur has gone,” Sumerian announced to the demon Morphos as he passed by her. “So has Vulcan.”

“Who cares?” Morphos looked at her as if she was mad.

Sumerian knew it pointless trying to talk to a dweller of the underworld but she had to talk to someone. She was going crazy in her forced captivity. None of the other inmates shared their thoughts. “Aren’t you curious to know what’s going on?” Sumerian was. Since being forced to come to Brisbane by Archimedes, she had been consumed by the need to find out whatever she could. But Archimedes just fobbed her questions off with a smile. Once, a long time ago, Sumerian had known Archimedes very well. She had hoped to use that relationship to find out more. But Archimedes was a vault when he wanted to keep a secret and maybe what she wanted to believe of their past was just a lie. Sumerian knew whatever Archimedes planned, he never did anything without gain for himself.

“I care not for others, only for myself.” Morphos stared at her with intense dislike.

"I know that." Demons by nature were selfish individuals who could happily step over a dying man to take the last sip of water that could have saved his life.

"So why ask?"

Sumerian shook her head. "I have no idea." *Maybe I was in heaven too long.* Maybe she had held some vague idea that there was a kinship between them because of circumstance and the ankh tattoo. Surely they were bonded together because of that. If they chose not to see it then they were blind to the possibilities of freeing themselves from Archimedes' clutches. If they worked together they could do that for surely he knew more about that tattoo than they did. It had to have a power or a meaning for Archimedes to have gathered them together as he had. They should use that bond and save themselves from whatever he planned. Sumerian was not foolish enough to think any tie she may have once had to Archimedes made her immune to whatever he had decided their fate was to be. Sumerian may have fallen from grace but she wasn't about to go from one structured, rule-bound environment to another where the deck was marked to her detriment.

"I'm going to talk to Vulcan." While doing her own thing was the main reason why heaven had dismissed her, she couldn't sit and do nothing. Unlike the other three, Sumerian did not have plans to use the populace of Brisbane to satisfy her own desires. Her needs were different. She never took.

"Vulcan? He won't tell you anything. Why bother?"

"Talking to you? I have no idea. Might be some throwback to my days in heaven when I used to care." Sumerian turned her back on him as she had with heaven. She was tired of playing games when results mattered.

* * * * *

Two months ago

"You know we cannot let you stay, Sumerian."

"No." That was only too obvious. She had not only broken the rules but smashed them. Now, as she stood before the intense white light that was Gabriel, she not only had to leave, she wanted to. This was the wrong place for her. They asked everything from her but gave nothing back. Not even heaven had the right to treat people with such disregard.

"And we cannot forgive your crime."

Sumerian smiled a tight smile. She tried to relax her clenched fists but it was difficult. She wanted none of them to see how much she was angered by this situation. Yes, she wanted to go but she would do it on her terms alone. "Is it is a crime to care? I thought that's what we were supposed to do in heaven."

Gabriel's stare was hard and unflinching. "You are correct, Sumerian. We do care but you had no right to take matters into your own hands."

"I could not let innocents suffer." Sumerian would never allow herself to feel guilty for her actions. To have done nothing would have been a sin in her eyes.

"But killing someone without the sanction of heaven is not permitted."

Sumerian almost smiled. Heaven had no qualms in killing anyone. They just needed it approved in triplicate by Gabriel and, depending what mood he was in, he may allow "his" will to be done. "Not even if the human was evil and deserved it?"

"You did not have permission."

She had heard this so many times over the past week that she was tired of it. "I had to act or risk an innocent suffering." That they could not see that through their rules maddened her.

"You are not God, Sumerian. Your arrogance to think you can change or manipulate circumstances to suit yourself is not the behavior of an angel. This is not the first time you have been warned and this time you shed blood."

Like Gabriel himself had never done this. He had been a wild card long before she had come on the scene. "For a good cause."

"That was not the decree of God so it was murder."

Why do I bother? Yet Sumerian could not help but respond. She was already lost. There was no point trying to save herself. "I see, so God can kill and it's righteous but when I do it's murder." Sumerian regretted nothing. The human had to die so others could live. If she had left it up to the will of heaven, two innocent souls would be standing in heaven wondering why God had let them suffer. At least Sumerian would have. The human world was out of control and God and his cronies like Gabriel seemed to be doing very little to help.

"Yes. God can do whatever he wants. He is in charge."

"So we're a cult now, Gabriel?"

"There is no 'we' anymore, Sumerian. There is 'us' and 'you'."

Just to drive the point home. It was typical of Gabriel. "I stand by what I did." Not that she suspected he would care. The precious rules had been bent because someone took a stand and thought for themselves.

"That you have no remorse is not the belief of a true angel."

"Maybe I never was one of those. Maybe I was a ring-in."

Gabriel shook his head. "You were meant to be here but you chose to leave by your actions."

"So the whole 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord' thing is only fine if you are in charge?"

"When we cast you down you can never come back."

"Because it's a rule, Gabriel?"

His smile was thin. "You make this harder on yourself than it has to be. You could always ask for forgiveness."

"I would rather stick a needle in my eye."

"You need to leave now, Sumerian. There is nothing left for you here."

She took once last look around the place that had once been her home. *Funny, I feel nothing.* Sumerian thought she might have. But only emptiness sat within her. "There is nothing for me here anyway. I do not belong. I don't think I ever did."

* * * * *

"Why the hell am I here with these idiots?" Morphos roared in anger. There was no one to hear him and even if there had been he couldn't care less. Their opinions meant nothing to him. "I am not like them. I will never be like them." That he had been caught like a rat annoyed him. And by Archimedes? How galling. He was a pretentious prick of a demon who Morphos would normally never have given the time of day to. "Now I am stuck with a fucking angel and two wannabe bad guys."

Morphos had a hundred plans in his head about getting out and getting revenge. Problem was he required help and he never asked anyone for that. He was a demon. They walked alone. Besides, who could he ask? The other three had their own agendas and he wanted to be beholden to no one. Morphos had thought about doing a deal with Vulcan but that would be like kissing a cobra. While Morphos was a risk taker, Vulcan was too sly even for him. The angel? A woman? No way. The vampire? Too pretty and petulant. The warlock? They were too honorable for their own good.

"So that just leaves Archimedes. How do I screw him as he is trying to screw me?"

Chapter Four

"This is Vulcan—sorry, what did you say your surname was again?" Wayne Palowski, human resources manager, looked at the man beside him.

"Smith, Vulcan Smith." His smile was friendly, his eyes watchful.

Wayne smiled back. "That's right, Vulcan Smith, he's starting here in accounts payable today, Marduk."

Marduk shook his hand. "That's an unusual name. Was your mother a *Star Trek* fan?" *And what the hell is going on here?* Why in the midst of economic doom and chaos were they employing someone new? Hadn't they just spent money on a farewell gift for Mandy who left accounts payable last week? Who was this guy? He was hardly the bland and boring type of person who was expected in accounts payable. Why him and why now? Marduk looked at Wayne. He was an amiable twit who just smiled, probably only happy in the knowledge that a new employee had filled out the tax declaration properly. It was pointless asking Wayne questions. The man only understood forms with official numbers on them. People were a foreign concept to him.

"*Star Trek*? No, she wasn't."

"Family name?" There was something about those bright, piercing blue eyes that didn't match the rest of his tall, lean form. They were too strong and intense for the bland body they were in.

"Sort of." Vulcan was vague yet polite, his interest fixed on Marduk.

"I see." She didn't. There was something not right about this picture. They were letting staff go yet employing him. He looked boring and innocuous yet his eyes told a different story. There was just something about him that made her skin tingle with suspicions and rarely did she ignore those feelings.

"I'll leave you in Marduk's capable hands."

Vulcan turned to her. "Are you capable?"

Oh yeah, there was a story here. The air around him crackled with strange electricity or was she just imagining it? "When I have to be."

"You look somewhat surprised, Marduk."

There was no point beating around the bush. Besides, that was not her nature. "I am. We're downsizing yet you were employed today to do a job another woman was terminated from due to lack of work and dollars to spend on staff."

"Do you think I'm sleeping with someone to get the job?"

"Are you?" That wouldn't be the first time that had happened even at Danby. "Or you're related to someone." Nepotism abounded in the company. Cousins, sisters, brothers. There were times that the business was bordering on inbred.

Vulcan was unperturbed by her words. "Maybe I got the job on charm and skills alone."

That he had both did not surprise Marduk. Besides, it wasn't the issue. Why employ him now? "You didn't answer the question."

"I don't kiss and tell." Vulcan was amused and delighted by Marduk. There was something about a spit-in-your-eye, straight-to-the-point woman that always attracted him. His eyes ran over her full breasts then back up to her strong-featured face. Marduk was not beautiful but she was someone who made a man keep looking and wondering about her. Vulcan much preferred that to pretty—pretty was vacuous and he saw this woman was anything but. *Shame she belongs to the vampire.* Vulcan was tempted to have a taste of her himself. But that wasn't why he was here. He needed to make sure that the vampire and Marduk got together. It would be one less immortal to deal with. Vampires could be perverse individuals who only did what they chose to do. Normally that wouldn't have been a character flaw that Vulcan would care about. However, Archimedes was not the only one who knew about the children of the ankh.

Vulcan already had the power of life and death. Few people knew or were aware of what he was responsible for in both the mortal and immortal worlds. He did what he did for reasons of his own and never advertised that fact as it was his business and no one else's why he acted as he did. Getting Marduk and Decatur together was important. While it helped Archimedes with his insane desire for world domination, it also helped Vulcan. If Archimedes thought he was getting what he wanted then it made him less inclined to look with suspicion at those around him. Vulcan's plan was to hit Archimedes when he least expected it.

Vulcan planned to destroy Archimedes. He had insinuated himself into the megalomaniac's world in order to do it. There was a bounty on Archimedes' head. And, while normally Vulcan would not have gotten involved in one of the many and varied coups within the demon world, this one had interested him. This one would give him the one thing Vulcan craved but could not do. The chance to go back in time and change the past. The angel Gabriel had offered him that power. *For only I know what you would change, Vulcan. Destroy Archimedes and I will give you that power.* Problem was, other than killing Archimedes, Vulcan needed three more things to do it. One of them was purity. It was not a characteristic he possessed. He looked at the woman before him. *But this one has it and one day she will call on me for help.* How, Vulcan did not know. He just did.

"Smarty-pants," Marduk told him point-blank, hands on her hips and eyes narrowed in doubt.

Oh yes, this one was most interesting. *Great hips. If only...* "Possibly."

"What sort of an answer is that?"

It was one designed to make her think and wonder. Vulcan enjoyed teasing women with words. "So, lovely Marduk, what are my duties?"

"Changing subjects always indicates something to hide."

"What do you hide, Marduk?" The widening of her eyes made him wonder what lay beyond the surface. *Pity the vampire would have her.*

"Nothing."

"Everyone does." Vulcan had hidden so much over the centuries he had forgotten, deliberately so, most of it. There was no point leaving wounds open.

"You don't look like an accounts payable person to me."

"Ah, now you're changing the subject." He smiled at her scowl. "How do they look?"

"Usually cranky like their underwear is too tight."

"And you are? Other than delightful of course?"

"Accounts receivable." Marduk was unfazed by his charm. "We're ruthless people who take money from others so we don't have their issues."

"I see. So you have loose underwear. Good to know." Ah, the woman was blushing. How sweet in this day and age. *Damn shame she belonged to Decatur.*

If Marduk was out of kilter, she did not show it. "Probably best to introduce you to Maxine. She's a total, anal, backstabbing bitch who'll eat you alive."

"You sound pleased at that thought." Vulcan had never met a woman he could not control and he doubted this Maxine would be any different. "I like that you speak your mind."

"Life is short."

"For some," Vulcan responded without thinking.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Vulcan knew the minute the vampire entered the room. It was instinctual but it was also the fact that the woman beside him jumped as if shocked by electricity. Excellent. This was going to be so much easier than he anticipated. He wanted to be at this ridiculous little office to meet Marduk and to make sure everything went according to plan. That she was interested in the vampire helped. Vulcan now just needed Decatur to do his part.

Marduk's eyes went from the photocopier guy to Vulcan. She noticed Vulcan was trying to look like he wasn't looking at the man. Hmm...what was that about? Men generally did not pay much attention to another unless... "You're gay." *Oh crap.* Did that mean the photocopier guy was too? Was it true that gay guys could recognize each other on sight? Chrissie had told her that, but then Chrissie had told her bikini waxes weren't painful. What did she know? "He's pretty hot."

Vulcan looked at Marduk as if he was mad. "Oh hell no, I'm not gay."

Interesting. An honest reaction from the man. "I just wondered. Your attention seemed diverted somewhat."

"Do you like him?" Vulcan's eyes were back on hers. "I was not the only one looking."

Correct. "Good looks are deceiving. He could be a homicidal maniac." She could almost hear her mother's voice now, *You never bring nice boys home to meet us. Only the crazy ones.* "But then I only meet the crazy ones," Marduk murmured to herself.

"He attracts you."

It was then that the photocopier guy turned and locked eyes on Vulcan. Marduk felt a chill run down her spine. The look was one of sheer contempt. "Do you know him?"

"I have never seen him before in my life."

Marduk had no idea what was going on but she knew a lie when she heard one. This just added to her suspicions as to why Vulcan was suddenly at Danby. "Uh-huh." Marduk turned from Vulcan. "Maxine," she called out to her colleague sitting at the far end of the room. "Fresh meat for you." *Let's see how he handles Maxine.* Grown men had been known to flee under her icy stare and waspish tongue. It would be interesting to see Mr. "Smith" deal with her.

"You're just going to pass me over like a virgin sacrifice?"

"I don't think you're a virgin, and I believe you will probably charm the starched bloomers off Maxine."

Vulcan chuckled. "You're a cynic."

"I'm a realist."

