



# Wicked City

By

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## Chapter One

“I didn’t realize I’d been dating a vampire until the night I died.”

Lavinia watched as the girls’ eyes widened appreciatively at her story. People were always wanting to know how she got turned. Vampires were all the rage it seemed. She told a different story every time she was asked, only this one was true. She wasn’t schizophrenic or anything and it wasn’t like she had trouble remembering how she’d been turned ...or how she had been betrayed. She just didn’t think it was anyone’s business. So she usually made something up.

The two girls sitting across from her couldn’t have been more than eighteen. They were dressed in black and one was wearing fake fangs. Lavinia fought the urge to roll her eyes. In over two hundred years she had gotten use to the “normal” reaction. Pitchforks, torches, stakes and crosses, that kind of thing. But this new vampire fetish had her stumped. Ever since they had decided to go public her afterlife had changed. Lavinia had always been able to mingle with mortals with relative ease. But now, with all their identifying traits made known, she often stood out in a crowd. Even when she didn’t let her fangs show. Sometimes it was because she was the only one in a restaurant who didn’t eat. Other times it was the near perfection of her alabaster skin that gave her away. Whatever it was, it seemed that everywhere she went, someone wanted to hear her story. Well, tonight she was going to tell it. At least, enough to scare them away.

“So you were bitten by your boyfriend?” the one with the fangs asked.

“Yes. He drained most of my blood and left me for dead.” She reported the tale flatly, as if she were speaking about someone else. She hoped this made it even more frightening to the young women who were so interested to learn more about her. However it was all Lavinia could do to hide the pain she was feeling at just the mention of her true origins.

“Um ...how old are you?”

Lavinia put down the papers she had been trying to read and sighed. “Old enough to know this is not a game. And these aren’t fashion statements.” She pointed at her own fangs. “Go home and find another hobby.”

“But we just--”

“Go home,” she repeated, but her tone was softer this time.

“Interviewing vampires is not a safe pastime.”

“Why, are you going to bite us?”

Lavinia raised a brow. “No. I have no interest in young girls. But I can’t say the same for everyone else here.”

Lavinia gestured toward the rest of the room. She watched as the two girls took the place in with a glance, and quickly departed. In a matter of seconds she was left with only the faint smell of their perfume and a smile

curled her sensuous lips. Maybe she had saved their lives, maybe not. Either way, they had no business in this place. Lavinia took another look at her familiar surroundings. Dark chocolate colored drapes were pulled back, revealing the street outside. Soft rays of moonlight shown onto a few tables and reflected off the black and white checkered floor. Vampires sat in booths around the room. Some were there with companions, deeply engrossed in conversation. Others, like Lavinia, were alone. Unlike her, most did not prefer it that way.

“Sorry about that. I didn’t see them come in.”

Lavinia smiled at the familiar masculine voice. The vampire standing over her was named Judas and he ran A Winter Shade of Pale. It was sort of like a coffee shop, except for vampires. They sold a substance known as Re-vita Life. It had only hit the market in the past couple of years. It was a blood substitute for vamps who were trying to be more politically correct and not drink blood in public. Lavinia wasn’t much for PC, but she actually enjoyed the flavor. Besides, drinking from a coffee cup made her feel almost normal sometimes. She enjoyed what she was. However there were times, like when she saw fear in the eyes of those young girls, that she wanted to be normal for just a little while.

“That’s alright,” she said, smiling up at Judas. “You can’t always keep out the fang bait.”

“The usual?”

“That’ll be fine.”

She only paused a moment to watch him walk away, taking in the tight curve of his ass and the way his long red hair swished when he moved. Maybe she would see him over at Sinful Delights later. She could use a good romp in the sack. She smiled when Judas paused beside the counter and turned back, his long silken hair spilling over one shoulder and down his back. He gave her a wink that seemed to say he could feel her eyes on him and he didn’t mind at all.

Lavinia returned his wink and went back to reading the papers in front of her. They were written in an ancient language the two girls couldn’t possibly have understood, so she hadn’t bothered hiding them. In fact, she’d heard most vampires couldn’t read it either. It was a language spoken only by the ancients and one she had learned a long time ago. From what she understood, most vampires knew nothing of its existence, nor did they care to. It was for this reason that Lavinia could read the death sentence in public.

Her orders were to be carried out tonight. She’d learned not to ask questions. Being an assassin wasn’t the best job she’d ever had, but the money was good and business was never slow. She was known as The Reaper. Only one person knew her true identity. Most who had heard the name didn’t even know if The Reaper was a man or a woman. But the master of the city knew and it was for him that she worked. He had saved her when she was left for dead all those years ago, and Lavinia felt she owed him her allegiance.

Time was growing short. She needed to feed, but business first. She finished her cup of Re-Vita Life and stepped out into the night. The streets

were busy. Traffic moved in an endless flow of metal and people cluttered about on the sidewalks. Everyone looked intent on getting somewhere. People moved around her. No one seemed to notice that she stood still. They just moved around, like water flowing past rocks in a river.

Lavinia looked up at the moon, closed her eyes and breathed in the night. The darkness was her strength and her freedom. It enveloped her like a familiar embrace. The moonlight caressed her pale skin almost like a lover's touch and she smiled, just as oblivious to the people around her as they seemed to be to her. But there was no time to waste. She needed to get moving too.

Lavinia headed across town to her apartment. Being a servant of the master did have its advantages, and her penthouse was one of them. What furnishings she had were expensive, but she had never been much for decorating. Lavinia pulled the death sentence from her inner coat pocket and picked up a lighter on her way to the closet. She lit the papers on fire and tossed them into a metal trash can before changing clothes.

Blood didn't show up on black and it was for this reason she preferred the color. Lavinia had accepted what she was years ago. She wasn't squeamish when it came to blood and she wasn't shy when it came to her sexuality. After all, both were necessary to sustain a succubus. She wore a solid black bodysuit and knee high boots. Her long dark hair blended with the outfit which stood out in sharp contrast against her pale skin and blood-red lips. Her dark eyes sparkled in the mirror as she smiled her approval of her appearance before turning out the light.

Time to go to work.

Robert had been a pain in the master's ass for quite some time. He stuck his nose into too many places where it didn't belong. Honestly, she was surprised she hadn't gotten the order for his execution before tonight. Lavinia preferred to take out her targets from a distance. It made for an easier escape. But this specifically called for "up close and personal." Maybe that was because the order had come directly from the vampire council. Once the master spoke to them of Robert's nosy ways, they decided he had to go. And not in a pleasant way.

She was to cut out his heart and bring it back in a box "Snow White" style. Only she had forgotten to bring a box. She was halfway across town and closing fast on Robert's location when she realized her mistake. Lavinia could move at superhuman speed and preferred to go on foot to find her targets. That way she didn't have to worry about her car getting blocked in when she needed to make a fast get-a-way. She came to a screeching halt in an alleyway and started rummaging around for a decent box. A Chinese takeout carton was the best she could do.

"Gross."

She dumped the carton's half-eaten contents onto the pavement, careful to get nothing on her hands or clothes. It smelled like ass, but it would have to do. In a matter of minutes she stepped back onto the sidewalk. There were only a few people out at this hour and in a bad part of the city.

Lavinia definitely stood out. Two men from across the street looked her way and she captured them with her eyes.

“Do not see me,” she whispered.

The men went back to talking to each other as if she didn't exist and Lavinia took off once more toward her target.

She stopped several feet short of the building where he was supposed to be. The master had arranged for Robert to meet one of his representatives here. He had made up some bullshit business deal as a premise for the meeting and it looked like Robert had taken the bait. She moved slowly past his car and sat the takeout carton on the hood before stepping out of the shadows.

Robert had his back turned and she was quite certain that he was unaware of her presence. He had long brown hair and was only slightly taller than she. His dark eyes glimmered in the faint light as he turned to greet her.

“Lavinia,” Robert said, moving toward her. “I didn't expect to see you.”

“Well, I am a representative of the master. Have you obeyed his command and come alone?”

He spread his arms wide in a harmless gesture.

“Why, can't we do business if I brought a friend?” he teased.

“I'm afraid not.”

“I'm alone,” he answered, but she already knew that.

Lavinia was on him in a heartbeat and though he struggled, Robert was no match for a vampire over a hundred and fifty years older than himself. She wrapped her legs around his waist with such force that his ribs cracked. When he cried out in pain, she broke his neck, taking him to the ground.

Her hand was a blur as she removed the dagger from her boot and sliced off his head before setting to work at removing his heart. She packed the heart as neatly as possible into the carton before licking her fingers. Just as she did so a chill ran through her and the sky rumbled overhead.

“A storm must be coming,” she thought.

Lavinia was starving, but feeding from his body was out of the question. If someone were to find him before dawn, it would give away the fact that The Reaper was a vampire. As it stood now, no one knew if The Reaper was human, vampire, or some sort of shape shifter. She was always careful not to leave any identifying marks behind in order to add to the mystique.

The taste of blood, though small, was enough to kick her libido into overdrive. Sex and blood go hand and hand for one like her and Lavinia knew when to give in to her cravings. Sex was a primal urge, a drive. A need as basic to human survival as food and shelter. That desire did not diminish with death, for the undead still hearken to its call.

She picked up a ratty old suitcase in another alley and put the carton inside it. She knew where to find the master and that's where she was headed. He would be at his club. The fact that he owned the largest preternatural sex club in Wicked City was just a bonus.

Sinful Delights wasn't hard to find. It was located in the heart of the city and sex radiated from the building in waves. Halfway there it started to

rain, but that wasn't the only reason Lavinia was wet by the time she knocked on the door. A slot high on the door opened and a pair of pale blue eyes looked down at her. Lavinia saw the desire reflected in those eyes as they took in her appearance and a hungry growl could be heard on the other side of the door.

"Let me in."

She was well known here and didn't need a password to enter. The tall blond werewolf swung the door wide and motioned for her to step through. The building smelled like an old theatre, perhaps because it used to be one, but underneath that was the smell of cologne and sex. Lavinia breathed deeply as she stepped through the door and smiled.

"It would be my pleasure," he said, and his meaning was clear. If she wanted werewolf, he was on the menu tonight.

Logan always looked good enough to eat, but never more than he did tonight. He was six foot four and every inch of him was just as gorgeous as the last. Lavinia knew this from personal experience and she smiled with the memory as she reached up to place her hand on his bare chest. He was wearing black leather pants that fit well over the parts she recalled so fondly. His dark blue shirt hung completely open. She pressed a kiss against his skin and breathed deeply of his scent. He smelled of leather, whiskey and fresh night air. It was actually quite alluring. Lavinia kissed his smooth skin once more before pulling back.

"Maybe later," she purred. "Is he in?"

She didn't need to clarify her request. Logan knew she had come to see the master.

"Upstairs."

Lavinia moved past a few of the other rooms on her way toward the stairs. Sounds of sex could be heard from within and she felt her muscles tighten. She could feel desire emanating from the rooms, pouring from the very walls. And though she could feed from it, it was not enough to satiate her craving. She hungered for hard male flesh. Lavinia gritted her teeth against the sensations coursing through her and focused on the task at hand.

At the very top of the stairs, at the very end of the hall, behind a red door was where she would find who could best be described as her oldest companion. The door opened before she could reach for it and a familiar smile welcomed her into the room. Jean Philippe was more than every young vampire's wet dream, he was the master of Wicked City and from the looks of things, he was very glad to see her.

"There's my killer."

The master let his hungry eyes drink in the sight of her. She was absolutely beautiful. Her long hair was wet from the storm outside and it clung about her shoulders like a dark cloud. Her tongue darted out to wet heart-shaped red lips and he smiled at his body's reaction. In two hundred years his desire for her had not decreased in the slightest.

Jean Philippe still remembered the first time he'd ever laid eyes on her, surrounded by a pool of her own blood. Even then she had been lovely, a

blood splattered angel in his eyes. It was obvious to him what she had the potential to become. He could see it in her eyes. She was a tigress, a warrior. She must have been caught unawares, he'd thought. He saw Lavinia that first time as the predator she was and not the prey she had become. "Yes," he thought as he watched her hips sway, her prowess evident in the movement. "Definitely a tigress."

Jean Philippe's hair was in slight disarray this evening and he tucked a stray curl behind his ear as he moved to prop against the desk.