"Marduk," Chrissie called to her. She was standing next to the photocopier man. "Please come and tell this gentleman about the problems we are having with this beast."

Marduk refrained from wincing at Chrissie's obvious tactic. She glanced at Vulcan who smiled. Who was he? This was not some guy off the street. Was he from the head office checking them out to see who should be shown the door next? "Excuse me."

"But of course, Marduk."

She turned and looked at him. "Who are you?" Marduk could not help but ask.

"Interested?"

"Wary." Marduk moved on before he could say more. Instinctively she knew she could get into trouble sparring with this man. Chrissie passed her by and winked. Marduk rolled her eyes.

"So what's wrong with this 'beast' now?" the blond man asked.

The sound of his voice made her stiffen. *He sounds like my lover. Mental head slap. You have no actual lover, you have a recurring dream and a case of wishful thinking. So snap out of it.* She cleared her throat. "It's a piece of crap," Marduk responded coolly. *Maybe it's that the ass-looking incident is still fresh in my mind that makes me think about the other man...lover...ghost... Oh crap, I don't know.*

He nodded in agreement. "Yes it is."

"So your company should replace it." *But then I would never see you again so maybe not.* However the chances that he would be interested in her were slim to none so maybe it was worth pushing for the new machine. It was at least realistic.

"Marduk, is it?"

The low, husky sound of her name on his lips made her jump. It sounded so familiar and yet other than staring at his butt, they were strangers. "How do you know my name?"

"Your friend told me that among other things."

Marduk could only imagine what they could have been. *She hasn't had a man in a year so she needs a good fucking.* Little did Chrissie know.

"I'm Decatur. Decatur Smith."

"Smith? Uh-huh." Two in a row? Coincidence? *I think not.* Marduk didn't believe in that. Add to that Vulcan's interest in Decatur. "Seems a common name at the moment." Marduk knew as she turned her head Vulcan would be watching them. "Do you know him?"

"No."

"I see." She didn't. His words came out too quickly for Marduk to believe. Her thoughts went back to management spies looking to cull staff.

Decatur knew he had spoken too fast. *Damn it.* But he found it hard to concentrate with Marduk so close to him. Normally, in the office, she just flitted by trailing the sweet scent of jasmine. Standing so close to her now was mesmerizing. He wanted to touch and taste and take as he had last night. But this time Decatur wanted her to see who loved her body so passionately.

"Show me where the problem is." It was better to concentrate on a piece of junk than wondering how soon he could taste Marduk. Besides, that was not his only problem. Vulcan. What was he doing there? It took everything Decatur had not to go over and grab him by the throat. He was Archimedes' henchman and his being there boded no good for Marduk. "How long's he been here?" Decatur's hands moved down to the drawer that he had sabotaged to stick on the machine.

"The other Mr. Smith?"

Decatur smiled despite himself. "It's a small world." Thankfully he had retracted his fangs before he entered the office. Marduk would find out soon enough who he was but he needed to talk to her before that happened.

"Is it?"

The woman wasn't stupid. That she had worked out he and Vulcan knew each other indicated that. "You doubt me?" Decatur would if he was her.

"Do I have reason to?"

Oh yes. "No, I'm here to do a job."

"And watch a man you say you don't know." Marduk assessed him thoughtfully. "Are you gay?"

As if. And he wanted to show her how not gay he really was. If this was any other woman at any other time he would have acted on instinct. But Marduk wasn't. She was as much a victim as he was. The frustrating thing was he didn't know how or why. Only Archimedes did. "No, I'm not gay."

"Thank god."

Decatur grinned. He suspected Marduk had not meant to say that out loud. "Are you interested in me, Marduk?" The idea excited him. It was not the slightest bit unusual for him to draw female attention. He was a vampire. They naturally attracted women. But this one, Decatur felt was different. Maybe it was because of Archimedes screwing with them. Maybe not. He just knew Marduk was not like other women. *Or maybe I am so screwed up I have no idea anymore.*

"No, not at all."

"Really?" The "not at all" was unnecessary to add and that indicated Marduk was trying to convince herself more than him.

"You're attractive. You know that. Naturally I wondered. You know the whole bit about the best men being either married or gay."

"I'm neither." *Hmm, "best men".* "Are you looking for a 'best man'?" What made this woman tick? Decatur needed to know. Whoever she was as a person made Archimedes want her. *And what is my part in Marduk's destiny?*

"Nope," Marduk's tone was noncommittal.

"Liar," Decatur murmured under his breath. The attraction between them was not one-sided. He pulled out the bottom paper drawer he had previously triggered to fail and withdrew the twisted paper. "I need more paper to test it." *And I need to get you alone.*

"I'll get it."

"I'll help you." Decatur had already checked out the stationery storeroom. It was big enough for two and he needed to talk to Marduk in private. In some ways Archimedes was right. He needed to make a move on this for their own sakes. Decatur suspected Marduk was a straight shooter so he was going to attempt to use the truth and see how she reacted. Decatur could see the curiosity in her eyes. "I'm a gentleman. I'll help you." He followed her, his eyes on her hips and ass, mesmerized by the seductive sway.

Marduk pushed open the door of the storeroom. "Are you looking at *my* ass now?"

Decatur motioned her inside with just the forward movement of his body. He shut the door behind him. "Let's stop playing games."

"Excuse me?" Marduk arched her eyebrows and put her hands on her hips.

He had to give her credit. Marduk did not appear to scare easily. That was a good thing. She was going to need this ability to deal with whatever Archimedes had planned for them. "You and me—the feeling is entirely mutual." That was no lie. If the circumstances had been different, Decatur would have been on this woman in seconds. He had held back because of Archimedes and not knowing the true reason he wanted Marduk in whatever plans he had. There was nothing supernatural or immortal about her. Those beings, such as himself, were instantly recognizable to another of their kind. But this woman, she was different and a strange need to protect Marduk had gripped

Decatur. That was so unlike him. He had never thought about more than giving pleasure to a woman and moving on. There was inevitability between them. They were linked and it was not something Decatur could ignore. He saw the recognition in Marduk's eyes. *How will she feel when she knows who I am?*

Marduk was riveted to the spot. No man had ever approached her like this. She liked it. She wanted to be shocked and horrified and offended but those emotions were just not within her. Marduk wanted to see what Decatur would do next. "So what?"

"You want me and I want you."

This was unlike any encounter she'd ever had. Normally a man's moves were boring and predictable and the urge not to yawn usually gripped her. But not now. There was something more to this. Sure, he had a great ass and he was attractive but there was a feeling she got from him that she couldn't work out. She took her hands from her hips and reached for a ream of paper. In theory that's what they were there for. In reality it was something else. "Here's the paper."

"You feel what I feel, Marduk."

Oh yes. That hot, tingling sensation that started in her stomach and spiraled up her spine. "But I am not the sort of woman who's a quick shag in a storeroom."

And then he smiled and Marduk wished she was that sort of woman.

"No danger in your soul?" He took the paper from her hands and tossed it aside. Decatur moved in closer to her.

Marduk gulped. "I have a feeling you're way out of my league." The heat from the oncoming rush of his body made her inner thighs sweat in anticipation. She licked her lips and wondered what he would taste like. She just knew he would be addictive. Some men didn't need to have a warning label because no one would read it anyway.

"I need to kiss you." Decatur's hands were at her waist. Pulling her closer.

Marduk knew she could push away. *But I want danger.* "Why me?"

"Because the look and feel of you drives me mad with need. The scent of your perfume makes me hot. To do anything else but kiss you would be crazy." His body met hers. "Do you feel that? Do you know how good we would be together?"

Oh yes. Decatur's lips hovered teasingly over hers. His breath was so warm and intoxicating that she felt her head spin. Good? Fantastic was more the word.

"Yes, but—"

And then Decatur kissed her and whatever the "but" was dissolved on her lips as she gave in to a wave of intense desire that molded her body against his as she sought to be closer to him. The same feeling that had rocked her body last night now tore into her heart and soul. *It's him but how can that be? Is it because I want so desperately to believe?* Marduk knew she should be pulling away and maybe slapping his face and yelling at him for making her need him. But she couldn't. *I want him.* She eagerly parted her lips under his as her hands pulled at the binding holding his hair in place. She did not stop Decatur's hands as they roamed her body, touching and teasing and making her gasp in delight between kisses. This was real, raw passion and Marduk wanted whatever he could give her.

She was powerless to stop the hands that plucked open the buttons of her blouse. When his head dropped and he licked her exposed cleavage, Marduk pushed against Decatur for more. "Suck me."

"Oh yes." His hands made short work of her bra. That and the blouse fell to the floor as his lips fastened on her nipple.

Marduk clutched at the man's head, holding him close for fear of him moving away. Her whole body was on fire with need as his mouth left one nipple red and wet and moved to the other, sucking hard and without stopping. It was one of the most sensual experiences she had ever felt. But like all the best moments in life, someone screwed it up.

"Oh sorry." It was Vulcan. "I thought this was the door to the lunchroom."

"Get out," Decatur barked at him.

Marduk pulled from his arms and started searching for her clothes. *Well, crap. How does one recover after a moment like that?* That it was Vulcan who interrupted them made the whole situation more uncomfortable. She could see by the look in his eyes, that this was not a simple mistake. He had come looking for them. But why? "The lunchroom is two doors down on the left."

"My apologies for interrupting." He nodded at Decatur and left.

After the door shut behind Vulcan, Marduk assessed the blond man before her. It was all very well to get caught up in the passion of the moment but reality beat illusion every time. "Okay, what's going on? Why are you here and why the sudden interest in me?" Her own words came back to Marduk. *It would be like mating outside your species.* "And don't tell me some bullshit story about falling in love at first sight because I'm not going to believe it."

Decatur blew out a sigh. "Fair enough. I do have a reason to be with you."

Damn. For one moment Marduk hoped he was going to say, "The moment I saw you I knew there could be no other woman for me and I will do anything, anything at all, just to be with you." Of course that only happened in soap operas. "And that reason is?"

"You're not going to believe me."

"Try me."

"I am a vampire being manipulated by an evil bastard of a demon who wants me to get you to fall in love with me. Why? I have no idea. All I know is he wants us to be together." Decatur stood and waited for her response.

"Huh. A vampire." *Typical.* A handsome man was interested in her and he was crazy.

"Yes."

"And you want me to fall in love with you?"

"That's Archimedes' plan."

"And he's the demon?"

"Yes."

"Pity."

"What?"

"Well, you look so normal and after that kiss I could almost fall for you but you're insane."

"Marduk, I'm telling you the truth." Decatur's hands reached out for hers.

She evaded them. Touching him now, after the kiss and that revelation, was a really bad idea. "I'm sure you think you are truthful."

"I am serious."

"Yes, of course you are." Marduk ran a hand over her hair. A few stray hairs out of place but that was not unusual for her. She could feel her lips were swollen but if anyone asked she would just act vague. "Now, if you will excuse me, I want to get back to work." This was not a sentence she would have normally uttered as wasting time at work was something Marduk enjoyed.

"I don't think you know what's at stake here."

"I bet you're probably thwarting evil or something. That's the usual deal, isn't it?" Marduk saw the sad resignation in his eyes and for one moment she wanted to believe him but she was not the gullible type. She had worked out the whole Santa Claus deal when she was four years old.

"Not thwarting it but trying to deal with it." Decatur's hand went to her arm.

Marduk tried to shake him off but he held fast. "Please let me go."

"I can make you stay."

She had no doubt about that. He was a tall hunk of a man. She was short and chunky. He had strength and agility. She only possessed feminine survival skills. "And I can give you much pain. It's your choice."

Decatur laughed. "How could you hurt me?"

There was something so patronizing in his response. She smiled sweetly. "Like this." Marduk stamped her heel down on his foot. They were only short heels but she had weight behind them.

He yelped and instantly let go. "We need to do this together," he told her between gritted teeth as he jumped on one foot to relieve pressure.

"I need nothing from you, sunshine." Marduk wanted to make her escape before he had time to grab her again. She wasn't silly. There was no way he would let her get away again. Decatur caught her hand in his. His eyes locked with Marduk. Suddenly the force of the moment hit her. *One day very soon you will see me. We will meet and you probably won't like me. I'll probably annoy you and yet you won't be able to stop looking at me and wondering, "Where do I know him from?" I'll lift your hand to my lips, look into your eyes and kiss your palm and you'll know who I am to you and why I waited. I want you to come to me because there is no other place you would rather be. I want to be the only man for you.*

"No fucking way." The soft, simple kiss on her palm made her body shake. "It can't be you."

"I love how you moan and clutch at me when you come, darling."

Darling. No one said that one word quite like her lover did. "I—this is—um—" Marduk was lost for words. How did a dream suddenly become her reality? She pulled her hand from his. "T-this cannot be."

"But it is."

"Unbelievable," Marduk mumbled as she pushed past him out the door.

"Interesting," Vulcan murmured as he watched the woman leave the storeroom flushed with anger. "That had to sting." Vampires had enormous egos. To his knowledge, not many women turned down Decatur. Vulcan had thought after seeing their lips locked in passion that he would have to come up with a plan to break them apart. He didn't want them getting together too soon. That would not suit his plan. Eventually Vulcan knew they would. That was inevitable but by that time Vulcan

planned to have Archimedes where he wanted him. Mess up his plans, mess with the man.

“Right, back to the delightful Maxine.” She was, as Marduk indicated, a painful personality. However, like all the Maxines in the world, she was useful and Vulcan had learned a lot about Marduk Howell that he planned to use later if events did not go his way. After all, he was at this human hellhole called her work to keep an eye on her and Decatur. Vulcan knew the vampire would no longer be in the storeroom. He would disappear in the blink of an eye after the woman had rejected him. “No doubt he’ll be cursing Archimedes about now.” No one, especially a man, mortal or immortal, liked to be pushed around by another male. It smacked at their pride.

As Vulcan turned, he ran into Sumerian. He smiled. Of course. She was so predictable. The red-haired angel had never been one not to meddle. It was part of the reason she had gotten kicked out of heaven. Vulcan wondered if she knew the full reason and just not the sanitized version they had given her. Probably not. Sumerian was too passionate to look below the surface. Her deep green eyes only sought out injustice as she tried to save her precious innocents.

“Vulcan.” Sumerian was not surprised to see him. Vulcan always had a plan. She had followed Decatur as she followed Amory and Morphos wherever they went. She needed to know what was going on. However, neither of them did anything like come to a mortal’s place of work on the pretext of fixing a machine. From what she knew about vampires, they rarely helped anyone or fixed anything. That alone made Decatur’s movements suspicious. And that Vulcan was here? *Doubly suspicious.*

“Always a delight, Sumerian.”

Although he was dressed in a simple, bland business shirt and trousers, Sumerian knew the outer façade he projected was a hoax. Once, a long time ago, she thought she had seen a glimpse of the real Vulcan. It was the real reason they had gone their separate ways. Even though she was no longer an angel, Sumerian had her principles

and honesty was paramount to her. However to Vulcan it belonged on a sliding scale of what suited him at any given time.

"The spectacles are a nice touch." She saw his eyes glow in amusement behind the glasses.

"Well, you know humans, they tend to believe what they see."

"Whereas we both know nothing is ever as it seems."

"Very true, my dear," Vulcan responded, his eyes never leaving hers. "You're wondering why I'm here."

Sumerian nodded, all the while knowing the ancient demon before her was unlikely to tell her anything but a lie. "I know you never do anything without a reason." Sumerian had already seen the woman leave. That a vampire was pursuing a mortal woman was nothing new. That he struck out was. How strong was this woman? Was that why she was caught up in this mess they found themselves in?

"Maybe I'm a romantic at heart."

The look Vulcan gave her made her jump slightly as Sumerian remembered a time not so long ago when she might have believed that of Vulcan. "And maybe you're a liar." Before the fall, Sumerian had believed in so many things. Archimedes was not the only one she had been foolish over. She had always been a pushover for a demon, wanting to believe that she could turn a bad boy good. It was madness of course but that was her nature. Vulcan had carved a notch in her heart that she thought she would never get over – and she hadn't and he knew it. Sumerian stiffened her spine. There was no point dwelling on the past. "What are you playing at?" Vulcan was very good at games.

"You were always so suspicious, Sumerian."

"As are you." That was one trait they had in common.

"But you are rash," Vulcan added as if he knew what she was thinking.

Sumerian knew she would never be allowed to forget what had happened. "He had to die. I do not regret that." She almost bit her tongue as the words came out. She did not want Vulcan knowing any more than he had to.

"I'm not talking out him. I'm talking about us."

She took a quick, shallow breath to strengthen herself. This was typical of Vulcan to remind her of the past and try to lead her off track from his true intentions. "There is no us." Vulcan had made that only too obvious. The day he betrayed her was the day they ceased to be.

"Once there was, after Archimedes. Maybe I even led to your fall."

Sumerian had no one to blame but herself for the fall. Maybe, she should not have acted as rashly as she had but that was in the past as was her relationship with Vulcan. "I know you like games, Vulcan, but I'm not playing with you today." The lessons he taught were too painful.

"You used to like to."

There was no response that Sumerian could give that would not incriminate her. He has used her feelings and he would again. *Remember that. Remember him. Old feelings no longer count.* "The woman is innocent." It was best to get back on track. Whatever any of them planned, Sumerian could not let the woman suffer.

"The vampire is not."

"No." Vampires were reckless, uncaring beings who were more interested in having a good time than following rules. The breaking of those always had consequences. "I have no idea what any of you are planning to do but I will not allow her to be hurt."

"You no longer belong to heaven, my dear."

If Vulcan thought to wound her he was mistaken. "You're correct. I belong to me and I do as my conscience dictates."

"At your own cost."

"As always it is pointless talking to you, Vulcan." He was like the riddle of the sands, always moving and changing to suit the force of the wind as he sought to harness more power.

Vulcan smiled in delight. "And yet I find you charming."

Sumerian rolled her eyes. There was no point in talking to him or being there. She waved her hand and disappeared.

"What a woman," Vulcan growled in deep appreciation.

Archimedes was wild. "How could I not know?" He had tailed Sumerian to find out where she was going. She had a habit of forcing her way into his plans and disrupting them. Once he had thought it was cute. Now it was just annoying. "Sumerian and Vulcan? Together?" He still did not believe what he had just heard and seen. Archimedes had heard rumors but they had been so laughable that he had not taken them seriously. Until now. Their banter and the way they looked at each other was that of past lovers still holding on to something each did not want to completely let go of. Not only did that not suit Archimedes' plans but a small part of him burned with jealousy at the thought of Vulcan with Sumerian. While it was true he had thrown her over long ago, Archimedes was the possessive type and always had trouble letting go of those things that had once belonged to him.

That he felt jealousy somewhat surprised Archimedes. He had cut Sumerian adrift. She did not have to explain herself to him. Besides, Archimedes knew she could not resist getting involved in things that had nothing to do with her. It was her nature. It was her downfall. However she had the ankh and that made her important to his plan and he would not allow an ancient demon to turn her head.

As for Vulcan, no one knew at any time what was going on in his head. He was in a league of his own. The perplexing question was why was Vulcan involved in playing dress-up office worker? It was not something his assistant had discussed with Archimedes. "Assistant, my ass."

The only good thing to come out of this was seeing the woman called Marduk looking flustered and lipstick-smeared. Regrettably she was not at the vampire's side but he was confident she soon would be. There was nothing a vampire hated worse than having a woman turn him down or having someone know his weakness. Both woman and vampire would come together. "It's the way it's meant to be."

* * * * *

Chrissie rushed to Marduk's side. "What happened? You were in there for ages."

"Nothing." *Something. Everything. Crap, I don't know.* One minute she was kissing him and the next he was telling her a fairytale. *But it is anything but.* Marduk closed her eyes as she once more remembered the taste of his mouth on hers.

"You look angry and your lipstick is smeared." Chrissie looked pleased. "You kissed the hot guy, didn't you?"

Oh yeah. Marduk could still feel the firm, seductive pressure of his lips on hers. "He's psychotic."

"Bummer."

"Yes, as he tells it, a demon commands him and he has been sent to be with me." *He is also my dream lover. Lordy, if I said that Chrissie would think I was out of my mind. And who the hell is this Vulcan dude? If I had more sense I should have asked the man, er, my dream lover...I mean the vampire, that.* That the other Smith boy had been watching was not a fluke. She felt sure of that. So what was going on? *And why me?*

Chrissie shook her head. "Oh, I just knew someone that good looking had to be loopy." She nudged her friend's arm. "What was he like to kiss?"

"Pretty damn good. It was the best kiss I have had since— Well, since maybe forever." *Or last night.*

"What a shame."

Marduk blew out a sigh. "Yeah well, you get that."

"You know what everyone will think you were doing in there."

"That he was fucking me up against the wall?" Marduk didn't care what her colleagues thought. Some other bright, shiny object would take their attention away soon enough.

"No, that you're probably the one nicking stationery supplies. You know we've had a rash of paper thefts."

Marduk waved her hands in dismissal. "As if I would take paper. I'm strictly a pen and sticky notes thief."

"I know that but people talk."

Yeah, they did. If the shoe was on the other foot Marduk would have been the one wondering why a coworker and a repair man had to both go for paper. "Let them wonder."

Chrissie stopped near the photocopier. "Do you think he'll fix this before he leaves?" She looked around for him. "Did he come out with you?"

"I left him in there. He should have come out by now." They would have seen him but they hadn't. Marduk doubled back to the storeroom. It was empty. That was odd. There was no way he could have passed them unnoticed. "Oh, I know, his demon master must have beamed him out."

"Yeah, I hate it when that happens to me."

"What a weirdo." It was better to think that way than to relive his kiss in her mind.

"He was hot though."

"Oh yeah, but typical I get a nutcase."

Chapter Five

Suddenly, at nine o'clock that night, Marduk knew she wasn't alone in her home. She shared it with no one, be it human or pet. There was no sound yet she was aware that she had an intruder inside her house. How did she know? *I just do*. It was more a feeling. A sense that everything was not right within. Marduk knew she had locked all the doors. It would have been unlike her not to have. While she wasn't over the top with safety, she liked to be comfortable in her own home. At that moment, she wasn't. Her thoughts went straight the vampire. Decatur. Was it him? She felt the rush of wet heat between her legs. "And why am I so excited? He's not normal. None of this is normal."

Marduk dropped the book she had been reading and slid out of bed, picking up the baseball bat that leaned against her nightstand. She had never thought she would have needed to use it. But then anyone coming unannounced into her home would get what they deserved. The theory was to kneecap them while she screamed at the top of her lungs. That was if she got the chance. There was no time to change from her star-covered sleep shorts and white singlet. But then, Marduk doubted anyone coming into her home would be worried what she looked like.

She walked to the bedroom door and twisted the handle. She had attended one self-defense lesson. She knew where to hit if she had to—eyes, throat and groin—but it also helped to have a big stick just in case those options failed her.

"Okay, whoever you are get ready for an ass kicking," she muttered low as she tried to steady her heartbeat and give herself confidence.

"Sounds impressive," replied a distinctively droll male voice.

Marduk swung around in fright. "What the—" She stopped dead in her tracks when she saw him. "You! How?" Decatur was leaning casually up against a wall in her

bedroom. She brandished the baseball bat in front of her. "Why?" He made her bedroom look small. "How?"

"You've said 'how' twice but I guess 'where' was already established as we're in your bedroom." Decatur looked around with interest. "It's cute but messy and awfully purple." His dark eyes looked on hers. "I think that's the color of repressed passion."

Marduk felt a wild flash of heat rush through her body. His voice made her tremble. "What?" She was completely out of kilter. She wasn't sure whether to be angry he was in her home unannounced or relieved that he was at least someone she knew – sort of – who believed demons commanded him. *Right. Not normal.* Marduk swung the bat before her. "What the hell are you doing here in my bedroom?"

"Well, I know what I'd like to do to you in –"

"Get out!" Marduk swung the bat once more in defense. It was a needless move as he was hardly rushing to attack her.

"No." Decatur pushed off from the wall. "Do you know how to use that other than with a ball?" He started walking toward her.

"Yes." *No.* But she was counting on adrenaline to help her when required. Besides, Marduk had never played any sports so it was doubtful she could even hit straight. He was so close she could touch him. Now was the time to strike out but for the life of her she couldn't hit someone who was so calm and chatting to her.

"Really?"

Okay, so looking menacing was out of the question. "The thing is, it will hurt when I clobber you." Marduk stepped back. He was too close and this was all too confusing.

"If you can catch me." In the blink of an eye, Decatur disappeared.

"Holy crap!" One minute he was in front of her and the next he was behind Marduk, tapping her on the shoulder.

"Bloody hell!" She yelped and jumped forward in fright, dropping the bat, as she ran to the opposite side of the room. There was nowhere to go but out the window.

Marduk's heart pounded. She was trapped. *And possibly hallucinating. How had he got by her so quickly? Oh, wait – head slap. He's a vampire. They probably do that as a party trick.*

Decatur bent down and picked the bat up. "As I expected."

"You expected what?" Marduk herself had expected nothing more than reading a couple of chapters of her book before going to bed. This was not entertainment she had planned on.

"You have no idea how to defend yourself." Decatur twirled the bat like it was a baton. "You should have kneed me in the groin when I was close to you."

"Okay, well, stand still and I'll take another crack at it." Decatur just smiled at her. Marduk had the crazy urge to smile back. *This is all so surreal.* A week ago she didn't know him. Two days ago he came to her as a dream. Today, in the flesh, he kissed her and told her he was a vampire. *Then he broke into my house. I'm thinking he's going to be a lot of work.* "Who the hell are you?"

"You know who I am. I'm the man of your dreams."

His smile made her blush. Marduk accepted that this was the man who had taken her body and touched her heart but she wasn't about to give in so easily again. As much as she wanted to believe he craved her body, Marduk knew there was more at stake.

Decatur couldn't help smiling. Marduk was so damn cute and sexy standing there before him. He wondered if she was aware he could see the distinct outline of her nipples through the thin white cotton of her singlet. His cock tensed in anticipation as he thought about those plump thighs spread and wrapped around his waist once more. He wanted Marduk again. He wanted her to see the man who made love to her. It was time to lay his cards on the table and make her believe he was not crazy. "So you know I'm a vampire." Decatur allowed his fangs to be exposed.

"Showing off is not attractive."

He chuckled. That was not the response he expected. Decatur wanted to shock and awe Marduk, not make her look at him like he was an annoyance. "Not impressed with that?"

"Nope." She crossed her arms over her chest.

In the blink of an eye Decatur propelled himself forward until he was almost touching her. He bared his teeth once more. Marduk stepped back in a rush. Decatur filled the space she left. "Am I scaring you now?"

"Maybe." She took two more paces back and got tangled up in the curtains.

"Is it the teeth?" Some women loved them while other loathed them.

Marduk snorted and stepped forward pushing her hands against his chest. "Hello? You broke into my home—several times. Your teeth are the least of my concerns."

"Really?" Now that wasn't an answer he had expected to hear.

"Well, yeah." She pushed him again.

Decatur allowed her to gain ground on him. Besides, having her hands on his body made him hot. "Are you going call the cops?" Not that they could do much. He could be gone within a second.

Marduk looked once more at his fangs. "Um, yes. No. I'm not sure—do you think I should?"

Asking the bad guy for his opinion was cute. "Nah, it won't do much good."

"Because you'll have left before they would have come."

"No, because if you were really worried about me you wouldn't be standing and chatting to me. You'd be running away from me screaming."

"I never run," Marduk declared, giving him another shove.

"Fearless?" He liked that her hands remained on his chest.