"I trust everything went smoothly tonight." He made it a question, but he already knew the answer.

His French accent was always a welcome pleasure and Lavinia smiled at the sound as she opened the suitcase and sat it on the desk beside him. Jean Philippe wrinkled his nose in apparent distaste as he removed the white, blood-stained carton from the case.

"Uh, this smells like ass."

"You didn't say what it needed to smell like. You just said what needed to be inside." She gestured toward the carton. "Robert's heart, as promised."

"And on time." Jean Philippe placed the heart back inside the suitcase. "Your payment will be ready within the hour." He spoke as pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his hands.

Lavinia took a step toward him and opened his vest. His long black coat hung over the back of the chair and his white shirt was already unbuttoned, leaving only his vest standing between her and his bare skin. She ran a finger down his chest and he shivered beneath her touch.

"I'll take part now," she said boldly. "And I'll take it in flesh and blood."

A slow smile curved his lips. "Whose flesh and whose blood?"

She opened his shirt wide, placing her hands directly over his nipples. "Your flesh and Logan's blood."

"Is that all?" he teased.

"That depends. Is Judas around?"

Lavinia stood waiting a few moments later when Logan entered the room accompanied by the tall redheaded vampire. He was wearing a silver shirt and skin tight black pants. He moved into the room with confidence and winked at Jean Philippe before turning his attention toward Lavinia.

"So good to see you again," Judas said, smiling. "How can I be of service?"

She liked to be in charge and they knew it. This was not the first time the four of them had played this game. She had had them in so many ways and yet she always wanted more. Hungered for it, in fact. Lavinia wasn't dating Jean Philippe, though she knew most people assumed that was the case. Their relationship wasn't even one of romance ...it was one of need. He had saved her when she needed saving and now she turned to him for satisfaction. It was as simple as that.

"Help me take off my boots," she said softly.

Judas knelt at her feet and did as he was asked. When he looked up at



her from the floor Lavinia felt a thrill run through her. She really liked Judas kneeling before her. It made her feel powerful and turned her on something fierce. From what the men had shared with her, they liked her in control just as much as she did, so it was a familiar game. However, that didn't seem to make the players any less excited.

The master preferred to watch and so he rested against the desk as the scene unfolded before him. He watched as Lavinia's dark eyes began to glow with passion. He had only known one succubus before her. They had met briefly in Asia before her untimely death at the hands of vampire hunters. She was significantly older than him but nowhere near as powerful as Lavinia. And Lavinia was under half her age. The price of such power was an even stronger hunger for sexual energy. It was a price he was glad to help her pay, though he sometimes wondered if Lavinia grew tired of the necessity of so many lovers. Even though they were intimate on a regular basis, she let no one near her heart. Jean Philippe knew the reasoning behind this, but he wondered if she ever wanted something more.

Logan moved behind her and started unzipping the wet bodysuit. He ran his hands up and down her body with a growl before he started removing the wet fabric. He could smell her arousal, like a rich perfume mingled with the scent of fresh rain and he hungered for her touch.

"I hadn't realized it was raining so hard," the werewolf said, his breath a warm promise across her skin.

He licked a few drops of moisture from her back and she shivered.

"Not that I mind getting a little wet."

Lavinia was starving, but she hungered for more than his blood. Logan wanted her. She could feel it in his touch. She could smell his desire. But she needed to taste it, to drink it down into her very soul. She turned to face him and stared up once more into his pale blue eyes. White blond hair fell forward over his shoulders as he bent forward and she licked her lips in anticipation.

His lips were pale, pink and perfect. Her skin still tingled from the last time those lips had touched her and she ached for them to do so again. Lavinia stood on tiptoe and Logan moved to meet her kiss. His tongue plunged inside her mouth as Judas finished peeling the wet bodysuit down her legs.

From across the room the master smiled when he saw she hadn't been wearing anything underneath.

She opened the werewolf's shirt wider and pressed her bare breasts against him. She reached back to touch Judas and with her lips still devouring Logan she commanded, "Take off your clothes."

Her sensual command came out as more of a moan against the werewolf's lips, but Judas seemed to have no trouble understanding her.

## Chapter Two

Judas quickly disrobed while Lavinia moved to sit on the sofa against the far wall. She leaned back, thrusting her hips forward as she spread her legs in invitation. It was a bold gesture and Judas smiled as she motioned for him to come forward. His body was a vision of masculine grace as he moved across the room. Each muscle flexed perfectly in time as if choreographed to make her senses reel on command. His dark grey eyes reminded her of London fog and as he knelt between her thighs his hair fell forward, glowing beneath the dim lights like a captive flame.

Strands of silken amber framed his face and his eyes glowed almost silver as he pressed his lips against her inner thigh.

“What is your desire?” he asked.

“Eat my pussy.”

Lavinia felt her eyes roll to the back of her head before fluttering into focus on Judas’ amber hair as it fell over her thighs and spilled onto her belly. Apparently, the scene was too much for Logan to take. He lowered his head to her breast with a growl and Lavinia cried out.

Judas continued to lap at her flesh while Logan tormented her already hard nipples almost to the point of pain. But that was alright. She liked for it to almost hurt sometimes. There is a very fine line between pain and pleasure. It’s that moment when pleasure becomes pain and pain becomes pleasurable. She knew Logan understood what she was after when he let his teeth gently graze her nipple to heighten the sensation.

Lavinia put her arm across the werewolf’s shoulders and held him tightly against her breast. At the same time she moved her other hand to the top of Judas’ head and arched provocatively against his face.

Over Logan’s back she saw Jean Philippe, still content to watch from across the room. He smiled and she knew he was enjoying this as much as she was. It wasn’t long before she couldn’t take any more of Judas’ skillful tongue. She needed relief from the coiled knots in her muscles and from the searing ache between her thighs.

Logan lifted up and Lavinia moved so that Judas had no choice but to lift his head. This put him right where she wanted him with her straddling his waist. Lavinia leaned forward and kissed him hungrily, tasting her own arousal on his wet lips.

She reached between their bodies and took his hard shaft in her hand, bringing a groan unbidden from his lips.

“Give it to me,” she whispered, her voice husky with desire. “Now.”

The instant Judas began to penetrate her she could feel his desire flowing into her along with his hot flesh. With one thrust he entered her fully and Lavinia wrapped herself around him. She placed her hands flat

against his back and felt the energy, the unbridled sexual passion flowing from him and into her veins like liquid fire. Lavinia moaned and slid forward, nearly coming off the sofa entirely in order to get closer to Judas.

Every move she made aroused him further and as a result of Lavinia drinking down his desire, Judas kept thrusting into her with wild abandon. This back and forth game kept orgasm just out of his reach. But he would have been disappointed with any less.

Logan saw the way her skin began to glow and knew that she was feeding from Judas. He moved to sit behind her, straddling her butt so that she could rest back against his body. He just wanted to be near her when she fed. The feeling was incredible.

Lightning flashed so bright that for a moment Jean Philippe feared he had misread the clock and dawn was upon them. Everyone stopped and turned toward the large window at the back of the room. Rain pelted the glass mercilessly and the lights gave one last brave flicker before going out.

The master moved like a graceful shadow in the dark and closed the heavy drapes against the storm.

“Who needs light when you can see in the dark?”

Lavinia watched as a slow smile curved his lips and knew he planned to join them this time. This room served as more than just an office. It was one of the many daytime resting places he kept. Jean Philippe lit a few candles near the bed at the back of the room and with a curl of his finger, motioned for her to come to him.

Lavinia crawled across the bed toward him. She had meant to take her time and enjoy the night. But she could no longer hold back. She hungered for his flesh just as she hungered for the werewolf's blood. She could feel herself losing control as she opened his pants and took his cock into her mouth. He gasped, throwing back his head as the werewolf crawled onto the bed to join them.

Judas rested back against the pillows and simply enjoyed the show for a moment. It was such an arousing display. He watched Lavinia practically choking on Jean Philippe's hard cock while Logan licked up and down her back. When Logan nipped at her ass, the succubus turned on him and Judas moved forward.

She had her legs around Logan in an instant and as he fought to get his pants off she sank her teeth into his neck. She was so lost in the moment, in the ecstasy of his blood, that she didn't realize he'd gotten out of his pants until he thrust inside of her. She tossed back her head, screaming with surprise and pleasure as Jean Philippe leaned forward to claim her lips.

He licked every drop of the werewolf's blood from her cherry lips and couldn't decide which he liked more. The taste of blood, or watching her have sex right in front of him.

“Harder,” Judas whispered. He needed to hear the sound of Logan slamming into her soft flesh. He lowered his head to her breasts and she moaned, pulling his face closer.

With a look the master let Logan know that it was time to switch places.

Even after all the times he had touched her before, the master always gave her chills. Lavinia knew his touch in ways that went beyond words. She made a decision a long time ago to never let anyone close to her heart again. She promised herself that she would never again endure the pain of love. Jean Philippe had come closer than anyone to breaking that promise.

He always took his time with her, even if they were only hours before dawn. He refused to hurry. That was one of the main reasons she loved having sex with him. She never got short-changed. He ran his fingertips down her abdomen and she quaked beneath his touch, arching her body upward. She learned long ago to take pleasure and pride in what she was. Succubi were a dying breed and hers was a rare and sensuous power. She learned this and many other things at the command of the hands that now caressed her body. Lavinia turned herself over to the power of his touch.

He entered her slowly, grazing his fangs over her lower lip as he did so. She could feel Logan standing over her and when she turned her head slightly, found his wrist. She knew what he was asking for. They were awfully close to dawn and even if that did not concern the master, it concerned everyone else.

Logan didn't want to be left with a bed full of dead vampires piled all over each other. As head of the daytime guard, it would be his job to sort things out and to make sure the room was secure before dawn. He needed enough time to do his job without having to worry about keeping them out of the light.

Her bite, if sustained for longer than a few moments, was orgasmic. It was also transferable from one body to the next, almost like lightning. She looked to Judas for his consent and he smiled in response. She sank her fangs into Logan's wrist at the same time Jean Philippe bent forward and bit her just above the heart. As he did this he held out his wrist to allow Judas to drink from him.

She took a good long pull from the werewolf's wrist and release washed over her. She felt herself contract around Jean Philippe and heard him moan, though he did not break contact with her breast. He continued to drink from her as she drank from Logan and orgasm hit them all like a wave, crashing against the rocks.

The storm had now reached a deafening pitch, but none of them heard it. And if they had, they wouldn't have given a damn. That was their second mistake. The first was not knowing that they had been the cause of the storm in the first place.

\* \* \* \*

Lavinia felt completely refreshed. She wanted to bask in the afterglow but knew that time was short.

"I've got just enough time for a shower." She rolled over Jean Philippe and Judas. The generator had just kicked on and she planned to take advantage. It wasn't designed to keep the club running indefinitely, but for a few hours at a time. She knew Jean Philippe would likely turn it off during the day in the event that it was needed for another night.

Logan was just finishing his inspection of the room

“I don’t think any light will get through these drapes. But just in case, I’m going to have some blinds installed tomorrow night.”

The master didn’t stay here often. It was for this reason that the room needed to be checked. Although he could be found here most nights, at least for a while.

“By blinds you mean those large metal shutters like I’ve got at home?” Lavinia asked.

“Exactly. They’re the perfect thing for vampires.”

“Yep,” Judas agreed. “I’ve got them on the shop, just in case I have to stay there during the day.”

Even though they were her regular sex partners, the three men were also her friends. They had gotten about as close as she’d allowed anyone in the past two hundred years. When they weren’t having sex, she felt sort of like one of the guys. They didn’t seem to mind her emotional detachment and she was thankful that they never questioned her reasons.

Jean Philippe knew her reasons and it was because of this that he guarded her so closely. If she didn’t want to be hurt again, then he would try to keep that from happening. He had never asked for her love, only her trust. That was enough for him. He watched as Logan continued to busy himself with double checking the room and smiled. The werewolf was also overprotective where Lavinia was concerned. He didn’t think she’d ever shared the full details of her past with him, but Jean Philippe felt that Logan knew enough to have feelings similar to his own. Judas knew only that she had been hurt badly before, both physically and emotionally. That was all that the master had told him because it was not his story to tell. He didn’t have the right to reveal more.