"No, just really unfit."

Decatur was laughing more with Marduk than he had in a long time. "We need to talk." There was so much he needed to explain about what was happening to him. He

wanted Marduk to understand and not fear him. And Decatur wanted to try to work out how she fitted in with Archimedes' plans. If she was innocent and unaware of the evil of Archimedes, Marduk needed to be warned. More importantly there was so much he wanted to know about her. *And I want to be naked with her once more.*

"Do you often break in to a woman's home for a chat?"

"When it's important." Marduk looked down at her hands as if it only occurred to her that they were still on his chest.

"Be my guest and leave them there." His eyes moved down to her breasts.

Marduk removed her hands and folded her arms over her breasts. "You didn't think of knocking?"

"Would you have answered?" Not that he would have. Decatur liked the element of surprise.

"It would have given me a chance to change."

"You look beautiful—clothed or naked." As much as he hated Archimedes he was glad that the bastard had brought them together.

"You think?" Marduk was surprised.

"Oh yeah." Decatur often thought human men were stupid. They only seemed to praise the thin and vacuous bodies that were a dime a dozen. True beauties like Marduk were often overlooked or not cherished as they should be. "You're pretty fearless."

Marduk shook her head. "No, I think it's more that I'm too scared to think straight." She stopped and assessed him as if trying to decide what to do or say. "About what happened in the storeroom—and the other night—"

"The kissing? The touching? My cock in—"

"Yes, well, whatever." Marduk's words came out in a rush.

"That was unforgettable." He smiled when she blushed. He hadn't met a woman in centuries who still had the ability to do that.

"No, not that," Marduk responded quickly.

"You say it as if it wasn't important. Do you get made love to a lot by vampires?"

"This is not about kisses or stuff."

"So it's about fantastic sex?"

"You have a one-track mind."

Decatur arched his eyebrow. "It was fantastic though. You have to agree with that."

She ignored the question. "About this demon who's manipulating you."

"You remembered." Decatur was pleased.

"Well, it's not something you get told every day." Marduk assessed him. "Is it about Vulcan, the other 'Smith' boy? Is he the demon?"

"One of them." Marduk was smart. She had worked out who Vulcan was without being told. Decatur had to admire her. She was taking this in stride as few people would. "Does none of this strike you as odd?" How was that possible? Or were there so many television shows about supernatural beings—albeit completely wrong—that had inured people to the odd and the quirky? "You're not the slightest bit shocked?"

"Maybe eighty-five percent of me is but I'm trying not to show it."

Lord, she was sweet. "I have a lot to tell you." Decatur walked over to the bed and picked up her robe. "You look lovely but I'm sure you would be more comfortable in this." There would be plenty of time later to touch and taste his beloved.

Marduk didn't know what to think. She went from fear to shock to thinking what a nice man to hand her a robe and then to *why doesn't he want to see me half dressed?* She knew in a couple of hours from now she would either wake up and this would all be a dream or she would wonder at her sanity. But somewhere inside her she'd known from the moment she met Decatur he was different. Not a vampire of course but different. *Maybe I always knew who he was. Maybe I dreamed him into my life and made him a reality.*

"I'm not a dream, darling."

Darling. No he wasn't. Marduk clutched the robe to her. "Wanna explain to me what the hell is going on?" Marduk looked at the vampire leaning against the wall. There was no question that she wanted to hear more about him. This man had been thrust into her life and his story demanded attention.

She sat on the bed and listened as Decatur told her about the immortal world, the wars and Archimedes. It was as shocking as it was mesmerizing. That such a world existed Marduk didn't doubt. She was not so fixed in her thinking that she refused to believe a world other than her own existed. When Decatur was finished speaking, they were both silent for a moment. What Marduk said next was important. She wasn't sure why though. She just knew in her heart that her world had taken a dramatic turn and she had to move with it. That Decatur was a vampire initially was a surprise. Marduk would have lied if she said otherwise. Yet sitting and listening to him describe his life was like any other person. He had his highs and lows and now he was trapped and he hated it. Who couldn't identify with that? The one thing that stuck in her mind was the fact the he had led such a lonely life. The price for immortality had to be that everyone you knew died but you went on, a little harder of heart every year. Where did it stop?

"What are you thinking?" Decatur's voice was low and wary.

It occurred to Marduk that he was someone who had probably never fitted in anywhere in his long life and confiding in her had taken a lot from him. "I think it's all kind of sad."

Decatur looked surprised. "How so?"

"You've always been alone." Marduk had friends and a strange dysfunctional family that at times drove her insane but she had always had someone to turn to. Who did Decatur turn to? Or did immortals not seek the same things in life that mortals did? The look in his dark, soulful eyes answered the question. He wanted more but he was afraid to ask.

"I hadn't thought of it like that." The smile Decatur gave her was lopsided and self-conscious. "Anyway I'm a scary vampire. You're not supposed to feel sorry for me."

"You're not so scary." How could he be after what he had told her?

"No?"

"Nah, women at a ladies' shoe sale are more terrifying than you." Having your hands on the last pair of size nines in that instance could get you trampled.

Decatur shook his head. "You're very strange, Marduk."

"You're not the first person to tell me that." *Here I am sitting and chatting with a vampire in my bedroom. What next?*

"Why did you —"

"Come to you as I did? Why do you think?"

Marduk looked in his eyes and wanted to believe the love she saw there. But was that real love or was she just caught up in the drama of the moment? *Is it that I want him to love me as I love him?* She stiffened as she said the words in her mind. *Holy crap, I love him. When did that happen? And how rational is that?*

"What?" Decatur looked intrigued.

"Can you read minds?"

"No, only faces."

Lucky break for me. Marduk knew it was time to change the subject before she said something stupid. "So, ah, the vampire thing..." Was it tacky to ask specifics?

"Yeah, what do you would to know?"

Everything and anything about you. Marduk remembered the hot, sucking feeling of his mouth against her neck. She just thought it was hot and kinky. "Do you drink blood or is that just Hollywood hype?"

"Yes, I do, and to answer the next question I see in your eyes, I do it when I have sex. But you know that. You felt it with me."

"Do you have sex a lot?" Marduk did not want to be one of many.

"Not anymore. Not since I met you."

Good answer. "So, do I turn into a vampire now?" She eyed him with suspicion and intrigue. *I do it when I have sex. I'd like to see that.*

"No. Vampires are born and not made." He came to sit on the bed beside her. "And I know you're thinking, 'How often has he had sex before me?'"

Yes. "That's none of my business." *Am I that obvious?* Although they were not touching, Marduk could feel the heat from his body seeping into hers.

"Isn't it?"

The look he gave her rattled her to the core. It was hot and heavy and it told one thing. Decatur wanted her. "Um, so, ah, the blood thing. Do you do it because blood sustains you?" That's what happened in the movies.

"Yes, I need blood to survive."

"Huh," Marduk murmured once more. *The things you learn.*

"Ask anything you want, darling. I will tell you whatever you want to know." His tone was one of teasing challenge.

Marduk licked her lips. The thing she really wanted to know was did he want to have sex with her again. How did he feel about her? And was he only with her because someone called Archimedes had forced them together? *And will you leave when all this madness is over?* But she asked none of those questions. "So what's your weakness?" That was a safer topic and more to the point. After all Decatur was in her life because of this Archimedes person. She had a stake in what happened. "What's he got on you?" Marduk could see the reluctance in his eyes. "Come on you can tell me. Who am I going to tell? Who'd believe I sat and chatted to a vampire in my pjs?"

Decatur countered back. "What's your weakness?"

"I can't stand heights, I hate baked beans and I love anything full of empty calories but it makes me pile on the pounds."

"Oh yeah?" His eyes traveled over the curves that the robe could not hide. "I've seen you naked. You're luscious."

Marduk crossed her arms over her chest once more and blushed. Decatur laughed at her self-conscious actions. "You have a nice laugh."

"I don't use it often."

Marduk could see there was not a lot to make merry of in his life. "So..."

Decatur held his hand up to stop her. "Sweetheart, I'm not going to tell you what my weakness is. I can't."

Bummer. "You don't trust me?" But then, why should he? They barely knew each other.

"It's not that," Decatur replied as he moved closer to her on the bed. "I have no idea what Archimedes plans to do with you."

"Me?" Marduk was boring in the extreme. She couldn't even imagine a demon glancing at her, let alone plotting something with her in mind.

"Why do you think I was at Danby?"

Okay, there was that and Marduk wasn't big on coincidences. "I thought at one stage you were there to cull staff. And Vulcan?"

Decatur snorted in derision. "He's a pain in the ass demon with his own agenda. And no, I have no idea what it is but it has to be something big. Vulcan rarely makes an appearance in anyone's life without meaning to."

"I found him strangely charming." This, to Marduk, wasn't necessarily a good thing. Charm always made her suspicious. Decatur was different. He had a reckless sex appeal that was awfully interesting.

"I'll bet. He's quite the ladies' man."

If she didn't know better, Marduk would have sworn she heard a note of jealousy in Decatur's voice. Not that he had reason to be. It was more than likely just the usual male pissing contest over who was more of a man, er, immortal "So what about the other three? Do you know their weaknesses?"

"No, immortal beings are rarely friends."

"Maybe you should be. Have you thought of joining forces to thwart this Archimedes dude?"

Decatur rolled his eyes in exasperation. "Now you sound like Sumerian, the ex-angel. She still can't stop being a do-gooder."

Marduk had been called many things in her life but "do-gooder" wasn't one of them. "I'm being practical. You tell me you all have a weakness. You all have the ankh. Has it occurred to you that the four of you combined would be a powerful force against Archimedes?"

"Yes."

"And? Are you just being stubborn?" How often did someone get to chastise a vampire?

"I'm not a team player."

Marduk snorted with laughter. "Well, who the frig is? This is about survival."

Decatur moved so his thigh touched hers. He smiled when Marduk jumped at the contact. "Do I scare you, darling?"

Oh hell yes, when you say "darling" like that you do. It was low, throaty and full of hot meaning. "You're here in my bedroom telling me things so you're making me care. It's a flaw with being human."

"You're sweet." Decatur tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

Marduk shivered at the simple contact of his fingertips on her cheek. "Um, are you sure you don't want to tell me your weakness?" She knew, at the moment, he was hers.

"I don't want to endanger you."

Decatur's breath was so warm and soft on her cheek that she closed her eyes for a moment and gave in to the sensation. "I bet it's something really embarrassing like being afraid of mice." Her eyes opened onto his.

He chuckled. "You're adorable."

The silence that followed his words filled Marduk with anticipation and confusion. She wanted him to speak. To be quiet. To go. To stay. To touch her again. *I don't know anymore. Just please make a move. Don't let me think you don't want me.* "We're being awfully quiet here."

Decatur ran his fingers down to her lips. "I want to kiss you again. May I?"

She wanted him to. "Really?" That this man wanted her was amazing. *I am so average and he is so gorgeous.*

"If I do not taste your beauty again I will die." Decatur pushed her backward on the bed.

Marduk found that funny. "You can't die. You're immortal." She was flat on her back and awaiting his next move.

"I was being poetic." Decatur's hands slid up her bare legs and under her sleep shorts to rest on her thighs. "Have you ever felt this way before?" His fingers slid down to massage her inner thighs.

That felt so good. "No—never."

"Do you crave the taste of me as I do you?" His hand started work on removing her shorts.

"Oh yes." Marduk watched as he flung her shorts across the room.

Decatur's fingers toyed with her bikini briefs for only a moment before they followed the path of her pajamas.

"I need you to be naked." Could he see how wet with need she was? He had only to look at her and she wanted him. "I have not seen you so to speak."

Decatur smiled and removed his hands. "I'll strip if you do." He saw her hesitation. "I have seen your body. I love your curves. They drive me wild." He stood up from the bed and started to undress.

Good answer. Marduk sat up to watch as Decatur removed his shirt. The tanned, firm muscles made her heart skip a beat. *He is all mine.*

"Aren't you going to join in?" Decatur's hands went to his belt. "Take your top off. I want to see your breasts."

"Take your trousers off, I want to see your cock." Never did Marduk imagine she would ever say those words. She watched as Decatur kicked off his boots, unbuckled his belt and dropped his trousers down to his ankles.

Marduk's mouth dropped open. She had never considered a cock as attractive until now. *I had that in me? I want that again.* "Damn, I wish I could have seen it go inside me," she murmured to herself. There was something exciting in the thought of watching your own body being possessed by your lover.

"You will." Decatur walked toward her.

She held out her hand. "Stop. I want to do something." Marduk saw his head tilt in interest. "I want to taste you. I've always wondered what it would taste like. I want your cock in my mouth.

"I am honored."

Marduk got off the bed and lifted the bottom of her top up over her non-flat stomach to reveal large, non-perky breasts. She waited for his response.

"Oh darling, I need you now." Decatur stepped closer to her.

"Stand still," she commanded. "I need something from you first."

Marduk went to where he stood. The love and lust she could see in his eyes made her feel invincible. *He loves me.* One of her hands reached forward to touch his cock. Her eyes locked on his as she stroked it gently. Marduk had never before wanted to play with one as no man had interested her that much. But Decatur? *He is different.*

"May I taste you?"

"Please." His answer was a rough, low growl of approval.

She sank to her knees. There was probably some sophisticated way to do this but Marduk cared not for etiquette. Instead she leaned forward and licked the tip of his cock. She felt the shiver that ran through his body. Marduk licked again, this time

letting one of her hands run up and down the thick flesh of his shaft. It was smooth yet hard, soft yet unyielding. *And it's all mine.* She decided to follow the path of her hand with her mouth. *How would that feel? Taste?* Her tongue traveled down the long vein that bulged out through the skin. It was erotic and mesmerizing to Marduk. Up and down. Up and down. Her tongue enjoyed the taste of his smooth, hard flesh.

"Darling—"

"Yes?" she murmured between licks.