After a few minutes he decided to join her in the shower. The smell of her soap filled the room, which was already beginning to fill with steam from the hot water. Jean Philippe always welcomed a visit from her and for this reason he was sure to keep some of her favorite soap on hand. He observed the lithe curves of her silhouette through the cream colored shower curtain and a slow smile curled his lips.

Lavinia could feel him watching her and she smiled when he pulled back the curtain. He moved closer and she handed him the shampoo.

“Do my hair?”

“Sure.” He poured some of the shampoo into the palm of his hand and began to massage her scalp as he asked, “Did everything really go fine tonight?”

“You think I’m lying?”

She took a moment to enjoy his long fingers in her hair while waiting for his answer.

He didn’t think she was lying, however, he chose his words carefully. He knew something wasn’t right.

“You know I trust you,” he said softly. “That’s all we’ve ever really had, you and I. But something passed behind your eyes tonight. Not a lie ...

but something else. Tell me everything. Humor me.”

Lavinia turned to him and he wiped at the suds on her forehead.

“When I told you things went fine I wasn’t lying. It’s what I felt that worries me.”

“Go on.”

“When I killed Robert ...well, I was starving. I knew better than to bite him but I licked my fingers after removing his heart.”

“And?”

“And his blood tasted ...like magic. Like a different sort of magic.” She looked up to meet his dark green eyes and he hoped she was warned by the concern he could not hide. “It scared me, Jean. For a split second I was frightened. But you know the effect blood has on me. Before I could give much thought to it I was on fire. I had to have sex and blood and I had to have them immediately.”

Lavinia rinsed her hair while he thought over what she’d just said. The part that concerned him most was her admitting to being afraid. In all the years he had known her, Lavinia had never before told him she was afraid. Not since that first night ...

“But nothing looked strange? Robert, did he struggle?”

She shrugged. “Only as much as expected when someone is trying to kill you. But he was no problem. I wish I could describe the taste so you could understand.”

The heart was still on the desk, inside the suitcase. But the blood was no longer fresh. Whatever magical properties it had before were likely gone now. It was for this reason that neither of them considered tasting the dried blood an option.

“Whatever it was, it’s over now,” he said.

Lavinia wanted to take comfort in his words, but her skin still crawled with the memory. She knew something wasn’t right. But since she had no idea what she decided to push the thought aside.

Jean Philippe stepped out of the shower and handed her a towel before opening the bathroom door.

“If anyone else wants a shower, now’s the time. I’m going to tell them to shut the generator off until mid afternoon.”

\* \* \* \*

Lavinia awoke the next evening to the sound of the television blaring. She hated television. Worse still, Jean Philippe was watching the news. She rolled over Judas and off the other side of the bed.

“Could you at least turn that down? You know I fucking hate the news.”

Thunder rumbled so loud outside that for a moment she thought an explosion had gone off. Normally she enjoyed a good storm but this sounded more like a war than the soft pitter patter of rain. She half expected to find shrapnel on the concrete outside instead of puddles.

“Jean, please. I can’t take the storm and that damn television.”

“Hush.”

Lavinia stopped in her tracks. Master or not, he did not speak to her

that way. It just wasn't his nature.

"Don't you want to know what's causing that?" he asked, pointing toward the window.

"The same things that have caused storms for countless centuries, I would imagine."

"Think again."

He rose from the bed, still completely nude and opened the drapes. Then he took her by the arm and led her over to the open window.

"Jean, I don't know what you want me to look at. It's a storm"

"Look closer."

Lavinia stared out into the almost complete darkness. She looked over the tops of buildings and past the sides of others, out onto the vast city. Lightning flashed again and she saw it. With a scream she jumped back from the glass.

"What the fuck is that?!"

"They're calling it the Leviathan," he answered, pointing at the television. "Apparently it appeared last night about the time the power went out. They say it knocked out a whole block. No one knows for sure what it is or how it got here."

Lavinia put her arm around Jean Philippe's waist. She looked toward the reporter who was standing in the street three floors below, pointing up at the creature.

"I'm more interested in why it's here and how to make it leave," she said.

According to what had been filmed during the day, the creature was circling the city. It had no wings, and yet it somehow floated through the sky. It swam through the air just as if it were the ocean. It would appear that the monster came with the storm.

Lavinia and Jean Philippe were in the shower again when Judas finally woke up. He came rushing into the bathroom a few minutes later.

"Fuck me! Have you guys seen the news?! If it's alright with you, I'm going to close up shop and stay here for a few nights."

"That's fine," the master answered. "Whatever that thing is, it doesn't appear to be able to enter the city. But you can stay here if you like." He turned to Lavinia then and spoke softly for her ears alone, "I would prefer it if you stayed too, just until I can figure out what is going on."

"I was kind of afraid to go out anyway," she admitted.

\* \* \* \*

The storm and the monster concerned her, but she couldn't have asked for more than being confined in the master's club for a few nights. The old theatre had been renovated long ago, transforming it into Sinful Delights, the most celebrated preternatural sex club around. Everyone was afraid of what was going on outside, humans, vampires and shifters were all staying indoors for the most part. But that didn't mean that those working at the club didn't show up for their shifts.

The building was decorated in a lush, decadent style. Red, gold and

black were the predominant colors. It reminded her of some of the old opera houses in France in the 1800's. It had that same delightful garishness about it. Some of the rooms downstairs were bedrooms which could be rented. But most of them were set up for live performances. Despite the type of business it was, there were no prostitutes at Sinful Delights. And everyone who worked there was willing to do so. They simply performed for the audience. Some shows were nothing but good old fashioned dirty dancing. Others consisted of masturbation. But Lavinia's favorite thing was watching the live sex shows that the local werewolf pack performed from time to time out of the goodness of their hearts. Those who starred in the shows did so for free. They volunteered, hoping only for the pleasure of a few vampire bites. The club profited mostly from drink sales and the generous donations of those who insisted on paying for their entertainment. However, it was only the wolf pack's performances which were free. Everyone else, werewolf or otherwise got a paycheck.

But there wasn't a live performance scheduled for the evening, at least not on stage. She could still watch a show from one of the private rooms though, and that was what she intended to do. If she had to spend a night or two at Sinful Delights, might as well enjoy it. Besides, she was starving.

Lavinia didn't have any clothes in Jean Philippe's room upstairs that weren't dirty. Though she normally kept a few items at the club, they had all been sent to be cleaned. Jean Philippe was busy communicating with other master vampires in various cities in the hopes of finding out what was going on. He was so busy that he didn't notice as she slipped on his black silk robe and quietly left the room.

The club was almost empty so she was easy to spot coming down the stairs. Logan watched her from behind the bar and smiled. She reminded him of a cat prowling around in the dark. The black robe and long dark hair only added to the illusion, making her appear somehow even more pale. Her skin was luminous beneath the dim lights and every strand of hair glistened at the height of one wave before dipping back into the dark sea of tresses. She moved past him with the barest of smiles and he knew exactly where she was going.

Lavinia entered the room near the back of the club and took a seat on the plush red sofa. Instantly a light came on inside the large booth which was separated from her by a pane of glass. She could see them but they couldn't see her. She recognized these performers. The woman was a vampire named Cherry and the man, a werewolf named Adam. And they were good...very good.

The show began with little preamble, which was fine with her. Their lust for each other was palpable, even from behind the glass. Lavinia closed her eyes as their hands roamed over each other and began to drink in their desire. Adam took Cherry's breasts in his hands and she moaned, causing Lavinia to gasp in response. It wasn't what he did that was so arousing, it was the way he did it. Adam touched Cherry like there was nothing in the world he'd rather be doing and that turned Lavinia on in a way she could not



describe.

The show continued and soon they were both undressed. Not that they'd been wearing much in the first place. Cherry rested back against the red sofa on their side of the glass and spread her legs wide in invitation.

"Jean, I need you."

Lavinia's voice echoed through his mind. Her plea was both urgent and passionate. Jean Philippe was just finishing a conversation with the master of New Orleans, who was very familiar with magic. Even he had no clue as to what was happening in Wicked City. They would have to wait for further word from the council to see if the vampire elders knew how to handle the situation. But in the meantime, he could help Lavinia with her fervent request.

"Logan."

He heard her just as clearly as if she was standing beside him calling his name. But that's all she had to do. There was nothing more to say. Logan knew what she wanted and he was more than willing to give it to her.

He reached the door just as Jean Philippe came hurrying down the stairs. The vampire caught his look and smiled. They were obviously both eager to answer Lavinia's summons. Logan decided to wait for him and let the master enter the room first.

They stepped inside just in time to see Adam's ass moving up and down as he pumped in and out of Cherry who was screaming in ecstasy beneath him on the sofa.

Lavinia was practically writhing as she watched. Sure she could get herself off if she needed to. But it just wasn't the same. Masturbation did not satisfy the needs of a succubus. It was more like a snack when she needed a four course meal.

"What took you so long?" Lavinia panted.

"I came as quickly as I could, ma chéri."

"He ran," Logan teased. He winked at Jean Philippe. "And so did I. How can we help?"

Lavinia didn't speak. She rose to her feet ignoring the scene behind her for the moment, save for the sounds of pleasure that echoed in the room. She pulled the sash on the robe she had borrowed and let it fall to the floor.

Jean Philippe made the first move which was rare for him. But tonight with the storm raging and a monster floating over the city, he felt a sense of urgency to take her in his arms. He wanted to bury himself inside her flesh and forget his troubles for the moment. He ran his hands through her hair and claimed her mouth possessively, his tongue instantly tangling with hers.

Lavinia melted into his kiss and began to pull the black silk shirt from his pants. Jean Philippe reached between them and hurriedly unbuckled his belt, never once breaking their kiss. Lavinia's hands roamed up and over his shoulders, pulling the shirt down his arms. He pulled back only long enough to remove the garment and to unzip his pants before drawing her back to him with a lusty grin.

Logan wasn't used to seeing Jean Philippe appear so eager and felt himself growing harder as he watched them

"What are you waiting for," the master said, a teasing note in his voice, "take off your clothes."

Before Logan could finish stripping, Lavinia pushed Jean Philippe back onto the sofa and straddled his waist. Logan heard her moan and knew without looking that the vampire was inside of her. Lavinia may not have known it, but she had a very distinctive moan when she was with Jean Philippe. And Logan recognized it instantly.

"Yes," she cried.

Jean Philippe thrust into her, deep and hard and she threw back her head, drawing him into her arms at the same time. Lavinia looked into his eyes and found them completely green. They glowed in the darkness of the room and when he licked his lips she lowered her head to do the same. She took first his bottom then his top lip into her mouth, gently grazing them with her fangs while she sucked on the delicate skin.

Logan pressed against her back, his already warm skin fevered by his desire.

"I need his blood," she whispered against Jean Philippe's lips.

He moved and allowed the werewolf to take his place. Jean Philippe was very well endowed, but Logan was bigger and she took her time lowering herself onto him. But slowly, inch by inch, Lavinia nearly took him all while the werewolf trailed kisses down her throat and breasts. He flicked his tongue across one hard nipple and she screamed.

"Take me," he growled. "Take me now or the beast will take over."

She looked up into his eyes, which had already turned amber, and knew there wasn't a moment to waste. That had happened to them a few times in the past. Lavinia had excited him to the point that Logan completely lost control and the beast took over. She hadn't found the experience disagreeable, but Logan didn't particularly enjoy it. It was for this reason that she honored his request.

Logan turned his head in invitation and she sank her fangs into his neck. She could feel the instant he came. His blood flowed into her as his desire sent her over the edge as well. Jean Philippe leaned over her from behind and bit her neck in order to share what she was feeling. Rapture spread over and throughout her body with such intensity that for a moment she wasn't sure of her surroundings.

"Wow," Logan said breathlessly. "That was amazing."

Lavinia smiled at him while Jean Philippe helped her to stand.

Apparently, they made a lot of noise. When they were finished they turned to find Cherry and Adam with their faces pressed against the glass, trying to see through to the other side.

"Lavinia?" Adam called. "Is that you?"

She laughed.

"I think you should have been on this side."

\* \* \* \*

Three days later the storm was still there, and so was the monster. No one knew what its purpose was, but Jean Philippe finally managed to get in touch with the vampire council. Their best guess was that it had entered through a portal to the demon world. It was a creature of remarkable power. But worse yet was the one who could control such a beast. They said that only a very powerful wizard would even be capable of opening the portal, let alone calling forth something like the Leviathan.

“Do you know of any such wizard?” he asked.

“Synn.”

One word. That was the only clue they had. No sooner had the council given Jean Philippe the name than it somehow found its way to the street. It was as if word of him spread by magic at just the mention of his name. People began to whisper about the wizard Synn. Maybe he was controlling the beast, some said. And still others thought he could fight it. As they listened to all of this on the news, the master found himself overcome with mirth.

“Ha! Good luck with that. Humph, getting him to fight the monster. HA!”

“What do you mean?” Lavinia asked.

“If this wizard still exists, and that’s a big if, he’s a fiend.”

“How so?”

“I thought Synn was just a fairytale until the council mentioned him. Now there are rumors that he lives right here in Wicked City. Right under our noses.”

“Yes, but how is he a fiend?”

“According to legend, the guy sacrificed his own wife in order to obtain immortality.”

“How fucking sick is that?” Logan chimed in from across the room.

Lavinia thought about that for a moment and shivered. He sounded a lot like someone she used to know. Like someone she had made the mistake of getting involved with. Then again just about every villain seemed to have something in common with her former lover. He was a bastard.

“There is one way to know for sure if a wizard is here,” Jean Philippe said. “I have this charm I’ve had it for years and never used it. Honestly, I thought wizards were extinct. Anyway, you take this charm and you hold it up into the storm-”

“And get struck by lightning?! Have you lost your mind?” Lavinia snapped.

Jean Philippe smiled ruefully and held up his hand for silence.

“Let me finish. If this thing actually works, the lightning won’t flow through it. It will empower it. Then, it’s supposed to show you the way. That is ...if there is a real wizard around and if it really works.”

“And if it doesn’t?”

“You might have a really bad night.” He shrugged. “But it’s probably all bullshit anyway. What worries me is how did everybody else hear about him? Am I the master of this city or not? If he is here, how come I didn’t know?”

Lavinia walked toward the bathroom then turned back to Jean Philippe.  
“Maybe he didn’t want anyone to know.”

Someone who was powerful enough to cloud the minds of master vampires, now that was something to worry about. The rain came and went, but always there were storm clouds and lightning and the Leviathan swimming through it. Lavinia kept looking out the window. It wasn’t that she wanted to see the creature. She was trying to get numb to its appearance ...trying to work up her nerve for what she planned to do.

## Chapter Three

It didn't take much to find the charm Jean Philippe was talking about. It was the only odd piece of jewelry she hadn't seen him wear before and it was locked in his safe. She was the only one he had trusted with the combination, just in case something happened to him. Of course Lavinia was trustworthy. She was only after the charm, not everything else he had hidden. Besides, she planned to return the charm after she was finished. It looked like just an old key on a necklace. But when she walked toward the window with it, the key began to glow. She had her answer, now she just needed the courage to go outside.

Everyone else was downstairs playing cards. The normally busy sex club had temporarily closed its doors. It seemed not many people were in the mood since the monster appeared. Either that or they were just afraid to go outside. According to the news people were refusing to go to work in some places, even quitting their jobs to avoid going outside. The creature hadn't harmed anyone yet, but that's not to say it wasn't capable. No one knew for sure.

She pulled on a pair of black pants and one of the master's black shirts before slipping on her boots and opening the door. In a matter of seconds she was out on the fire escape and climbing up to the roof. Once there she caught sight of the beast through flashes of lightning. It was so far away now that it almost looked small. Lavinia breathed a sigh of relief. That meant she had several minutes before it circled this way again.

She took the necklace off and held the key high into the air. After a minute of nothing but getting whipped by rain and wind she was starting to feel stupid. But then it happened. Lightning split the sky. It moved toward her so fast she didn't even have time to scream. All she did manage to do was close her eyes.

Trembling fiercely, she looked up to find her arm still extended and the charm glowing brightly in her hand. The lightning was gone. Nothing was singing around her and she was completely unharmed.

"How is that possible?" she mumbled.

About that time the monster let out a terrible screech, audible even at such a distance. It must have known what she was doing because it looked really pissed off. It reared back its ugly head and started her way.

"Come on, damn it. Where's the wizard?"

The key glowed so bright it was nearly blinding. In an instant a beam of light shot from the tip of the key and straight across town. It only lasted for a second. After that the key looked normal again and she was out of time. The monster was so close that she could smell its foul stench and fear gripped her like a physical thing.

She turned to find Jean Philippe racing onto the roof behind her.

“Lavinia, what’s going on? What are you doing up here?”

“Jean, run!”

He looked up and saw the monster and a look of rage passed over his features.

“I will not.”

His eyes began to glow solid green and he stepped in front of her.

“What are you doing?! We have to get inside!”

Lavinia tried to pull him but it was useless. The master meant to stand his ground.

“I don’t think he can come this close.”

“So you’re going to play chicken with a monster?!”

The beast let out another yell and dove straight toward the roof where they stood. Lavinia fell to her knees behind Jean Philippe, but he stood his ground. He stared up into the face of the monster and laughed at its snapping jaws.

“Something is keeping him out,” he said calmly. “Just as I suspected. I don’t know if this wizard is controlling him or not. But some magic is keeping him at bay.”

Lavinia was shaking uncontrollably. She hated sea creatures. They were the only things to ever really scare her and this was just too much to take.

“Get me away from that monster,” she said, keeping her eyes on the ground. “Get me away now, Jean or I’m going to lose it.”

He gathered her in his arms and carried her back inside. Much later he asked if she was able to use the charm

“Did it work?”

“I didn’t get a chance to find out.”

She wasn’t sure why she’d just lied to him. Oddly enough, it seemed like the right thing to do. At least for the moment. Lavinia wanted to see this wizard for herself before she turned him over to the master. Because the master would turn him over to the council and whether he was guilty or not, that most likely would mean his death.

Once word got out that the monster couldn’t actually come into the city, life got back to some semblance of normalcy. Well, as normal as things could be with a giant monster circling the city and a storm that refused to go away. The only thing Jean Philippe was able to find out for sure about the wizard was that no one had ever seen his face. At least, not in recent history. No one knew what he looked like or even if he was definitely still alive. Still, rumors were spreading like wildfire across the city.

Someone had to be helping them spread, because it sure as hell wasn’t him. People were saying that Synn was responsible for their present misfortune. It had become the general consensus that he was evil and he was in control of the monster. News reports were starting to speculate that he was holding the city for ransom. Only he hadn’t come forward with any demands. The good news was that the monster couldn’t get in. The bad news was, they couldn’t get out. It was as if an invisible wall blocked Wicked

City from the rest of the world. People could still get in, much to their dismay. But they couldn't leave.

It had been a week and a half now and no one was any closer to a solution. They were also not any closer to learning about the wizard. Everyone from demonologists to priests had tried to get rid of the monster. They'd even called in the National Guard. But nothing worked.

Lavinia had returned to her penthouse and there she sat, wondering what to do next. She still remembered where the light had shown and it wasn't terribly far from where she was. It couldn't hurt to go take a look, could it?

Whatever she wore was likely to get wet anyway. So she didn't put much thought into her attire. She put on a pair of dark jeans and a black turtleneck before heading out. Rather than bringing a weapon or binoculars, she decided to take a scope from one of her guns. It was easier to carry and she was used to looking through it. Binoculars felt too much like spying on someone. Looking through a scope felt more like ...work.

She was a little bit hungry, but this wouldn't take all night. There would be time to eat later. She just wanted to see if there was really a wizard in Wicked City. So having no idea what he looked like, she positioned herself on a rooftop and waited for him to appear. She was directly across from where the light had pointed. As best she could tell, the building across from her was completely empty. No lights were on, though she could see furniture so someone lived there. There was nothing overly suspicious about the place. No voodoo dolls lying about or odd symbols painted over the door.

While she continued to focus the scope in order to peer through the window, the Leviathan flew overhead. It growled as if it remembered her and though Lavinia shook with fear, she refused to look up and acknowledge it.

A short while later it started raining again. She was freezing and soaked through and just about to give up when she saw someone in the alley. It was definitely a man. He was tall with broad shoulders. He was also wearing a long coat and a hood. She couldn't see his face, or even his hair color, but he had nice hands. The night was cold, but he removed his gloves when he stopped in front of the door. This wasn't strange in itself, but he didn't use a key to get inside. He waved his hand in front of the knob and the door opened itself.

Lavinia wanted to seek shelter, but she also wanted to observe him for a little longer. Just because she was a vampire didn't mean she didn't feel the cold. It just meant she wouldn't die from it. She adjusted the scope and looked toward the window once more. He removed his coat, but his back was still turned. Wow. Those shoulders weren't just padding. But she still couldn't see his face.

He ran a hand through his hair, shaking it out. It looked shaggy and wavy and almost shoulder length. But because it was wet she couldn't tell the color for sure. It looked black. Then again unless it was super blond, most people's hair did look black when wet.

He took off his shirt and Lavinia wasn't prepared for her reaction. If

breathing was necessary for her to live, then she would have found it difficult at the moment. And although it wasn't necessary for her heart to beat either, just the sight of him had put hers into overdrive. She couldn't remember the last time her heart had run away like this. Not since ... Well, not since she was alive.

The muscles of his back rippled and flexed as he bent to remove his shoes. He had lots of scars. It looked like he'd been stabbed a few times and quite possibly clawed by some sort of monster. But that didn't distract from how beautifully put together he was. If this was Synn, then she was in trouble. Someone so powerful and rumored to be so evil should not make her ache with longing. It was the first time her heart had beat in so long. But why? She wasn't starved for the sight of naked flesh. She'd seen plenty. But all Lavinia could think of now was how much she wanted him to finish stripping. Go ahead, just take off those pants.

Instead he walked down the hall and out of her sight. She couldn't help the disappointment. And at the same time she scolded herself. This man might not even be Synn and here she was spying on him. Not only that, but waiting for him to get naked. Even if he turned out to be Synn, that still didn't make it right. She wasn't sure how the door opened. That wasn't definite proof, just odd. Since she had never seen a wizard, she honestly didn't know what to look for. But she was certain the answer would not be found waiting around to see his dick. Then again, answers were overrated.

She waited only a moment longer before deciding it was time to go. What if this was Synn? And what if everything she'd heard was true? How could the first man to make her heart beat in centuries be capable of killing his own wife? Come to think of it, the last man to make her feel this way had killed her. Maybe this line of thinking wasn't good. She needed a distraction and a quick bite.

On her way home Lavinia stopped by A Winter Shade of Pale. Judas could tell by the look in her eyes that she hadn't come for the Re-Vita Life. She approached the counter slowly and he took in the way she licked her lips, the sway of her hips. She was stalking her prey. Lucky him. Lavinia ran a hand through her long dark hair and water droplets splashed onto the bar as she leaned forward.

"Judas, sweetheart, could I trouble you for a bite?"

Her voice floated over him like a second pair of hands and came to rest right over his crotch.

"No trouble at all."

He loved it when she fed from him. It was unlike anything he had ever experienced. It wasn't just sex. It was much better. As soon as they were alone in his office, Judas could tell it wasn't sex she was after tonight. She would let her voice touch him as only a succubus could. Lavinia sat on the desk and reached for him. She began to whisper things to him in a long forgotten language. Even though he didn't understand the words, his body did and that was all that mattered. She could feed from his desire without ever taking his blood, but Judas loved to be bitten.



She wrapped her arms around him and he pulled back his hair to allow her access. She licked and kissed across his skin. All the while she spoke softly to him. Her voice washed over and through him up and down his legs, constantly stroking between his thighs. This was amazing, but there was something different about her tonight. He closed his eyes and listened carefully. There was a tenderness in her voice that he had never heard before, a soft and desperate edge to her touch. She needed something, but it wasn't his body. It was almost as if she hungered for his soul.

Lavinia could feel the change in him. She could tell he had stopped enjoying the moment entirely and was at least halfway paying attention to her voice. Perhaps she had given too much away. Before he could ask questions she sank her teeth into his neck. Judas ran his hand between her thighs and cupped her pussy through her jeans. That was all it took. She came hard and her release transferred to him through her bite.

After freshening up and drying off a bit, she walked back into the office to find him waiting for her.

"Something is different about you tonight," he said softly. "I sensed ... emotion. What has changed?"