"While I like to pride myself on my control I really don't know how much longer I can last if you keep doing that."

"What about if I do this?" Marduk swallowed the head of his cock into her mouth and sucked.

"Marduk—" Decatur's hands gripped her head.

She looked up at him and winked then started sucking and releasing his cock in long, steady strokes. Marduk was enjoying herself a lot. There was something about having a man's attention completely fixated on her as she drove him wild with need.

"I want to suck you."

Marduk let the cock slide from her mouth with a pop. It was wet, shiny and engorged. *Perfect.* "Later. I'm enjoying this. She tongued down his cock to his balls, sucking on one then the other as her hand massaged his cock.

"Oh man," Decatur groaned, his thigh muscles flexing with tension.

"This is fun." *And I'm pretty damn good at this.*

"Torturing me?"

Marduk lifted her head. "That too."

"I will come in your mouth."

The idea was strangely appealing to her. "I want to taste everything."

Decatur laughed. "I prefer to come inside your body."

Marduk gave his cock one last lingering lick then raised her hands to him. Decatur helped her stand. His hands then went under her ass and lifted her off her feet and carried her over to the bed. "You're a wild woman."

"You make me wild." She spread her legs to allow him instant access. Marduk was already wet from her attention on his cock. Just knowing all that would soon be inside her had made her so. As Decatur moved in between her legs, Marduk halted him as reality hit her. "Condom." She hadn't thought to demand one before when she thought he was her dream lover. This was too real and could not be written off as a dream.

"I do not carry disease like mortal men."

"I don't want to get pregnant."

Decatur nodded his head. "Of course. Problem is I don't have one."

Marduk rolled her eyes at him in mock reproach. "And you call yourself a magical being." She reached into her bedside drawer. Smart women were always prepared for any eventuality. Marduk handed it to Decatur. "Unless you want me to put it on you." *That would be fun.*

"Touch me there now and I will explode." Decatur took the rubber and ripped open the packaging.

Marduk let the toes on one foot slide teasingly up and down his bare thigh.

Decatur's hands worked quickly in covering his cock. "Darling..."

"I need you, Dec. I burn with need."

He snapped the last inch of latex in place. "And you shall have me." Decatur pulled her up into his arms so Marduk was sitting on his lap.

She needed no further urging. Marduk lifted up and impaled herself on his cock. The slow, heat that penetrated her body made her sigh. "Oh..."

Decatur smiled at her response. "Good?" His hands encircled her waist.

"Perfect." Marduk licked her lips, her eyes locked with his. He leaned in and kissed her, his hands sliding down to her hips to control her movements. Marduk started to

move. Her hips and ass undulated to the rhythm that his hands commanded. Her eyes never left his. It was sex but it was more than just physical. An unbreakable connection was being forged. She could feel that. Decatur's mouth moved down to her breasts, sucking and softly biting her nipples. Marduk's tongue licked at the navy ankh tattoo on his neck. Maybe she imagined it but it made her tongue tingle. Marduk moved faster, urged on by his fingers digging into her flesh. It didn't hurt. It was more possessive and controlling and it was exactly what she needed.

Decatur lifted his mouth to hers and their lips met once more. It was passionate and deep and full of need and caring. Marduk had been kissed before but not with this intensity. Her hips moved faster as his cock pushed in and out of her body, not allowing her to forget for a moment he was there.

"Oh Dec..." Her words came out choked as a rush of pure intense pleasure shot through her body. She clutched at him riding him harder, wanting everything she could take from him. "Suck me." She needed that burning heat that only his teeth on her neck could give her.

"Thank you." Decatur's mouth fastened on her throat.

The slight pain was nothing compared to the amazing sensations racking her body. His mouth sucked in time to the last of the contractions that shook them.

"Wow," Marduk panted as a wild torrent of emotions swept through her. She still held on tight to Decatur as the last of the tremors made her shiver and moan.

"Wow indeed." He kissed her neck where his fangs had pierced her skin. "Did I hurt you?"

"No, it was kind of, um..." What was the word? Hot? Sexy? Possessive? "I liked it, a lot." *Too much. I want you for life.* "You know I never saw this coming." She had seen him but never imagined a hot guy, let alone a vampire, would look at her twice.

"I wanted you when you were staring at my ass." Decatur kissed her gently. "Actually, I wanted you the minute you pretended not to see me."

"I was not staring at your ass." *Was it that obvious?* "Anyway you made it almost impossible for me not to look at it, Dec." She watched as he removed the spent condom. Some men looked stupid doing that. Every move Decatur made was sexy.

He stiffened, his eyes met hers. "Dec?"

"Sorry." Giving a vampire a nickname was probably not the thing to do. Who would be scared of a vampire called Dec?

Decatur's arms wrapped around her as he kissed her until she was breathless. "I love that name and I love you, darling."

Marduk's eyes were wide with wonder. "Sex does not equal love." *Yay! He loves me.* A more rational person may have considered a supernatural being loving them as strange but rationality was not Marduk's strong point. Her fingers traced the navy blue tattoo on his neck. "I love this." She did and it was easier than saying, "I love you." *I need to know where this is going first.*

Decatur caught her fingers and entwined them with his. "Each one of Archimedes' victims has one."

Reality check. It was what Marduk needed. She pulled back from him slightly. "Seriously? You never told me that."

"It ever occurred to me.

Marduk rolled her eyes. "Men—you only ever tell us part of the truth. Clearly that tat indicates you're all linked."

"It's what Amory believes." Decatur's hands slid down to her ass.

Marduk smiled as hard cock pressed against her stomach. "The warlock? Is he sexy, Dec?" The sudden flash of jealousy in his eyes made her hot all over. Or maybe it was the thought of incoming cock that did it.

"I never think of other men like that."

"I always pictured warlocks as sexy." Marduk rolled so she was under him. *Come on inside, big boy.* She parted her legs in invitation. She was still so wet that no further

foreplay was required. "So this tat, you all have them and you all have a weakness Archimedes can exploit. But why me? Why am I caught up in this?"

Decatur took the hint, his cock head rubbing up and down the creamy slit of her pussy. "I thought you were in it with him."

Marduk snorted. "Oh please, I'm not a team player." She only did what suited her. Like having sex with the vampire. "Do you think he thought we'd be here like this?"

"No idea and that worries me."

"Hey!" Marduk slapped his ass playfully. "I'm not expecting a declaration of marriage from you."

"I mean I'm worried that he knows about you at all."

"The only thing I'm worried about at this moment is I may cry if you don't fuck me again right now." Marduk pushed her pelvis toward him.

"I like demanding women." Decatur reached over to the drawer and once more secured a condom. "We have to stock up on these because I plan on fucking the stuffing out of you."

"I like a man with a plan." She watched as he rolled the latex on once more. "Hurry up." Decatur lifted one eyebrow at her mockingly. "Hey, you said you like demanding women. I demand cock." As the last word came out Decatur was on her and in her. Marduk squealed with excitement. *Now this was sex.* "Harder. I want to scream."

Decatur pulled out of her body and plunged back hard and deep. "Better?"

"Oh yeah." The fast pace made her body shake with excitement. Marduk lifted her legs around his waist and held Decatur tight against her. "More. Harder. Faster."

"Bossy – beautiful – woman," he forced the words out between thrusts.

Marduk never got a chance to scream as Decatur's mouth found hers and they hung on to each as a roller coaster of orgasm hit them both hard. She felt sudden tears in hers eyes when Decatur looked at her with such love and devotion. "Don't ever let me go." *I cannot be without Dec.* It was a mad thought but one she knew was true.

“Never,” Decatur promised, his fingers pushing back the hair from her face. “You are mine.”

Chapter Six

"You can get them together, Archimedes, but you can't make them procreate." Vulcan looked at his nemesis in amusement. Before this, Vulcan considered Archimedes to have had moderate intelligence. But now, with this wild plan to force four supernatural beings to dance to his tune in threat of their weaknesses being exposed? Madness. Bringing evil human beings back to life? Crazy. *But that works for me because in two weeks you will be dead.* While it was hard to kill an immortal being, it wasn't impossible. Everyone had one Achilles' heel that would be their downfall. *And once you are dead, Archimedes, I take back what's mine.*

"They will do as they are told." Archimedes looked at him in irritation. "Why are you here?"

"I'm your assistant." *I want to get under your skin and weaken you. I want to laugh as you lay dying gasping your last breath.*

"Really." There was no question in the word.

Vulcan accepted Archimedes was suspicious. He would be if another demon suddenly decided to befriend him. "Yes."

Archimedes trusted the other demon about as far as he could throw him. Not far. There was so much he wanted to know about Vulcan. What did he plan to do? What about Sumerian? How did Vulcan feel about her? *Were they still connected? Why do I even care?* Fallen angel or not, Sumerian was not for him. *What do you want, Vulcan?*

"You know the woman will help the vampire."

"Yes." Archimedes was only too aware that most women were incapable of not meddling where their men were concerned. Sumerian was the same. Archimedes cursed inwardly. *Forget Sumerian. She can never be.* "Women direct men to solutions—be

they mortal or not. The vampire is too passionate to think calmly. She will do whatever it takes to save her man."

Vulcan didn't look so certain. "No one can trust a human, let alone a woman. They tend to lead men astray."

"That's what I'm counting on." Once the Howell woman knew her man was under threat then he would use her to get what he wanted.

* * * * *

"We can't keep doing that, Dec." Marduk eluded Decatur's grasp as she sprang out of bed.

Decatur smiled as the luscious flesh bounced from his reach. The lady was all hips and breasts and ass. *And I love every inch of her.* Love was an odd sensation for Decatur. Vampires rarely fell in love and when they did they generally made a mess of it. He knew what the problem was. They were too passionate and controlling when they wanted something. That was their nature. Decatur had no intention of destroying what he had found with Marduk. If he believed in miracles, he would have called finding Marduk one. "What's wrong with sex?" He rolled over and watched as she reached for her robe. At any time Decatur could have pulled Marduk back into bed with a wave of his hand. *But I want her always to come freely to me.* It was then that he knew. *My love for Marduk is my weakness.* He always knew his weakness was to love hard and forever but he never imagined he would find his true love.

"Nothing." Marduk tightened the belt on her robe. "But we have to work out how to save you from whatever it is this Archimedes prick wants from you."

"Do you care, darling?" That she did meant everything to Decatur.

"Yeah, because it could save my own ass."

Beautiful and practical. *I like that a lot.* He watched as Marduk headed toward the bedroom door. "Where are you going?"

"To my computer. The internet has everything and anything on it."

Decatur found her words amusing. "I'm a vampire I have been alive for over three hundred and fifty years. I think I know more stuff than what a computer can spit out." He got up from the bed and followed her, his eyes on the satin-covered ass wobbling gently as she walked. His cock tensed up in anticipation of falling into her arms and being welcomed once more between Marduk's thighs. *Home.*

"Three hundred and fifty years?" Marduk stopped and turned to look at him, her eyes dropping to his jumping cock.

"Yes." Decatur knew the lady had a mutual interest in his friend. The thought of her lips and tongue once more on the stiff flesh made him want to pick Marduk up in his arms and take them anywhere in the world that was away from the chaos they found themselves in. Decatur wanted only to concentrate on her.

"You look pretty good for three hundred odd, Dec."

"Come back to bed." He held his hand out to her. Marduk took it.

As much as Marduk wanted to do just that, she couldn't. She needed to know what was going on and how she could help the man she loved. Marduk lifted his hand and kissed the solid male knuckles. "I want to help you in everything, not just in taming that bad boy there." She could still taste the musky scent of his skin on her lips.

Marduk pulled on his hand and made Decatur follow her into the next room. She sat down at her computer and switched it on. "We need to find out what is going on." Marduk waited while the computer booted up. She concentrated on the screen to stop the mad urge she had to take Decatur's cock in her hands and massage the sturdy, length of it. *Of course if I do that I'll then want a taste...*

The screen flared into life as a familiar search engine came on. Marduk tapped her fingers over the keys. First she typed in "ankh". It was as she expected—Egyptian mythology. Next she tried "blue ankh". There were similar results. Marduk typed in a combination of words—blue ankh-vampire-demon-warlock-angel. There was nothing more than what they had previously seen. "Bummer."

Decatur's hands descended on her shoulders. "It's not going to be as simple as that, darling."

The sudden "ping" of an email arriving sounded. She knew it was probably a friend or maybe even someone who wanted her to increase the size of her penis. Marduk looked to the size at the cock that was available to her. *Nope, no need of help there.* She flicked over to her email. It was from someone called Hellspawn. "Hmmm, not sure I know any Hellspawn..." The message made her jerk back in surprise.

Who are you, mortal?

Marduk quickly replied. *Well, since it's my email, you tell me who you are.* She turned her head to Decatur. "Give me attitude? I think not."

"He'd be a troll."

"A troll? As in nasty-assed, warty-nosed thing with bad breath?"

Decatur smiled. "Met a lot of trolls?" He came around to share half the seat with her. "I have heard of Hellspawn. He's not someone you play with."

Marduk hooked a leg over Decatur's to stop from falling off the chair. "I have a fat ass." While sharing was sweet it wasn't always practical.

"I love your ass. I want your ass." He wound an arm around her waist to hold her close.

His cock was resting nicely, albeit impatiently against her thigh. "Questions first then ass later."

What do you want?

"Oh right, the troll person." Marduk tapped out some words. *What do you know about the blue ankh?* She looked at Decatur when he snorted with amusement. "Why beat around the bush?"

"You are so mortal, darling."

"What of it?" If the vampire wanted her mortal butt he'd better explain himself.

"You know nothing. Trolls hate to be questioned. They like to think themselves as masters of subtlety."

I do not answer questions.

Decatur smiled. "Told you so."

Marduk's attention went back to the keyboard. *Hey, I never invited you to email me, sunshine.*

"I don't believe trolls are generally called 'sunshine'," Decatur observed wryly.