It wasn't an accusation, just a simple question. She and Judas had known each other for a hundred years. It was only normal that he would notice a change in her.

He moved forward and placed his hand on her shoulder. For some strange reason it made her want to cry.

"In a hundred years you have never touched me the way you did tonight ... and you didn't even use your hands."

"I saw someone tonight," she said softly. "Someone who made me ... feel things."

"Like what?"

"I can't ..."

"What did he look like?"

"I don't know. I never even saw his face." She paused before admitting, "But he made my heart beat again."

## Chapter Four

Judas didn't know what to say, so he didn't say anything at all. He didn't know the whole story, but he knew that Lavinia had been hurt bad before. Bad enough that she hadn't loved anyone in all these years. He was alright with her not loving him but that didn't mean he was alright with seeing her get hurt.

\* \* \* \*

It was barely dark the next night before Lavinia returned to watch the man who might be Synn. This time he was already home. Once she positioned herself on the roof and zoomed in with her scope, she found him making coffee. He was wearing a long, dark purple robe and his back was turned again. He must have just gotten out of the shower, because his hair was wet again and still looked black. She had never seen his face and yet she somehow mourned the loss. It was as if something had been taken away from her, though she'd never really had it.

Lavinia watched as he added cream and sugar to the cup and stirred it with his finger. He turned only slightly to lick his finger and she got her first glimpse of his face. Full, perfect lips that curled slightly as if he were thinking of something that made him want to smile. He had a strong, but not overpowering chin and a long, aquiline nose. His brows were high with just the right amount of curve. He took a sip of coffee, licked his lips and Lavinia's heart started doing cartwheels.

He turned toward the window, but shadows obscured the right side of his face. It was as if the shadows followed him so that she couldn't see both sides. What was he hiding? He leaned forward to pick up a book from the coffee table and his robe fell open, revealing his chest. He had a few scars here, but not many. And none that could mar the ridges and curves of his gorgeous body.

Lavinia watched while he drank coffee and read. She wasn't sure how long she sat there or exactly why she was watching him. She found herself studying his hands as he slowly turned the pages, scanning words here and there with a finger. And she watched him lick his lips. It was obviously a nervous gesture. But what about the book was making him nervous?

She wanted him to take off the robe, but more than that she wanted to know him. For the first time in years she really wanted to know someone in more than just the carnal sense of the word. She looked around at the room behind him. The explosion of color made her realize how plain her penthouse was. He was surrounded by purple of all shades, green here and there, and red. There were fresh flowers on the table and their stark white color made a beautiful contrast to the rest of the room. The whole place looked and felt alive, and so did he.

Her penthouse was filled with white, black, and cream. The only variation was a bit of gold here and there. There was hardly any furniture at all. It didn't look like a home really, but it was functional. Now that she saw the inside of his house she realized how cold her surroundings were. Lifeless was the word that came to mind. She was just about to go home when he rose suddenly and put down the book.

He turned to the window and there was purpose in his movements. He walked right up to the glass and put a hand over the sash on his robe. With one swift motion he opened it and with a casual shrug, let it fall to the floor.

Her mouth watered and her heart felt ready to break through her ribs. The curve of his hip was what drew her attention first. The muscular curve there made her want to touch him even more. But then her eyes fell to his cock. Long, thick and full. What an impressive sight. She closed her eyes and could almost feel her fingers wrapping around it.

He stood there for a moment, completely unashamed as he stared out into the night. Could he see her? Did he know he was being watched? If he did, he didn't seem to mind. After several minutes he left the robe on the floor and gracefully left the room.

\* \* \* \*

Lavinia still didn't have proof that he was a wizard. She told herself that was the reason she returned night after night. After a week she realized that she was pining for him. She hungered so deeply for the touch of this stranger that little else filtered through her thoughts. She had been at peace with her life, or lack thereof, and what she was for so long that it took her a while to recognize the turmoil she was in. She had forgotten that one person could feel so many things at once. The unexpected fluttering she felt now was new to her all over again.

She hadn't found evidence yet, but she knew somehow that this truly was Synn. Whether he was a friend or enemy remained to be seen. She tried to find other things to do, to find reasons to stay at home. But the storm couldn't rage enough to keep her from him and the monster just didn't scare her enough to keep her indoors anymore. It had been a long time since she hadn't been able to possess the man she desired and Lavinia wasn't used to the sensation.

She stood on the rooftop for the seventh night in a row. And as she watched him through the window, she finally lost control. He might be her enemy and for that reason she could not reveal herself completely. But she could have this night. Here in the darkness he could be hers and with the light of dawn, no one would know what had passed between them in the night.

Lavinia stretched her arms wide and released her power. She let her thoughts carry on the wind like a soft perfume. And with her voice she called to him softly.

"Come to me. Let me see you ... Let me touch you. I will do you no harm."

Her voice carried to him even inside the house. The building was

protected from harmful magic, but he didn't need that reassurance to know that whoever called to him meant no harm. Words flowed over and through him like a pair of velvet covered hands, caressing him. There was lust in this magic, but more than that ...there was tenderness. It was the tenderness that made him open the door.

It was not the words she spoke, nor her considerable power that held sway over the wizard. It was the longing he felt when she called out to him. It had been too long since anyone cared for him. Too long since anyone even knew of his existence.

Lavinia was standing in the alley by the time he opened the door. She gasped as light spilled from the doorway and onto the street. Rain pelted against her skin like ice and bounced off of his broad shoulders as he walked toward her. His face was cast downward, out of the light and the wind whipped his hair about making him look like something wild.

She was careful to keep herself in shadow as well. He stopped right in front of her. He was well over six feet tall. His presence dominated the alley and his size made her feel small and helpless. Helpless was not something she was used to being. Lavinia knew in that instant that her power had not brought him to her. He had chosen to come.

Synn looked down at the dark haired beauty and was unsure what to think of her. He couldn't get a good look at her, but he didn't need good lighting to know that she was beautiful. Long ebony hair tossed about on the night wind and whipped across a luscious set of cherry lips. He could feel himself growing hard just looking at her. And when she smiled he understood the power he had felt. She was a vampire. How interesting.

"Who are you and why have you called me?"

His voice was deep and warmer than the heat she felt rising from his body. Lavinia had no answer. At least, none she could put into words. So she didn't say anything at all. She leaned into him and that first contact sent a thrill through her entire body. She stood on tiptoe and he bent down to accommodate her, letting her kiss him for the very first time. The gentle touch of his lips rocked her to the core. So many men had kissed her and yet she knew in that instant that she had never really been kissed before.

He tasted like coffee, sugar and ...tears. There was a sorrow deep within him and Lavinia could feel it when he touched her. She ran her hands inside his coat and began to pull his shirt out of his pants. She was desperate for the feel of his bare skin.

He wrapped his arms around her waist, and moaned as he deepened the kiss. He decided it didn't matter why this beautiful vampire wanted him. She must be the one he'd felt watching him for the past week. And he was going to let her have him before she changed her mind. Before she saw his face.

He took off his gloves and put them in his coat pocket. He needed to feel her skin.

Lavinia gasped as he ran his hands underneath her shirt. He was warm and his touch was gentle. No matter what anyone said, these were not the hands of a madman or a fiend. No one could touch a woman like he was touching

her after having killed someone he loved. It just wasn't possible. He unclasped her bra and ran his hands over her breasts, causing the nipples to harden instantly.

Lavinia ran her hand up and down the front of his pants and that was all it took.

He understood what she needed and it wasn't foreplay, not now. For whatever reason, she needed him. Her touch made him want to take her right there against the wall. But it was what he felt in her kiss that pushed him over the edge.

He stepped back to let her unzip his pants, but he pulled away when she reached for his face.

Lavinia wanted to at least touch his face, but she didn't try to push the issue. What she needed most of all was the feel of his hot flesh inside of her. And that he seemed more than willing to give. She closed her eyes as he put his hands underneath the hem of her calf-length skirt and pushed it up around her hips. He hooked one finger in her black lace panties and pulled them aside with a growl.

Lavinia tipped her pelvis forward and moaned as his mouth covered her pussy. Sex had been more intense ever since she was turned, but it had never felt this way. She ached almost instantly for release. And when he slipped one long finger inside her she came.

He grabbed her ass with one hand, pressing her harder into his mouth and she screamed. He shook his head back and forth as he sucked at her clit, growling and devouring her like an animal. Yes! This was what she needed.

He rose suddenly, lifting her against the wall. In one instant he pinned her with both his lips and his rock hard cock. He was huge. Lavinia held onto him, wrapping her arms around his shoulders as he drew back slowly.

"Did I hurt you?" he whispered, his voice hoarse with desire.

She shook her head and he thrust into her again. She wrapped her legs around him and ran one hand over the muscles of his back. She could feel him tensing and knew he was close to coming. His desire coursed through her, sweeter than anything she had ever tasted. And even though he whispered, "You can bite me if you need to," it wasn't necessary.

"You're enough," she moaned against his lips.

A shuddering breath escaped him and he clung to her as he came. Nothing she could have said to him could have possibly meant more than those words. Nothing he had ever done had ever been enough. And here she was, this beautiful stranger, telling him exactly what he needed to hear. He pressed his face against her shoulder, his tears blending with the cold rain.

When he finally pulled back from her, his heart ached. He lowered her slowly and turned his back while she straightened her clothes and he did the same. He knew better than to ask for her number. This woman obviously didn't want to make herself known. She would likely disappear into the night and he'd never see her again. Just the thought made him feel heartbroken. Surely someone who made him feel this way could not leave him so easily.

He remained standing with his back turned, unsure of what to do until he

felt her arms around him. There were so many emotions in that touch, in the gentle squeeze she gave his waist before releasing him.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

And just like that, she was gone. He turned around and found nothing but the rain. Synn turned up the collar of his coat, feeling colder than he had before and turned back toward his home. The door still stood open and his long dark shadow spilled across the street, all the way to the entrance of the alley.

He turned back just before closing the door and whispered, “Dream of me.”

In the two hundred plus years she had been a vampire, Lavinia had never dreamed. When the dawn came she was really and truly dead to the world. Or so she had thought. Now her mind was filled with the touch of lips she could still taste and hands that had burned her with their fire. Synn was a force of nature, just like the storm that raged around them. He had swept over her, turning her emotions into chaos, just like a storm. With his first touch her defenses had been broken. She simply could not stop what she felt.

When Lavinia awoke the next evening her dreams came back in a rush of emotion. Flashes of memories combined with feelings she wasn't at all prepared for. And her heart. She placed a hand over her chest and marveled at how hard it was beating. So hard that it actually hurt. This just wasn't normal for a vampire.

“Synn,” she whispered. “What am I going to do?”

\* \* \* \*

He knew the instant she spoke his name. He didn't hear every time someone talked about him. But this was different. She wasn't just talking about him or mentioning his name. She was calling him. It was the woman he had met the night before, the vampire. He was sure of it. There was that same longing in her call. That same...brokenness. Synn knew what that felt like and so was well equipped to identify the emotion in her. His vampire lover knew his name, but he still had no idea who she was. What he would have given for one good look at her face. Then again, hadn't he denied her that same thing?

But his case was different, or so he thought. After all, what would a beautiful woman want with a scarred up wizard? He should take his memories and cherish them because she wouldn't want him once she got a good look.

He tried to ignore the pain in his chest, and went back to his research.

\* \* \* \*

Lavinia had never felt better and still so awful at the same time. Last night was by far the best sex she had ever had. It was as if she had been touched, truly touched for the very first time. It wasn't his technique or his body, though she had no complaints about either. It was what she felt when he touched her, the way that he touched her. And the way his touch made her feel. He put his hands on her as if he were not afraid to do so. He obviously knew that she was a vampire, but he wasn't afraid. He even offered her his blood, but his body had been more than enough. That surprised her.

No one had ever been “enough.” But when he said she could bite him the words just came spilling out. And they were the truth. Nothing more was necessary.

Even now, hours later she was satisfied. She normally woke up hungry, just like anybody else vampire or not. But not tonight. Maybe it was his magic ...or maybe it was something more.

She had wanted to be with him if only for that one night. He had understood her need and given her what she asked for. But Lavinia knew now like she had known the night before that once simply wasn't enough. He made her feel alive. Despite being at peace with what she was, that was a feeling she had missed.