Why do you seek information on the children of the ankh?

"Whoa." Marduk's eyes were on Decatur. "Did you know you were called that?"

"No, but then I haven't been a child for a while."

"And I suppose you forget a few things in three hundred years. *I am having sex with a man over three hundred years old and it's amazing.* Marduk shook her head. *Focus.*

Children of the ankh? she asked the troll.

Yes.

These supernatural beings with the tattoo are those children?

No, it's their children.

Marduk would have fallen off the chair in shock if Decatur did not have such a firm grip on her. "You have kids? Do not tell me you're married. I do not do married men." While Marduk was no moral crusader, she was totally against the partner of another screwing around on their spouse. *If that is married cock I will cry.*

"No."

Phew. "Ever tempted?"

"Not until now with you."

Good to know. "So no kids?"

"So no response to my thoughts on marriage?"

I have many, many thoughts. "One dramatic revelation at a time please." There was so much to take in that Marduk wasn't sure what to focus on first. Talk to the troll.

These immortal beings have kids?

They will have children who will change the world.

"Whoa!"

"Double whoa," Decatur echoed her sentiments.

In what way do these offspring change things?

Have you heard of the great man theory, mortal?

"Yeah, I studied it at university." She could see Decatur looking at her words on screen with interest. "Yeah well, I had some vague idea I would do something with a degree other than frame it."

"Impressive."

"Not really. I have no idea where I put the frame." C'est la vie. "The great man theory is that every decade a person, not necessarily a man, is so famous and powerful that they change the world by their acts. Like Hitler, Churchill, Kennedy." In your face, troll. I know stuff too.

So – what? These kids will rise to be like them?

No, they will make evil live again.

How?

And do I really want to know? If she did not have Decatur's strength at her side she would have ended this conversation long ago.

Archimedes wants evil men to live again.

Decatur nodded his head in realization. "This is why he wants me."

"But why me? I'm not having kids for years if at all."

"Well, me neither."

"I'm not making babies with you, Dec. I like you and all but you know..." This was a weird discussion to be having after barely three dates. If you could call them that.

"Because I'm a vampire?" Both of them had forgotten the troll.

If she was honest, Marduk had forgotten he was anyone else but Decatur. "No, because I'm not the maternal kind."

Decatur smiled. "So, the vampire thing doesn't worry you but the baby thing does?"

"Correct."

"We would have cute kids."

"No doubt—but let's attempt to focus."

She turned back to the screen. *Is there any way to stop Archimedes?*

No.

Marduk sighed. "Bummer."

"Double bummer," added Decatur. "But not unexpected."

Thank you. Marduk typed.

You're welcome.

Decatur snorted in laughter. "You made a troll say 'you're welcome'. That's unheard of."

Marduk unwound herself from Decatur's body and stood up. "I just think it pays not to piss demonic types with spooky powers off."

"This is not your fight, darling." He also stood.

Hmm, naked, delicious man. "You want me to back off?"

"Yes." It was as simple as that for Decatur.

"Dec, I can't. It's not in my nature to back away." Besides, Marduk had never had someone so important in her life to fight for. While it was true they had only just met, Marduk knew Decatur was the man, er, vampire—no, man—for her.

"This is a dangerous world you are walking in."

Marduk lifted her hand in dismissal. "Oh please, I'm having sex with a vampire. I'm a thrill seeker."

Decatur pulled Marduk to rest against his body. "Do I thrill you?"

"Only down to my toenails." Her hands rested on his shoulders as her hips pushed in closer to his groin. "We should be concentrating on how to thwart the bad guy, you know." *I want cock.*

"You're grinding your pussy against my friend with determination there."

"Okay, so I'm oversexed." She reached down between them and undid the belt to her gown. "I'm sure that's not ladylike."

Decatur pulled the robe from her shoulders. "Oh, you are most definitely a lady – beautiful, classy, and sexy."

Marduk jumped up into his arms, winding her legs around his waist. "What about Archimedes?"

"He's as ugly as sin," Decatur murmured as his mouth teased hers with a soft kiss.

"Really?" That seemed right to Marduk. Evil was repulsive.

"Nah, actually he's considered quite attractive." Decatur moved them both until her back rested against a nearby wall. "That works in his favor as people don't expect him to act as he does until it's too late. Many innocent people have been used and abused due to him."

"I won't be. I don't fall for pretty faces." She sighed as Decatur's head dropped down to her breast and he tongued one pink nipple. "We need a condom."

Decatur smiled down at her. "Anything you want, darling."

"Yes."

"Then take me from behind."

"My pleasure." Decatur dropped her gently down to her feet. "Turn around. Ass out and wait for me."

"You're awfully bossy." Even as she said the words, Marduk did as Decatur commanded. "Hurry up," she called over her shoulders as the vampire disappeared and reappeared in a matter of seconds. "I'm loving this whole faster-than-the speed-of-light thing." Marduk took the jar she held out to her. "Why my hand cream?"

Decatur made short work of covering his already erect cock with a condom. He took the jar back. "Why do you think?" He stroked her back as he pushed her around to face the wall.

"I'm already wet."

His hand slid down to between her legs. "Yes you are." Decatur dropped down behind her and nudged Marduk's legs apart.

When his tongue slid into her vagina from behind, Marduk thought her knees would give out due to the sudden thrill of it. "Oh Dec..." His mouth withdrew from her vagina, licked up from her clit to her anus and then slid inside her wet core once more. "I am going to fall."

Decatur lifted his head for a moment. "If you do you'll miss out on what I have planned for you."

Could anything be better than this? He tongued her with a ruthlessness that made her scratch at the walls to hang on and not slide to the floor in a quivering heap. "I want cock."

"In here?" Decatur pushed one finger into her creamy vagina and then pulled it out, running the slick wetness back to the tight, puckered hole of her ass. "Or here?"

When his finger moved inside, Marduk jumped in surprise. "No one has ever —"

"Then we will both enjoy this immensely."

His finger pushed and pulled in and out of the tight, muscled entrance. Marduk shoved her ass back against him. Decatur's mouth fastened onto one of her butt cheeks and sucked hard. He had one hand around her upper thighs as he introduced another finger into her anus.

This was not at all what Marduk expected. She had never been keen to try anal sex. It never seemed doable to her. *But it does now.* When a third finger joined the other two, she became frantic with need, all but pushing her ass into Decatur's face.

"Have patience, darling."

"To hell with patience. I want you inside me now."

"And if I want to play some more?"

"I will cry, scream and stamp my feet."

Decatur laughed loudly. "That's what I adore about you, Marduk. You say what you feel." He rose to his feet and reached for the discarded jar of hand cream. "I hope this wasn't expensive."

"Who cares?" Marduk didn't at that moment. She knew what Decatur planned to do with it. She turned her head to watch him lather the length of his shaft with the cool, white lotion. "Pretty," she murmured, her eyes on his cock.

"I'm glad you approve." Decatur pushed the cream away and came up close behind her.

Marduk could feel the hard, slick cock pushing between her butt cheeks. She pushed back and gave him full access. At first, when the head of his cock prodded the small, tight ring of muscle, Marduk was doubtful so much hard flesh could fit into so little a hole.

"Relax," Decatur murmured against her ear. He edged farther inside.

There was a burning feel of fullness as inch by inch Decatur patiently worked his cock inside her ass. When he was fully inside, he stopped. "Okay, darling?"

"Uh-huh," Marduk sighed, as she closed her eyes and took in the whole hot feeling of being completely filled. When she felt his fingers on her clit, she cried out softly. "Please move." Decatur did. Slow, deep thrusts as his fingers played with her clit. This made Marduk pant and moan. She wanted him to go faster but stay slow. She wanted

hard thrusts but then no movement at all. Everything was pretty amazing yet Marduk wanted whatever Decatur could give her. "Bite me." That would make this perfect.

Decatur's mouth nuzzled her neck, kissing and licking. He did not bite her straight away, instead he teased her flesh as his fingers and cock made love to her body.

"Please," she moaned. *I want it all.* When his teeth sliced into her skin, Marduk whimpered with relief. She angled her neck to give him full access to her flesh. This was about possession and sustenance. Marduk wanted to take and give. Decatur's fingers plunged into her wet core and moved in time with his cock's thrust. The sucking and the fucking were almost too much for Marduk. She was so overwhelmed and ready to come that she clawed the wall to keep control. But it was useless. Marduk knew it always would be with Decatur. He had only to touch her and the need was so great that she would do anything to surrender to it.

Decatur removed his mouth from her neck and his fingers from her clit. His hands went about her waist to support her as his thrusts became harder and designed to thrill and send them both onto release.

The orgasm, when it hit, started in her pelvis, shot up her back, into her brain and then surged down to her toes. It shook her body so much that she feared her legs would give out.

They stood locked together for a long while after the last tremor subsided. It was where they wanted to be. Close, tight and together.

Marduk blew a strand of hair from her face. "So, I'm thinking we take the fight to Archimedes." Marduk felt almost invincible after sex with Decatur. She wanted him in her life no matter what and no madman was going to rule over her.

"Ballsy move, darling."

"I'm a ballsy gal." She wasn't but Marduk liked that Decatur thought her so.

"That's what worries me." He lifted her down so her feet touched the ground. "Archimedes uses people's strength against them."

"I'll be fine, Dec. I have you." Marduk's heart skipped a beat as the look of pride in Decatur's eyes.

"Yes, you do." He raised her hand and kissed her palm. "I will look after you. I promise."

Chapter Seven

"How lovely to meet you, Marduk." Archimedes extended his hand to her.

Marduk avoided it. Decatur was right. This being was amazingly attractive in a way reminiscent of a swaggering pirate looking for treasure. She looked into his glittering, hot eyes and warned herself what was at stake. Gawping at a sensual man was not going to help. *Besides, he is just smoke and mirrors, woman. Focus.* Mind you, that was hard to do when three unknown beings suddenly appeared without invitation in the room. They had to be the warlock, demon and angel.

Archimedes dropped his hand as if her lack of contact was of no significance to him. He looked at the vampire. "Always a joy to see you, Decatur. What brings you both to my humble abode?"

Marduk's eyes swept the room once. It was hard not to be impressed at the grandeur of the room. There was no humility in it. Delicate, gold furniture evoking thoughts of Louis the Fourteenth came to mind. When Decatur had transported them to the old warehouse on the river, Marduk had thought two things. One, her head was spinning from the sudden hurtling through space and two, she found it hard to believe supernatural beings had chosen a rundown warehouse in Brisbane to hang out at.

She glanced once more at the others. The men were gorgeous. *What was it with supernatural beings? Did they get access to good genes or what?* The woman, undoubtedly the angel, was almost luminescent. It was hard for Marduk to drag her eyes away from her. But she did when Decatur's hands slipped into hers. She liked that in the midst of what was going to be a pissing contest, Decatur cared only about her. "We have business to discuss with you, Archimedes. We need to speak alone."

Sumerian moved toward Marduk. "We're all friends here."

"From my understanding you could be but some of you choose not to be," Marduk responded without malice. It was pure fact. "You will understand that I, as a mere mortal, cannot trust you." This was all about her and Decatur. While it would be nice to have allies, Marduk could not allow any weakness to show if an ally turned on them. Besides, she suspected each of these beings would have to fight the battle in their own way – as would she and Decatur.

"I am an angel, Marduk." Sumerian's eyes were gentle on her.

"You're a fallen angel Sumerian," Archimedes clarified. "And I agree, none of this lot is trustworthy." He looked at the others in contempt.

Marduk smiled. "Least of all you, Archimedes." *Gorgeous but an arrogant prick.*

Archimedes arched his eyebrow in amusement. "She has quite a mouth on her. Don't you try to keep her in line, vampire?"

Decatur smiled an icy smile. "I have no need to control people."

"Ah yes, vampires are too *laissez faire*." Archimedes turned to the others. "Leave us."

Sumerian looked like she was about to argue.

"You cannot help everyone, Sumerian." Archimedes waited as they disappeared one after the other. "Of course you know they'll eavesdrop."

Whatever. Marduk got straight to the point. "Here's the deal, we know what you're doing and it will not work." There was no need for preliminaries.

"You're smart, Miss Howell."

"Yes." Though how smart she was to take on a demon who could kill her she wasn't so sure. The fact that he needed her was the only comfort.

"We know about your plans, Archimedes," Decatur told him. "And we will not comply with your needs."

Archimedes' eyes were focused on the mortal woman. "If you will not help me I'll have to use your beloved's weakness against him."

Marduk tried to think of an answer to that. Problem was she was pretty sure he wasn't bluffing and it was hard to out-bluff the demonic. "So you would kill Decatur in spite? Not much of a plan there." The thought of Decatur destroyed was too much to bear.

"I will kill you then." Archimedes didn't seem perturbed either way.

Absolute bastard. "So what happens to your plan if we both die?"

"I have the others to use."

Marduk hated people who had an answer for everything. "What if they get all pissy like us?"

Archimedes smiled at her words. "I only need one to see sense."

"Kill me instead, Archimedes." Decatur's eyes were hard on his. "You know you want to."

That was the last thing Marduk wanted to hear. She had a pretty good idea what it took for him to stand there as calmly as he was. Only she knew the strain he was under due to the increasing pressure of his hand on hers.

"There's only one way to do that, vampire."

Marduk confused. Was it the old stake in the heart thing? Was that Decatur's weakness?

"Haven't you worked it out yet, Marduk? A vampire's greatest weakness is to fall in love." Archimedes sounded quite pleased at the fact. "If a vampire never falls in love then he is no threat to another. If he does – well, kill his lover and you main him for life. He is so wounded that he is no longer immortal and those enemies he has will kill him in the slow, malicious way that our kind do so enjoy."

Crap. Marduk looked at Decatur.

"I'm sorry." His eyes were soft on hers. "I could not help but fall love with you."

"Oh Dec..."