His words had floated to her in the darkness, “Dream of me.”

And she had. If she really had to have proof that he was a wizard, surely that was it. While she showered she asked herself, “Okay, so now what? Now you know he's a wizard. What does that prove if you won't even speak to him?”

As the hot water ran over her skin, she imagined his warm hands on her again and closed her eyes. But rather than arousing her, it made her want to cry. What was going on and why couldn't she get a grip?

Just as she stepped out of the shower her phone rang. It was Jean Philippe. She hadn't seen or spoken to him in a week. She also hadn't realized that until he called. She pushed the speaker button and went back to towel-drying her hair.

“Lavinia, I need to speak with you about something. Could you come by the club tonight?”

It sounded like he had another job for her to do. It would give her an excuse to not spy on the wizard and maybe to get a hold on her emotions. The only man to ever make her feel anything close to this ...had killed her. And the one who made her heart beat now was forbidden simply because the council considered him a suspect. She needed time to think.

“Sure. I'll be there within the hour.”

## Chapter Five

The dress she selected was long, blood red and almost sheer. The fabric was so thin that it did little more than cover the necessities. The straps were thin and the back hung low, revealing the sensuous curves of her back. Her hair hung in ebony waves, reaching just past the middle of her back and contrasting well with the red fabric and pale expanse of skin.

Her lipstick matched the dress and her eyes were smoky and dark. Long lashes brushed over her cheeks as she looked down to find her keys. Tonight, she would drive for a change. She didn't feel like getting wet.

Business had picked back up at Sinful Delights and the parking lot was packed. Cars were lined up around the block, just to get a taste of what Jean Philippe's club had to offer. Of course, no humans were allowed without an escort. It was almost exclusively a preternatural club. Only shifters or vampires were allowed to work there. And that's what the clientele mostly consisted of. Every now and then a vampire would bring their human servant. But most of the time, it was just the other monsters who came out to play.

Logan saw her car drive up and admired the sleek black vehicle. That is until he caught sight of Lavinia. The car was quickly forgotten as he hurried to find an umbrella and rushed out the door.

She had barely come to a stop before he was at her door. His smile warmed her, but not as much as it usually did. She let him open her door and took him by the arm.

"You look wonderful," he growled sexily. "Please tell me you've come to play tonight."

She smiled. "Sorry, Logan. I'm afraid tonight is business. Jean Philippe called me here."

"Are you saying that you wouldn't have come otherwise?"

Come to think of it, that was what she was saying. She just hadn't realized it until he asked. Lavinia only smiled in response. She didn't want to hurt Logan's feelings. But the truth was she was completely satisfied. Even the sex radiating from the building couldn't tempt her. But the thought of going back to the wizard, now that was tempting.

He closed the door behind them and asked one of the other werewolves to park her car.

"Can I get you something to drink? We've got some fresh donations tonight. How about some O positive?"

If she refused it would look even more suspicious. She wasn't sure what was going on and definitely wasn't prepared to talk about it.

"That will be fine. I think I'll watch the show until he's ready for me."

Sinful Delights was host to many talented performers. The werewolf on



stage at the moment was doing one hell of a job stirring up the crowd. Lavinia took a seat at the back of the room and waited for the master and her drink. The stripper twirled artfully around the pole, bumping and grinding just right. The way she kept time with her hips was nothing shy of true talent. And the way she licked her lips would have normally been enough to get Lavinia's blood running hot. But not tonight. Even though she wasn't personally into women, that didn't mean she didn't enjoy watching them. She admired the female form as a work of art. Although the arousing display did little more than make her bat her eyelashes, she was still enjoying the show.

"Here you go," Logan said, placing the glass of blood in front of her. "He should be down shortly. I believe he said he was in a teleconference."

"Who with?" she asked, absently touching the werewolf's thigh as she spoke.

"The council."

"Fuck."

"What?"

"Nothing."

He nodded toward the stage. "She's pretty good, huh?"

"Wonderful."

Logan went back to the bar and Lavinia went back to worrying. She was curious before about why she had been summoned tonight. But now she was positively concerned. The vampire council had always made her nervous. Jean Philippe, like all vampires, answered to them. And she answered to him. He was an enforcer of the council and she was his loyal companion. That meant that over the years she had gotten into a lot of deep shit helping him to carry out their orders. Motherfuckers. What did they want now?

She had just finished her drink when she felt him enter the room. She looked to see Jean Philippe standing at the foot of the stairs, wearing solid black and a come-on smile. Lavinia took that as her cue and rose to meet him.

"What have you done?" he asked.

The question caught her off guard and she froze. Jean Philippe hadn't been able to enter her mind in years without her permission. Not since she had become so powerful. He couldn't possibly know what she had been up to.

He smiled and took her by the hand, spinning her around.

"You look magnificent." He whispered something in French and she smiled. "M chéri, you glow."

"New makeup," she said absently.

"And a new dress." He smiled appreciatively. "I like it."

He motioned toward the stairs and Lavinia followed him up to his office. After closing the door behind them he turned to look at her once more.

"Whatever you have done this past week, it has agreed with you."

Lavinia took a seat in the chair behind his desk and crossed her legs, causing the high split in the dress to fall open.

"So, what can I do for you?" she asked.

"Well, I just wanted to let you know what has been going on. In case you've forgotten, we're in a bit of a tight spot here." He gestured toward the

window where lightning flashed as if on cue and the Leviathan streamed past in the background.

“I haven’t forgotten.”

“While you were off doing, whatever it was you were doing all week, they nearly declared martial law.”

“What stopped them from it?”

“People have found a way to leave the city.”

“Really?”

He moved to prop against the desk and crossed his arms.

“Near the East End tunnel, a passage way suddenly ...opened for lack of a better word. Some men found it when they were trying to leave the city. Apparently they had tried every known exit and this one happened to work. No one knows why, but they have started to evacuate. If they can’t make the monster go away, at least those who want to leave can do so now.”

“That’s good then.”

“For the most part, business owners and most of the preternatural community are staying. Thousands had left when I last heard a report. Truly I am surprised the city isn’t in a complete state of chaos by now.”

“And what does the council have to do with any of this?”

“They believe that the wizard Synn is most likely here in Wicked City. They have been searching through historical records. No other wizard could be capable of this.” He gestured toward the window once more. “He is the most powerful to have ever lived according to their records. And trust me when I say the council keeps extensive records. If his legend is true, then he is also immortal and that presents another problem entirely.”

Lavinia didn’t like where this conversation was going. She stood abruptly and brushed past Jean Philippe.

“Don’t you ever get tired of doing what the council says? It is possible they don’t know everything. Besides, none of that makes sense. If he is here, why would he do this? He hasn’t come forward. He hasn’t asked for anything. Why go to all this trouble if you don’t want something in return?”

He shrugged. “Some men cannot be reasoned with, ma chéri. Perhaps he just wants to watch us all suffer.”

She turned her back to him and wrapped her arms tightly across her chest, holding herself as if for comfort.

“What if they are wrong, Jean? What if this wizard isn’t evil? What if he is a victim in this too?”

He touched her shoulder and she jumped. The master’s touch had never made her jump before and he took notice of this. He put a hand underneath her chin and tilted her face upward, forcing her to look him in the eye.

“If you knew something, you would tell me, wouldn’t you?” he asked softly.

“I’m confused, Jean. I feel like I don’t know anything anymore.”

That was true enough, he could see it in her eyes. She hadn’t lied to him she had probably just left out part of the truth.

He knew something was wrong. He had only seen that look in her eyes once before, and that had been shortly after her death. But he knew Lavinia well enough to know that if she didn't want to tell him then there was no point in asking.

"Stay the night with me," he whispered.

For the first time since he'd known her she answered, "Not tonight."

She offered him a soft kiss and added, "I'm sorry, Jean. I just don't feel up to it."

Lavinia started to leave, reached for the door and then seemed to remember what she had wanted to know.

"What orders from the council?" she asked.

"None yet. We're to wait until they decide what action to take. They're sending someone in to investigate."

She turned back at that and her eyes were suddenly cold. Jean Philippe noticed the change, but said nothing.

"You mean they're sending someone in to find him?"

"Yes."

"And if they do?"

"Then we will be given further instruction."

She turned to leave again and he asked, "Why does this matter to you so much?"

"I'm not sure."

Lavinia was halfway back to her penthouse when she turned on the radio. According to the news the rest of the world was at a complete loss as to explain what was going on in Wicked City. So called experts didn't have anything more to say on the subject. Since the Leviathan hadn't actually harmed anyone and the storm hadn't caused flooding or property damage, they seemed inclined to just wait it out. As a matter of fact, that was exactly what the DJ she was listening to suggested.

"Humph, wait it out. I'd settle for just figuring it out."

\* \* \* \*

"If I'm enough, then why hasn't she come back?" Synn wondered aloud.

He knew what the monster was that circled the city. He also knew which level of Hell it had come from. What he didn't know was what it was doing here. He should have been doing more research. But all he could think about was how soft her skin had felt beneath his hands. How sweet her kiss had tasted and how fucking tight she was around his cock.

He had known that he would most likely never see her again. He had even told himself that he was alright with that. But he had never been a good liar. Where was she tonight? All week he had felt her presence and now that she was gone ...he felt alone again. Even having someone watch him from a distance was more company than he was used to. He missed it.

\* \* \* \*

Three nights passed before Lavinia started to feel hungry again. Never had she been satisfied for so long. But tonight she was hungry and this was a craving she could not ignore. Maybe she would go down to Sinful Delights and

just take in the show. After all, she could feed from the sexual energy of the crowd. She didn't need blood if it wasn't what she wanted. Ever since the wizard had touched her she couldn't stand the thoughts of anyone else's hands on her body. So watching the show was really her only option if she didn't feel like biting someone.

\* \* \* \*

Sometime in the early hours of the morning the explanation had come to him. "You're enough," she said. Of course! She turned down the offer of blood because she had fed from his desire, his pent up sexual energy. His nighttime visitor was a succubus. It made perfect sense.

"Well, that makes things easier," he said, reaching for his robe.

Synn knew that what he was about to do was dangerous. He had spent centuries trying to prevent anyone from knowing him. And now he would risk it all for the chance to get to know this woman, this vampire. It wasn't her powers of seduction that made him want her so. It was the softness in her hands when she had touched him and the heartrending brokenness he had felt in her kiss. Only someone who had experienced pain, like him, could understand such a feeling. And the need to make it go away. It must be terrible to have to feed off of sex while carrying the memory of what it truly felt like to make love. She wouldn't be in such turmoil if she didn't know the difference.

He had heard before that the touch of a succubus was deadly. That men could become addicted to them like a drug and literally be loved to death. But he was no ordinary man. He understood how magic worked. If there was one thing Synn had had plenty of time to get to know, it was magic. Besides, she couldn't kill an immortal. At least, not with sex. It would take a lot more than that.

\* \* \* \*

Lavinia couldn't bring herself to go to the wizard again, even though there was nothing she wanted more. She had felt the hunger in his touch. He needed to be loved. That was something she didn't know if she could do. Lavinia had given up love to avoid suffering its inevitable loss ...again. She would be using him and that wasn't right. After a few more minutes thought, Lavinia put on a pair of black tights and a slinky red top. She put on her coat and high-heeled boots on her way out the door. To hell with driving tonight, she was in a hurry. Besides, it wasn't raining and she enjoyed the cold night air.

The night was clearer than it had been since the storm came. Clouds still lingered overhead, almost blocking out the moon. Lightning flashed from time to time and of course there was still the monster. But that didn't stop her from enjoying the familiar touch of night.

As she stepped out onto the street the night enveloped her like a velvet cloak. The moon's soft light caressed her pale skin and with a smile she became one with the darkness, moving ever closer to her destination.

Tonight there was supposed to be a live sex show and she didn't want to miss the performance.

The local werewolf pack could put on quite a show and Lavinia rarely

missed a night when they performed. She arrived just in time.

“The show is just about to start,” Logan said. He took her by the arm and led her to her seat.

The lights were dim but not just because they had been turned down. There were red scarves hanging over every light fixture in the room giving it a sexy sort of glow. That seemed appropriate to her because Lavinia was about to watch what had been affectionately named “The Red Light Special.”

The spotlight came on and the curtain went up. The show was about to start.

\* \* \* \*

Across town Synn was making ready to work his spell. The incense was lit. Candles circled the room and the soft fragrance of both mingled with the herbs he was burning.

## Chapter Six

The music began to play, thumping softly at first, like a heartbeat. Lavinia licked her lips as a hot male werewolf took the stage. He was dressed in black leather from head to toe. It matched his hair. His face was painted white. His lips were dark and so was the makeup around his eyes. He looked vicious and sexy ...and wonderful. She was starving for the feel of his desire.

The show wasn't the same every time. Sometimes a "sex" show consisted of only sex. Sometimes the performers would touch themselves. And other times, they would invite the audience to touch them. When their eyes met, Lavinia knew which it would be tonight.

The werewolf crooked his finger in her direction, beckoning her forward. When she reached the stage Lavinia took the hand he offered and it was warm welcoming. There was a single straight-backed chair on the stage behind him and he gestured for her to take a seat.

He removed a pair of handcuffs from the back of his pants and said, "Hands behind your back," loud enough that the crowd could hear.

As he leaned in close to cuff her to the chair he whispered, "My name is Brandon. You can bite me whenever you're ready."

He pulled back from her with a smile and as the pace of the music quickened, he began to unfasten some of the many buckles on his shirt. Oh yeah, this was going to be fun.

\* \* \* \*

Everything was in place. All that was left for Synn to do was gather energy. Some said that gathering energy for sex magic was the hardest to of all magical abilities. But he had just the thing. Sex came easily to Synn, perhaps because he had been without it for so long. He closed his eyes and focused on the vampire. He remembered the smell of her skin mixed with the rain, the way she cried out when she came. He could feel the curve of her hips beneath his hands, tasted the sweat as it trickled from her brow and was quickly washed away.

That was all it took for one as powerful as Synn. Just like that he was in her mind. It was time for the spell to begin. He could hear the music, could feel her hands cuffed to the chair. But most of all, he could see the man dancing in front of her.

He began to move to the music as well, dancing slowly around the circle of candles as he scattered rose petals over the floor.

When Lavinia closed her eyes she could see him. She knew it must be Synn. He was wearing a dark purple robe with a hood that cast his face in shadow. And nothing else. He was dancing to the same music and his robe was completely open. She opened her eyes and saw Brandon removing his shirt. But

when she closed them again it was the wizard who stood before her.

She could have counted the beads of sweat as they ran down his skin, over his chest and down his abdomen. Lavinia moaned as he drew closer to her and it was then that the words came.

“Like a moth to a flame, I call to the woman who knows my name.”

Brandon brushed against her thigh and she cried out, opening her eyes once more. He was starting to sweat now too and his makeup was running. It made him look like a dark, gothic sort of harlequin. She liked it and instinctively Synn knew she liked it too.

“Say it again and I am yours to claim”

Her heart kicked into overdrive again. She was breathing so hard she thought her chest would burst. Brandon leaned in closer and spread her legs, grinding against her body.

“Come to me now and feed this flame.”

She cried out again and the crowd thought she was about to have an orgasm. Apparently, so did Brandon and he smiled. But it was the wizard’s voice that was driving her wild with desire. And he just wouldn’t shut up.

“I call to you with feelings you cannot deny.

Come to me in darkness, underneath the blackened sky.

Say my name again, call it out, Cry!

Call to me now, so sayeth I!”

“Synn!”

In one move Lavinia broke free, tearing loose one of the spindles on the back of the chair. Brandon seemed stunned as he fell backward onto the stage, but he also seemed to be enjoying himself. Apparently, he liked it rough.

The wizard’s call echoed in her ears as Lavinia ran out into the storm. Rain was falling hard now, but she didn’t care. She left the crowd and Brandon practically foaming at the mouth, but none of it mattered. She had to find Synn. With her speed it wouldn’t take her long to reach him.

Synn knew she was coming. He felt the power rush over him when she called out his name. Through their connection he could feel the rain as it pounded against her skin. She would be here soon. With a wave of power he threw the door open wide and stared out into the night ...waiting.

Lavinia was just down the street when she saw the door open. As she approached the steps leading in she noticed that it was dark inside. She had a view straight down the hallway where one door was open, the inside of the room bathed in candlelight. She knew this was where Synn was, but she couldn’t enter without an invitation. So she stood there, wet and panting.

“Come in.” His voice echoed throughout the house as if he were using a microphone.

Lavinia moved slowly down the hall and jumped when the door closed behind her. Obviously it was his power that had drawn her here, but why?

The moment she came into view Synn felt his heart stop before pounding furiously back to life. He could see her clearly this time. She was wet, dripping onto the floor and absolutely beautiful. Long strands of dark hair clung to her. Her shirt was so dark it almost looked black, but he was

guessing it was red. The pants she wore clung to her as well, revealing everything he had been remembering so fondly. Her eyes were dark and makeup was running down her face, giving her much the same look as the dancer had when he started to sweat. Cherry red lips parted slightly as her eyes took him in and this made him smile.

“Why have you called me back?” she asked breathlessly.

“I know what you are,” he said, his deep voice casting a spell all its own. “I want to make you an offer.”

Lavinia took in the room with a glance. Red candles were lit all around, hundreds of them. The floor was a dark beautiful wood, covered in thousands of red rose petals, but the room was otherwise bare. And then there was Synn, standing in the middle of it all. Smoke drifted up lazily from the incense at his feet and curled around him as if it knew what it was touching. Though she knew him to be naked beneath the robe, the lower half of his body was mostly in shadow. However, the candlelight revealed all the marvelous curves and valleys of his chest. Lavinia found herself moving forward involuntarily at the sight.

“I know that you have never been truly satisfied and I know what it is that you hunger for.”

Tears fell down her face as she moved closer still. “One man has never been enough,” she whispered. “What makes you think you’re any different?”

“I can give you what you need.”

Her heart leapt at his words.

“Will you give me a chance to prove myself?”

“Yes.” She hesitated before adding, “But there are things about me you cannot know. For your own protection you shouldn’t get too close to me.” It killed her to say this when all she wanted to do was lay her soul bare before him.

The wizard nodded his acceptance. “I have one condition also.”

“What is that?”

“You must never see my face.”

Lavinia nodded and he closed the distance between them. His touch sent a shock through her body that almost felt electric. God, how she had longed for him to touch her again. A lifetime had passed in the three nights since she had held him. And it seemed like another lifetime went by as she watched him anticipating his next move.

“Then please, accept the offer of my blood ...and give me your flesh.”

With these words Synn lifted his right hand and Lavinia noticed the odd sort of sleeve that covered his middle finger. It looked like silver and there was a joint in the middle to allow for flexibility. He brought the sharp tip up to his chest and made a small cut just above his heart.

He put his hand behind her head and guided her toward the wound as a trickle of blood ran down. Lavinia traced the trail of blood with her tongue before pausing over the cut. Synn wrapped his arms around her, cradling her against him as a wave of magic broke over them.

Lavinia felt this power and wrapped her arms around his waist. She



didn't know how long this could last, but at least they had one more night. She lowered herself slowly to the floor, trailing her hands down his body as she opened his robe wide. She remembered the first time she had seen him naked, when he dropped his robe in front of the window. The curve of his hip was even more tempting up close and she pressed her lips against it, leaving a smear of lipstick and blood.

When she moved further down, Synn couldn't resist the urge to touch her face. He wanted to watch her, to look in her eyes while she took him in her mouth. She licked the tip of his cock and he moaned, sounding closer to an animal than a man. Her lush red lips stretched around him forming a wide "O" that he found extremely erotic. He wanted to watch those lips when his name came spilling out, when she called to him once more at the height of her passion.

Lavinia wrapped her hands around to grab his ass and push him further into her mouth. She was already drinking down his desire. It flowed freely from him even before he was fully aroused. It was unlike anything she had ever experienced. Synn was unlike anyone she had ever known. He reached for her and she took his hand, letting him help her to stand. She had gotten used to being petite, but she had never felt so small as when she stood next to him. Years of possessing superhuman strength had caused her forget what it was like to feel helpless. Even though she knew he meant her no harm she trembled slightly beneath his stare.

When he spoke next, his voice carried the heartbreak of centuries and she felt unsteady beneath the weight. "You know my name ...but what should I call you?"

Lavinia's voice broke with emotion as she whispered, "Yours."

Synn held her to him as if she might break. She could feel his heart beating beneath her ear, steady and strong. Maybe he was right. Perhaps he really was powerful enough to give her what she needed. She pressed her lips to the small cut above his heart once more, smiling when it started to beat faster. Lavinia ran her hands lightly over his shoulders, marveling at their impossible width. It looked like he was wearing shoulder pads, but by the feel of his thin robe that clearly was not the case. As she continued to caress him she understood that it was not just his body or his strength that she wanted. She wanted him...just him.

These were dangerous thoughts, dangerous feelings that would lead only to pain. It had been easy to not get involved with mortal men over the years. She had convinced herself that their short lifetime would be too painful to endure. Though she had been with many men, Lavinia had kept a close reign on her emotions. That had been easy after what had happened to her. The only man she'd ever loved had turned on her, trying to steal her life force to continue his own existence. It didn't get much more shallow or painful than that. She tried to remember those things now to bring up the past in order to stop herself from feeling ...everything. But as he held her in his arms she knew that Synn was not that man. He wasn't even that kind of man. Even for the protection of her own heart she could not imagine him to be. The instant

he put his hands on her she had known that the rumors spreading about him were lies. They had to be. She simply could not reconcile the legendary fiend with the man who held her so gently, whose hands roamed over her body with such reverence and whose kiss made her want to take a chance again.

After several moments he began to remove her clothes. As he tossed her wet shirt onto the floor Lavinia realized she had never felt so strongly about anyone before. Though she had known love, it had never felt like this. Her heart throbbed again at just the thought. She could not love Synn. This was too much, too dangerous. But when his big warm hands wrapped around her waist she knew it was pointless to deny. For the first time in centuries, she was in love. And for the first time ever, she knew those feelings were returned.

It was in the way he held her, the way he wanted her. And it was in the way he worshiped her now with his hands. He helped her to remove her shoes before sliding the tights slowly down her legs. Synn knelt before her as he did this and when she was naked, Lavinia joined him on the floor. She pressed her palms flat against his chest and traced a thin scar with her fingertips. She didn't understand why he hid his face. Maybe he thought she wouldn't want him if she saw whatever it was he kept in shadow, but she doubted that. There was nothing about Synn that could ever stop what she felt. No matter what the council decided or what their spy was able to find, he would be hers ...at least for the night.

He pressed a soft kiss against her lips and when his hood fell back, Lavinia closed her eyes.

"It's alright," she said softly. "I won't look."

She tilted back her head revealing her throat and he took the opportunity to kiss the smooth expanse of skin. The wizard held her body against him as he lowered his head to pull one nipple into his mouth.

"Yes," she gasped.

Lavinia looked down at his dark head, lowered so intimately to her breast and felt the tension beginning to build. This wasn't possible. At least, it hadn't happened so easily before. She tangled her fingers through his hair and pressed him more tightly to her breast.

"Yes, suck it. Suck it hard, Synn. I'm going to come."

He lowered one hand to her pussy and she welcomed the touch. She was already dripping wet. Just the slightest touch against her clit was enough to send her over the edge.

Synn slipped one finger inside and felt her muscles spasm around him. He wanted to feel her come, to know what he did to her.

"Fuck me," she panted, pulling his head back from her breast.

She had forgotten all about not looking at his face and was surprised to find it still somehow in shadow. She could see the left side, but not the right. Oh, but she could see his lips and she watched as his tongue darted out to wet them.

"Take me now," she said.

He hesitated for a moment.

"Synn, please."

He laid her back against the floor and spread her legs wide, entering her slowly, one inch at a time. Lavinia moaned and wiggled against him trying to force him deeper. But he would have none of that. Synn had gone for years without knowing the touch of a woman. Three nights ago she had surprised him. Tonight, he meant to take his time.

Hours passed as he toyed with her body, bringing her to orgasm repeatedly without ever entering her fully. Even though she came, Lavinia's release was not complete. She needed all of him and he knew it.

He watched as the flush of arousal crept up her chest, making her breasts seem to glow a soft pink. Her throat was red and her lips looked swollen as he nibbled at them softly. He could tell she was growing frustrated, even though she was enjoying herself. It was time to let her have what she wanted. Synn quickly rolled to his back beside her.