"So, you see you are screwed." Archimedes had the look of one who enjoyed the heartache he created. "Help me or you both die. It's a plan I'm extremely fond of."

"Manipulative, skanky, pus-filled, pukeable bastard." Marduk was sure there were other words she could use but those were the first ones that came to her mind. It had taken all her strength to walk sedately from the room without turning around and going for Archimedes' throat. While it would have done her absolutely no good, at least Marduk knew she would have felt better for it.

"We'll get through this." Decatur was tense and angry looking.

There was a sudden flash of light and Sumerian appeared. "I know how to weaken Archimedes."

Decatur moved to pass her by. "We do not need your help, angel."

Marduk pulled on his hand, making him stop. "Now wait a second. How can you help us? And why not help yourself if you know? You're in the same situation."

"I am but I'm not. As a woman my weakness is different from a man's."

"Rampant PMS?" Did angels get feral every month?

"No," Sumerian replied in amusement. "But Archimedes has a weakness."

Decatur looked at her in suspicion. "And what is that?"

"Archimedes loves me."

This surprised Marduk. She had seen the way he spoke to her. "He has a funny way of showing it then."

The angel sighed. "It's a long story but the bottom line is he cannot kill me but I can, if I choose to, weaken him."

Okay, this we can use. "What's your weakness?" What did angels fear?

"That is not something I can trust anyone with," Sumerian responded calmly.

"Angels don't trust?" The seemed strange to Marduk. Weren't they working on behalf of humankind?

"I have fallen, Marduk. The fall changed me."

"Yet you are helping us? I have to wonder why?" Decatur stared at her as if trying to see through Sumerian.

"Old habits die hard, vampire. You know that."

"What do you think, Dec?" Marduk would happily use any offer of help at this stage.

Decatur thought for a moment and then sighed. "What's your plan, angel?"

"I need something from you." Sumerian looked at him significantly.

He shook his head. "I cannot give you that."

The angel was undeterred. "Out of free will you can."

"It is not mine to give."

"Knowledge is for all," the angel persisted.

"Sumerian, some knowledge, as you know, can destroy you."

"Only if it's used for purposes of evil," she countered back.

Marduk was dying of curiosity. "The suspense is killing me. What are you two talking about?"

Decatur looked at his lover. "It's a long-held secret of vampirekind."

That confused Marduk. What could an angel, who was technically pure and good, want from a vampire who had been around the block several times and not in a good way? It was not like they were simpatico. That they both had an agenda, Marduk didn't doubt. Anyone with breath in their body had plans that others were not always privy to.

"Sumerian wants the knowledge to redeem lost souls." Decatur's eyes were fixed on the angel.

"Huh?" Redeem lost souls? *How? What? Who?* This was sounding suspiciously like what Archimedes planned to do.

"Everyone, Marduk, immortals included, although they choose to deny it, has a soul. Vampires have only been among us for two thousand years."

"Only two thousand?" Marduk looked at her skeptically. These immortal types had a weird way of looking at things.

"Yes, vampires are relatively new," Sumerian explained. "They acquired the knowledge of the souls two centuries ago through one of their deals with Lucifer."

"The devil?" Marduk was agog.

"He's not such a bad fellow when you get to know him," Decatur quipped, pulling Marduk closer to his side. "And we vampires are very good at building up caches of knowledge to use for our own purposes."

"So – what? You swapped stuff with Satan?"

Decatur winked. "Even the devil has needs."

Bizarro world. "So why do you want this knowledge, Sumerian?" If not for the solid warmth of Decatur's body against her, Marduk would have thought she was dreaming all this.

"I plan to use it."

Of course. She was an angel. That made sense. "So, you're using it for good."

"Some of it. Some souls need to find their way home."

Some? "And others?"

"Others need to be set free to do as their character intended."

Marduk understood instantly. "This is a revenge thing."

Sumerian nodded with a small smile. "You're smart."

"This doesn't sound like a very angelic thing to do." It sounded like the sort of revenge that would happen at Danby if another office worker used up the last of the milk for coffee.

"Angels are not all that they seem, darling." Decatur did not appear to be the slightest bit surprised in what the angel said.

"Is this why you fell from heaven?" Marduk asked Sumerian. "Because you didn't fit in?"

Sumerian laughed. "Oh, Marduk, there are so many misfits in heaven."

"It doesn't sound like heaven lives up to the hype." Not that she ever expected to go there, but Marduk was now not so worried about going to hell for her empty calorie consumption, swearing and overspending on shoes.

"Parts of heaven are as mortals believe but the leadership is another story," the angel reported.

"Before you ask, hell is very similar," Decatur added. "Essentially what happens in heaven and hell is exactly the sort of stuff that is played out on Earth. Neither of these factions is any better than the other."

This had been one hell of a week. Dream sex, a vampire, an evil demon bent on acquiring more evil and now an angel scheming to piss off heaven. *God damn it, I need chocolate.* "So do you plan to get back into heaven using this against them?"

"I only want back in on my terms." Sumerian appeared very definite on that. Her eyes locked on Decatur. "Now, if you give me the knowledge of how to redeem souls then I will help you destroy Archimedes."

Decatur smiled. "Unfortunately for you, Sumerian, I am not as desperate as you may think. I have other options. Thank you for your offer."

Sumerian did not look surprised. "I will get the knowledge with or without you, Decatur."

"Best you look at how to free yourself from the trap Archimedes has you in. You may be his weakness, but he has the advantage of knowing yours."

That was true. Marduk hadn't realized it until then. How much help could Sumerian have given them? As they walked away from the angel, Marduk felt a little more positive knowing Decatur must have a plan. "I thought we were totally screwed there for a while."

"Oh, we are."

Marduk stopped dead and looked at him. "Huh?" This was not what she wanted to hear.

Decatur tugged on her hand. "Keep walking, darling."

She did but it didn't stop her questions. "But how — what —"

"There is one who will help us. One who has an agenda that may benefit us as well as himself."

"Who?"

"Vulcan."

"The other Smith boy?"

Decatur smiled. "Yeah, the other Smith boy."

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"I'm not surprised to hear Sumerian is after the knowledge of the souls you possess. She is quite obsessed by striking back at heaven. She amuses me greatly," Vulcan remarked as he leaned urbanely against a nearby wall. "The vampire is correct. I can help you."

"What do you want in return?" Marduk didn't doubt for a second this demon wanted something for services rendered.

Vulcan looked her up and down in a slow, thorough way that was completely sexual and left no question as to his intention to annoy. "Now that's a loaded question."

"Demon—" Decatur's voice was low and throaty and full of threat.

Marduk knew the demon was playing with her but it was nice to see the instant jealousy in Decatur's eyes. "I can't believe you do anything out of the goodness of your heart." Few humans did. She could hardly expect a demon to.

"Why do you say that?"

"Gut instinct."

Vulcan arched one eyebrow up at her. "Are you ever wrong?"

"Rarely when it comes to men." Though Decatur was different. Seething at her side, but different. She knew he wanted to lash out at the demon but they needed him for the moment. Marduk reached over and took Decatur's hand.

"I bet you burn like fire, Marduk." Vulcan's voice was teasing as if he was enjoying the moment.

"And I bet you can be a real pain in the ass."

"Stop pissing around, Vulcan," Decatur snapped, his patience limited. "Clearly you are not at Archimedes' side because you believe in his cause."

"No, as demons go he's one of the more megalomaniacal."

"So what do you want, demon?"

Vulcan straightened up. "Archimedes will be dead in two weeks."

Decatur looked at him in suspicion. "How?"

"Never you mind, vampire. What I want is something only Marduk can give me."

She stepped back on hearing that. Giving something to this man, er, demon was not anything she wanted to do. "I'm not having sex with you."

Vulcan smiled. "I never offered."

Strangely enough, Marduk wasn't sure whether to be offended or not. "What do you want then?"

"Your purity."

Marduk snorted with laughter. "I'm nowhere near pure."

"I'm not talking sexually. It's about who you are in your mind and soul," Vulcan explained. "And before you say it, all humans think they have impure thoughts but few really do, at least not the sort a demon does."

"What is it you want from my woman?" Decatur stood squarely in from of the other man.

My woman. I like that. In turn, Marduk moved closer to Decatur.

"Her essence."

"My what?" What the hell was that?

Decatur sighed. "Why that of all things?"

"It is one of three things I need to get what I want."

"And what is that? Decatur growled, not in the mood to play games. "Come on, demon. If you ask something of us we have the right to know why."

"The angel Gabriel will give me the power to go back in time."

Marduk was impressed but confused. "I thought demons can do everything."

"Everything but that. It is the one talent I lack and need."

Decatur looked thoughtful. "Is this about Sumerian? It must be if Gabriel is involved."

Vulcan declined to answer. "So can I have it?"

This was going way over Marduk's head. They had come to Vulcan for help. She had not expected a demon to want something from her. She had no power. "If I give you my essence and I have no idea how to do it—does it hurt?" Marduk was no wuss but she wasn't into the whole sadomasochistic thing either.

"No."

A simple answer was a good answer. "Will it change me? Do I lose part of myself?"

Vulcan shook his head. "No and you have more essence than you will ever use."

Okay, time to get down to tin tacks. "How do you free us from Archimedes?"

"Like most ambitious men, Archimedes has a one-track mind."

Marduk had to agree with that. "He does appear to be hell-bent on killing one or both of us."

"So use the angel," Vulcan told them. "I can guess what Sumerian offered."

Decatur pondered this for a moment. "Even if Sumerian weakens him for a while, he will still come after us. I'm not concerned for myself. It's Marduk I worry about."

She smiled softly at him. *I could just eat him with a spoon.*

"No, Archimedes won't because when he is sufficiently weakened I will place a spell on both of you that will make it impossible for him to find you."

Demons did spells? Why hadn't Vulcan mentioned this before? "You bastard!" Marduk let fly one hand and slapped him hard in the chest. It was like slapping steel. "Why haven't you done it before this?"

"That would be no fun for me. Besides, the more Archimedes has to occupy him the more time I have to do what I must undetected."

"And I used to think the intrigue at work was complicated. You people—beings, whatever—are just painful to deal with."

Vulcan did not seem the slightest bit offended. "It's up to you, Marduk. Live or die."

What a great choice. "How do I do this essence thing?" She could see Decatur was not happy about it but it appeared to be their only choice.

"Very simply. I kiss you."

"Really?" Marduk looked at him in distaste. It wasn't what he looked like. It was who he was. "I'm picky who I kiss."

"It would take but a moment."

Decatur's hands were in fists at his side. "I'm not happy about this."

"I'm not going to bed her, vampire. It's just a kiss."

"This kiss transfers essence or something?" Marduk asked, partly stalling, partly trying to build up courage.

"Yes."

She turned to Decatur. "Do you feel that when you kiss me, Dec?"

Decatur's eyes softened on hers. "Oh yes."

"And this will save our asses?"

"Yes."

Marduk blew out a deep breath. "Okay, as long as you save us."

"I promise."

"Is he good for that?" She only trusted Decatur's word.

"Oddly enough, he is," Decatur replied, his eyes now fixed on Vulcan. "Demons have a strange code of honor when it comes to giving a promise."

Uh-huh, right, okay. "How do we do this?"

Vulcan moved toward her. "Just stand still."

"No tongue." The demon laughed at her. Before Marduk knew what was happening, she was in Vulcan's arms and his lips were on hers. As kisses went it was pretty average especially considering the power he was supposed to draw from it.

"Thank you," Vulcan murmured as the kiss ended. He stepped back from Marduk quickly, his eyes on the vampire.

"Is that it?" While she didn't expect to feel lust, Marduk had expected to feel something. She edged closer to Decatur, comforted by the arm he wound around her waist.

"Yes, Marduk, you transferred a part of yourself to me," Vulcan explained. "You do that with any kiss you give but most mortals don't realize that. If they knew they could do that then they would harness the power of something so simple and use it to their advantage." The demon's eyes focused on Decatur. "Now may I suggest you call on Sumerian?"

"I'm here." The angel appeared in the blink of an eye.

"Always the eavesdropper." Vulcan's voice was droll.

The angel scowled at him. "Whatever."

Marduk could tell there was history there and if it was any other time she would have wanted the gossip. "How do we go on from here?"

"At midnight tonight—"

"Why is it always midnight with supernatural people? In the movies it's always the graveyard at midnight or the —"

Decatur interrupted Marduk. "Midnight is when magic is stronger."

Sumerian nodded. "Go home, be together — soon it will be forever."

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"I like sucking your cock, it's a power thing," Marduk lifted her head and smiled at him. "I love that all your attention is on me and I have control of your body." Her head dropped back to her task. The long vein that ran the length of his cock fascinated her. She loved to run her tongue up and down it.

"You drive me crazy," Decatur growled as his fingers threaded through the hair of the woman who kneeled between his knees. "Bloody hell —"

If not for the fact she had a mouthful of cock, Marduk would have laughed at the violence of his outburst. That Decatur was completely at her mercy made her feel stronger than she had ever been. She alternately sucked and nibbled at the head of his cock. The spongy texture intrigued her. *I wonder what it would feel like...hmmm...well, why not just try it?* Decatur's cock popped out of her mouth wet and shiny. She sat up and curled her hand around the base of it.

"What are you doing?" Decatur looked on, bemused.

"This." Marduk placed his cock against her breastbone then squeezed her breast around it. "Move."

"Have I mentioned how much I love you?" He thrust his cock between the mounds of flesh.

"I would do this for no other man." The pulsating feel of his shaft sliding between her breasts was strange yet thrilling.

Decatur's eyes were fierce on hers. "There will be no other men for me but you."

"Only you, Dec."

"I have to get a condom now."

"No." Marduk wanted to try something else. With Decatur she felt a freedom she never had with any other man.

"Darling?"

"I want you to come on my breasts. I want to feel you against my skin." It was such a primal need that to do anything but that would have been against her true nature.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." Marduk released his sandwiched cock and sat back on her haunches. She watched with fascination as Decatur put her hand on his shaft and worked it back and forward. It was so raw and exciting that Marduk was entranced. As the first drops of cum hit her breasts she felt a wild thrill in the knowledge that she had made this man, her lover, so overwhelmed with need that Decatur would do anything she requested. He groaned with the effort of release, his eyes on hers, sharing the moment together.

As the last drop fell, Decatur stood up and lifted Marduk into his arms. The stickiness on her breasts clung to her skin and his. "Do you remember that first night in your shower?"

"Yes, Dec, you stopped and I was so horny I almost cried."

"There will be no stopping tonight." Decatur kissed her hard and carried her into the bathroom.

"I give in." Marduk lay on her back, arms outstretched and enjoyed the sensuous warmth of Decatur's body on hers. She wanted to wrap her legs around his waist and invite him inside once more but she had other plans.

"Excellent. I love an obedient woman." Decatur's lips nuzzled at her neck.

Obedient, my ass. There were swollen red bite marks all over her body. Her skin tingled because of them. It was so kinky and hot. *And I love it.* "Take me, I'm yours."

Decatur stopped what he was doing and looked at her. "What? Are you just going to lie there?"

"What do you want me to do? I'm exhausted." *Not. I'm just biding my time.*

"Really?"

No. I want cock. "Yes, you've worn me out." Marduk smiled as Decatur rolled off her body and onto his back beside her. How gallant he was. *Sucker.* Marduk jumped on top of him, straddling his thighs. "Ha!" She slapped at his hands. "No. Don't touch. It's now my turn to be on top."

"But I want to... I need to be inside you." Decatur bucked his body upward.

Marduk giggled. She had never understood the fascination people had for horse riding. Man riding was fun though. "Good boys do as they're told."

"What about bad boys?"

"They get punished. Now stay where you are." She swung one leg over and off him.

"Yes ma'am." Decatur watched her with interest as he folded his arms under his head in relaxation. "Are you coming back?"

"Yes. I just need something." Marduk pulled a dressing table drawer open.

"Socks?"

She stretched out a pair of striped ones. "Yep, they're nice and stretchy and I'm gonna tie you up and have my evil way with you."

Decatur lifted his hands above his head. "Tie away," he murmured in amusement. "You know I could break any restraint if I wanted to."

Marduk made sure to rub her breasts against his face. She felt his tongue touch her nipple. "Then you'd miss out on my licking you from neck to cock."

"I remain your humble servant."

"Damn straight," Marduk snorted. It was easy to control a man. She finished tying his hands. *Lordy, he looks pretty.* Marduk ran her hands over his body, stopping to toy with his cock. She had never been so hungry for a man in her life. *Multiple orgasms were a lovely thing.*

They had already showered several times after each hot, sweaty moment spent that afternoon. *At this rate my water bill will be sky high. Care factor? Nil.*

"You like?"

"You're a lot of fun to play with." The soft skin over his hard cock made her wet with need once more.

Decatur chuckled. "I've never had my penis called 'fun' before."

"Oh yeah, it is. I like playing with it a lot." Her thumb rubbed back and forward over the spongy head.

He groaned. "I thought you were going to lick me all over?"

"This is my game." *Though licking did sound good.* Marduk kept her hand around his cock and leaned over and licked his chest. "Yum. My favorite flavor." She continued to lick his body in long, slow strokes as her hand ran up and down milking his cock.

"Bloody hell." Decatur's voice was half growl, half choke. "I used to think I had amazing control until I met you, darling."

"You're very impressive, Dec," Marduk said between licks. "Can most men last as long as you? Maybe I should compare?"

"Touch another man and I will spank your ass until it's pink."

The jealousy Marduk saw in Decatur's eyes excited her. *He really loves me.* "Are you trying to dissuade me or encourage me to do it?" Spanking sounded like fun.

"Darling?"

"Yes?" Marduk started licking his lower stomach.

"You are the only woman I will ever need. I love you."

She lifted her head and smiled at him. "Good answer. Maybe I won't run a comparison test."

"Thank you."

"You're most welcome." Once more Marduk slid off his body.

"Where are you going?"

"Well, I'm wet and you're hard. It seems like the perfect time to find a condom." She looked down at the empty box on the table beside her bed. "Crap. Only one left. I had twelve." Marduk climbed back onto his body.

Decatur watched as she unwrapped the condom. "So we'll be going to the store after this."

"Or maybe we should abstain." She reached for his cock and began to roll the rubber down the shaft. "That might be fun." Marduk winked teasingly at him.

"Do you want to kill me?"

"No, I only want to love you." Before Decatur could respond, she plunged down onto the thick shaft. The cock head surged upward and Marduk closed her eyes and sighed. *Oh yeah. This is my happy place.* She raised and lowered herself working the length all the way inside. "I never ever believed I would enjoy sex until you. I thought I was frigid."

Decatur looked at her in disbelief. "You're kidding me?"

"Nope." She rested her hands on his chest to give her leverage as she increased her pace.

"Mortal men are stupid."

"Dumb as rocks some of them." Marduk moved faster.

"Needy?" he asked with a smile.

"I only have to look sideways at you and I want to come."

"Kiss me, darling."

Marduk didn't hesitate. Decatur's kisses were like chocolate-covered caramels. One was never enough. Her tongue twisted against his as she moved faster and faster. Slow, sweet sex was all well and good but sometimes a fast fuck was exactly what a woman needed. She enjoyed the bucking sensation of Decatur's hips under hers. That he was as excited as she was made the whole ride more thrilling. Marduk caught her breath against his lips as the first hint of the orgasm hit her. She kissed harder, their mouths

hungering in their need for each other. Marduk's fingers sank into his flesh as she tried to control the feeling racing up from her pelvis to her spine. "Oh Dec," she moaned as she tried to hold on but she knew it was useless.

"Don't fight it," Decatur said in between hot, frenzied kisses.

Marduk's body jerked and shuddered as she gave in to the feeling. She loved the low, growl of satisfaction from Decatur that reverberated against her mouth.

"Still thinking about abstaining?" he murmured, his body pushing up against hers.

"Oh God no, but I would like to try the spanking thing..."

Chapter Eight

"Sumerian?" Archimedes looked up in surprise. "What do you want?"

"I'm lonely." Sumerian moved farther into his bedchamber. It was opulent as was everything Archimedes did or had. Her eyes swept over the male body before her. For one moment she almost licked her lips in appreciation. The sculpted, muscular torso gleamed in the soft, subtle lighting. Her hands itched to reach out and touch the skin she had once known the taste of so well. But she refrained. That man, that lover, was dead. The demon before her was not her old love. Sumerian swallowed hard. *It is so long since I had sex. I must concentrate on the task and not the need.*

"Too bad for you." Archimedes' voice was dismissive but his eyes were not.

Sumerian was pleased by this. She had deliberately dressed to entice him. The soft silk of her simple white slip accentuated the paleness of her skin, the naked curves of her body and the titian red of her hair. "Is it too bad for just me?"

"Yes." He stepped back and sat down.

Sumerian knew it was a move that was meant to look casual and uncaring. She moved toward him. "Do you remember when—"

"I choose to remember nothing," Archimedes interrupted her quickly.

The man was on edge. *Excellent. It is good to know I have not lost my power.* "Do you not wonder what would have happened to us?"

"No."

"Never?"

Archimedes breathed out a long sigh. "What do you want, Sumerian?"

"I'm horny." It was partly true and she knew she had to be careful.

The demon barked out a laugh. "Seriously?"

Sumerian stood before him. "Don't you remember how good it used to be with us?"

Archimedes' eyes locked on hers. "That was a long time ago and we've changed a lot."

"Have we?" It seemed like both forever and also yesterday to Sumerian. *Maybe I have lived too long.*

"Yes."

"You once loved me." She watched his body stiffen at her words.

"Again, that was a long time ago."

"What if—"

"There are no 'what-ifs' in our world."

That was true. They had no time for *possible* outcomes. "Do you never crave the touch of someone?" She lifted the edge of her slip, just enough for Archimedes to glimpse a flash of her thigh as she straddled his lap facing him.

"No." His hands stayed rigidly at his sides.

"Liar." Her fingertips moved in and traced a line down his breastbone. Sumerian wanted to close her eyes and just give in to the sensation but she knew this was not the time. *But I need – I hunger.*

"It doesn't matter." His hands reached out and circled her waist. "I have other things to sustain me."

Sumerian knew he was touching her only to push her away. "Like what? The plan for your captives?"

"Yes."

"What about me? Surely I'm different from them." She smiled as one of his hands edged down to her hip. *Oh, he remembers.*

"You are."

"So why are you so angry with me?"

"Sumerian." Her name came out like a plea for help.

"Please, Archimedes." *What am I asking for? Is this to save someone else or save that part of me I believe is buried?*

"I do not have time for this."

"What could it hurt?"

"Please, Sumerian —"

"Please you?" She leaned in and touched his face.

"Oh lordy, I cannot believe we are watching this." Marduk was appalled and strangely turned-on. *How weird am I?* They were in the next chamber over. The beauty of hanging out with supernatural beings was they had the ability to make things happen and see what's going on with the minimum of fuss.

"She is quite the actress," Vulcan replied, his eyes never leaving the couple.

"Aren't you jealous?" She turned to look at the demon.

"Me? Why?"

"I sense there's something between you two." Marduk was pleased when Vulcan looked momentarily flustered.

"You are most perceptive." His voice was hard with suppressed emotion.

"I'm a woman. That's what we do," Marduk responded, her eyes never leaving his face. "So, you love the angel." *As does Archimedes if I'm any judge of character.*

Decatur laughed. "I'd tell her or Marduk will never let it go."

"We have history," Vulcan admitted.

"It must kill you to watch him with her."

"Sumerian will not let it go far."

Marduk was not sure about that. No woman touched a man as Sumerian was without having some intense feelings. "Because she loves you?"

Vulcan looked at the Decatur in frustration. "Your woman is most annoying."

"Yeah, but I like that about her."

"Uh-oh, trouser snake at twelve o'clock." The bulge in Archimedes' trousers was way more than Marduk needed to know.

Vulcan squared his shoulders. "Time for us to step in."

"Can't you do the spell here?" That sounded a safer bet to Marduk.

"Archimedes must see the spell worked to know he can no longer control you."

Decatur smiled. "In other words, darling, Vulcan wants to break this up between them."

"Oh right. Jealousy's a terrible thing," Marduk murmured, ready to follow the men.

"Come on." Vulcan's voice was gruff as he waved his hand and they were transported into the chamber.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Archimedes was surprised when they appeared. "Vulcan?" He pushed Sumerian from his lap.

"We've just come to say we're leaving," Decatur told him, his arm around Marduk's waist.

"You cannot go anywhere without my finding you and bringing you back." Archimedes sounded confident of that fact.

"Oh, but they can." Vulcan stood still, his eyes fixed on Decatur and Marduk.

"Dårlig vil ikke søge jer. Dårlig vil ikke på gensyn. Jer vil være i ro. Jer vil være omkostningsfrit hen til opholde sig uden skræk."

There was a sudden wild burst of thunder, a flash of lightning and a high-pitched howl of despair from Archimedes.

"What was that language?" Marduk was agog at the dramatics of the moment.

"It's Danish," Decatur replied. "Vulcan has a Viking heritage. He said, 'Evil will not seek you. Evil will not see you. You will be in peace. You will be free to live without fear.'"

"Excellent spell." Marduk was impressed. It had the right touch of drama and attitude. "Are we free?"

Vulcan answered. "Archimedes can do nothing to you now."

The man in question roared in anger.

As they walked away, Marduk looked back on the three supernatural beings. "What about them?"

"They can look after themselves, darling." Decatur took Marduk's hand and in the blink of an eye they disappeared.

"I will get my souls." Sumerian walked beside Vulcan later in the cool night air. Archimedes had ordered them from his chamber. She was both pleased and saddened. *Our world is strange and demanding and so lonely.*

"I did not doubt that for a second," Vulcan responded.

"Gabriel is not one to be trusted."

"Do I look the trusting sort, Sumerian?"

"No." She was well aware Vulcan made a point of needing no one.

He stopped and faced her. "I hope you get what you want, Sumerian."

She swallowed hard. It had been an emotional evening. Nothing else. "As I do you." *Vulcan does not want me.*

"We will meet again."

Sumerian smiled softly. "I know."

* * * * *

Decatur's cock was buried within Marduk's ass. "This is forever, darling." He lifted his mouth from her back. Decatur had been licking her skin in slow, determined strokes.

Marduk turned her head and looked at Decatur. “Well, maybe for you, Dec, but I’m mortal.” How could there be a forever for them? She would age and die and he would stay as beautiful as he was. What a weird time and place to be having this conversation. But then they were anything but normal. *I like that.*

“I can be mortal if I choose and I do,” Decatur declared.

That was sweet. Rash—but sweet. “That’s a huge step to take.”

“I want to.”

“And I want you to think about it.” Did it really matter who aged or who didn’t as long as they were together and in love?

“I can make you immortal.”

“Whoa!” Marduk hadn’t thought of that. *It would save on face-care products. Hmmm.* “Let’s sleep on it.”

“Sleep?” Decatur pulled her back into his arms. “Why waste the time?” His lips found hers and he kissed her with a hearty passion. “I love you, darling.”

“And I adore you, Dec. Now make me come and I’ll be yours forever.”

About the Author

Amarinda Jones believes anything is possible and sometimes just asking for the impossible will surprise someone enough that they will give it to you. Writing is like that. Put it out there and wait for a response. There is always the possibility you may fall on your ass, but after all, that's what cellulite is for. Amarinda believes in taking chances, speaking her mind and aging disgracefully. Twenty years from now she plans on being the neighborhood witch who all the kids are scared of. But then, everyone has to have a hobby.

Amarinda welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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