Lavinia needed no further invitation. She swung one leg over him and reached between her thighs to grab his cock. In a matter of seconds she had him right where she wanted him. He was too much to take fully, but she damn sure tried. She ran her hands over his chest. He was slick with sweat and that slippery-sliding sensation as she moved against him turned her on even more.

Synn reached up to cup her breasts as he asked, "Do you need more of my blood, or am I enough?"

"You're enough," she cried.

With that, release like she had never felt flooded her body. Lavinia bucked and grinded against him like something wild and she knew Synn couldn't hold back anymore. He came with a growl as he grabbed her hips and tried to hold her still. It was a futile effort.

They lay there for several moments in silence before Lavinia rose slowly to sit beside him.

"I'm sorry if I hurt you, the way I came to you before. My life is very dangerous. I can't afford to get involved with someone ...I can't afford to care."

"I understand. No one has known me in centuries, or even spoken my name for that matter."

He touched her back and Lavinia felt her heart melting.

"But you know me now."

She stood slowly and gathered her clothes. Synn watched as she walked toward the door, then paused to turn back to him.

"My name is Lavinia."

## Chapter Seven

Lavinia was nearly home when she felt it, a strange creeping/crawling sensation. It was at once strange and familiar. But she was too caught up in the memory of what had just happened with Synn to give it much thought. That was her third mistake. Because if she had given it more thought, she might have recognized the feeling. Instead she looked up at the Leviathan streaming past overhead and shivered. After all, she was terrified of sea monsters. Surely that was what she had felt.

Lavinia waited until she was inside her penthouse. Until the doors were locked and all the curtains were shut before she allowed herself to react. And then it happened. A slow smile spread over her features. It wasn't the usual grin she wore with a bit of wickedness behind it. It was a genuine, blissful, straight from the heart smile. She didn't remember ever feeling so wonderful.

No one had ever touched her the way Synn had tonight. He hadn't just touched her body, he had touched her heart. Mind, body, and soul had been involved in the experience of Synn.

"Wow," she whispered as she walked into the bathroom.

Her knees were still wobbly and apparently her brain wasn't working right, because she had just noticed the handcuffs.

"Holy shit." She laughed.

She had shown up on his doorstep still wearing handcuffs. HA! Good thing she had a spare key in her bathroom cabinet. Not that she couldn't break them if need be. But why ruin a perfectly good pair of cuffs?

About that time the clock in the hall struck four. She needed to hurry and get to bed before dawn. Lavinia continued to analyze the experience while she showered. Jean Philippe was the one she had the most experience with and he was a magnificent lover. That was one reason she had been with him so many times over the years. Even though there were never feelings involved, other than friendship and trust, she had gotten used to that. Lavinia had honestly forgotten what it felt like to be touched by someone she loved. It was an experience worth remembering. She had no idea where things with Synn might lead, or even if they would lead anywhere at all. The council was looking for him and it was her duty to carry out any orders they gave in regards to the wizard. It was a complicated situation and the stakes were getting higher. But when she remembered the way he made her feel, she knew it was worth the risk.

Lavinia felt perfectly fine when she lay down just before the dawn. However, she felt like shit when she woke up four hours later. She was expecting darkness. When she first opened her eyes she thought someone must have a spotlight outside. Damn, she had forgotten to close the metal shutters

Logan had installed. But why the hell would someone have a spotlight pointed at her window? Then she looked at the clock, 9:30. She had never slept that late in her afterlife!

"With a minute," she mumbled.

Lavinia snatched up the bedside clock and screamed when she saw the letters "AM" right beside the time.

"That's not possible!"

She stumbled into the bathroom and propped against the sink, staring at her reflection. Her eyes were bloodshot and she looked pale. Then again, she always looked pale. Her heart was beating again. It had been doing that a lot ever since she came into contact with Synn. Only now, it was because she was scared. Vampires were not supposed to be up during the day.

She peeked back around the corner and looked at the curtains. The daylight behind them cast the room in a soft glow. It was still raining. That meant the sky was most likely overcast. The light seemed blinding even though she knew it wasn't. Still, it was the first light she had seen in over two hundred years that hadn't come from the moon or an artificial source. She was afraid, but that wasn't what caused her to cry at the sight. She had told herself that she preferred darkness, that she had always been more of a night owl anyway. But the truth was she had missed the light.

Lavinia stepped back into the bathroom, sat on the closed toilet seat and thought about what had been happening to her lately. There must be an explanation for this.

"It must be something to do with his blood," she reasoned aloud.

She didn't know what effect the sunlight would have on her once she went outside, but saw no way around it. Lavinia needed to get to Synn. Maybe he knew what was going on. She had become accustomed to her own seductive type of magic. It was simply a part of what she was. But his magic was different. He controlled, he decided what was going to happen. That was entirely new to her. And since he had decided that her taking his blood was part of the deal, then he must have known the effect it would have.

The first thing she found in her closet with long sleeves was a dark green sweater. She put this on along with black pants and shoes. Next, she found a coat with a hood big enough to cast a shadow over her face. Gloves were the finishing touch and she was ready to go. Damn, she needed some sunglasses. She didn't even own a pair! Who needed sunglasses when you never saw the sun? Maybe the hood would be enough.

The other problem with leaving was, she had no idea how to get where she needed to go. When she was alive, Lavinia had been fairly healthy. The few times she had fallen ill came back to her now. The hallway spun before her eyes as she stumbled into the elevator. She wasn't sure if her powers were only weakened or if she still had them at all.

As soon as she stepped outside her senses started reeling even more. The rain wasn't heavy, but the cloud cover was. Even that small amount of light made her eyes hurt and she shut them tight for several minutes, propping against the wall just outside the door.

“Are you alright?” a woman asked as she approached.

“Fine,” she lied. “I’ve just got a terrible headache.”

“Damn migraines,” the woman replied. “Try putting on sunglasses, that helps me.”

“Thanks, I’ll do that.” Well she would if she fucking had a pair.

She straightened up, pulled her hood lower and tried to squint as much as possible without closing her eyes. Lavinia knew she was in no condition to drive and running appeared to be out of the question since she had almost no strength. So, for the first time in years she hailed a cab.

If she looked odd to him the driver gave no indication.

“Where to?”

“Downtown. I’ll let you know when to stop.”

“You got it.”

“Hey, you got any sunglasses?”

He looked in the rearview mirror where she could see his face clearly.

“I’m wearing them”

“I’ll give you fifty bucks for them”

He laughed. “That must be one hell of a hangover you got.”

“You have no idea.”

Lavinia reached into her pocket for some money, but the cab driver held up his hand.

“Here, you can have them I’ve been there myself plenty of times.” He passed her the glasses. “It ain’t worth it, sweetheart. Life is much better without the haze.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” She put on the glasses and added, “Thank you.”

“Although,” he said, leaning forward to look at the sky, “this shit is enough to make you drink.” The monster roared as he passed over a rooftop close to where they were stopped at a red light. “I almost wish I hadn’t stopped.”

She had the driver drop her off a block before reaching Synn’s home. Since it was unclear what was going on, she didn’t want to give away his position in the city. For all she knew the cab driver was a spy for the vampire council. She felt a little strange going back to Synn so soon after leaving. What was she supposed to say? I know we struck up a bargain for sex, but I really need your help? Crap. This might go badly.

She was still unsteady on her feet. No wonder the cab driver thought she was a drunk. For the first time she took a really good look at Synn’s home as it came into view. It was a two story brick building that didn’t look particularly strange. It also didn’t look like a house. It looked a lot like every other brick building that lined the street. It could have been an office complex, or it could have been apartments. There was nothing at all to suggest that a wizard was living there. Surely that was part of his plan. The bricks were a very dark red and the architecture gave away that the structure was very old.

When Lavinia finally pressed the doorbell, she felt faint. What if he didn’t answer? What if he wasn’t even home?

Her fears subsided a moment later when Synn answered the door.

"Holy shit."

He was so caught off guard that he almost forgot to hide his face. Lavinia's attention was drawn to the right corner of his mouth, but she wasn't able to get a clear picture before he had shadows cleverly in place once more.

"Lavinia, come in," he said, ushering her quickly inside.

"From your reaction I take it you have no idea what's going on?" she asked.

"Well, I wasn't expecting you before nightfall if that's what you mean."

He placed his hand against the small of her back and led her into the kitchen.

"Have a seat."

While Lavinia made herself comfortable at the cozy breakfast table, Synn moved to close the blinds in the bay window behind her.

"Is that better?"

"Yes."

"I see you got rid of the handcuffs," he teased.

Lavinia took off her gloves and lowered her hood, but she kept the sunglasses on. There was still a lot of light in the room. Despite how unnerved she was about being awake in the middle of the morning, she couldn't help but smile when she took a good look at the wizard. He was wearing a long black robe with an unusual pattern. It looked as if a deck of oversized playing cards had been scattered about over the material. He was also wearing fuzzy red slippers. She couldn't help but laugh a little when she noticed them.

His hair was tousled from sleep and now that it was dry she could clearly see it was black and slightly wavy. When he heard her laugh Synn brushed the hair back from the left side of his face and winked at her.

"My feet were cold," he said.

"Can you read my mind?"

"No, but I saw where you were looking." It looked like he had been making breakfast when she arrived. He went back to making coffee and asked, "Can I interest you in a cup of Re-Vita Life?"

"You keep Re-Vita Life on hand?" She raised one eyebrow as she spoke.

Synn licked his lips and she shivered. Damn it was sexy when he did that.

"No. I picked some up late last night, after you left."

"But you weren't expecting me?" she said sarcastically.

The wizard laughed and the deep baritone of his voice made her want to swoon.

"No, I wasn't expecting you. But nobody comes that many times without, um coming back for more."

"You asshole." Her tone was playful, despite her words and Lavinia couldn't seem to wipe the smile off her face. He was right.

"Sometimes," he agreed with a shrug. "So, you want that drink or not?"

"Yeah."

While he rummaged around the kitchen, the wizard began to talk and in doing so, he started to reveal a little more of his personality than Lavinia had seen before. It warmed her heart to feel like she was really getting to know him and it made her smile too.

"I'll be honest with you, Lavinia. I have no idea what is going on. But you don't appear to be harmed in any way. I'm sure an explanation will present itself."

He sat the cup of Re-Vita Life in front of her and turned toward the refrigerator.

"An explanation will present itself? That's the best you can do? I haven't seen daylight since . . ." Her words trailed off. "Shit, I don't even remember what was going on in the world the last time I saw the sun."

"Do you remember what was going on with you?" he asked softly. "I understand that there are things you don't want me to know about your life now. But who were you before?"

Lavinia considered the question for a minute.

"I was happy. My father was wealthy and English. My mother, who died while giving birth to me, was Greek. My father loved to travel and to play music, any kind of music. He learned to play a different instrument in nearly every country we visited."

"And what about you? What did you enjoy?"

"Art. I loved to paint and sculpt." She smiled. "And I loved to watch traveling gypsies dance. I was taking art lessons in France when I met the man who made me the monster I am today."

Her last words were sarcastic, but Synn could hear the pain behind them.

"You don't have to tell me that part if you don't want to."

She waved off his concern. "No, it's alright. I won't mention his name, just because it makes me feel better to leave it out. I was twenty six, a spinster by most any standard of the times. I wasn't looking to settle down. Maybe my views had become a little jaded from my travels." She shrugged. "Anyway, I was just enjoying being a woman and being young. Then I made the mistake of falling in love. He came to my room one night. He must have hypnotized me, because the next thing I knew I was lying in a puddle of my own blood on the balcony."

Synn wasn't sure what to say. He knew what it felt like to wake up in a puddle of his own blood ...or someone else's blood for that matter. Neither was pleasant. He sat down across from Lavinia and took her hand in an attempt to offer comfort.

"I'm sorry." After a moment of silence he added, "I didn't mean to offend you with my joke about coming back for more."

She smiled and stroked the back of his hand. "You didn't. You're right."

"Well, it's nice to know you didn't fake it," he teased.

Synn got back up to stir the eggs he was cooking and Lavinia's smile widened as she looked at the fuzzy slippers again.

"I don't believe in faking it. It's like laughing at a bad joke."



You're just going to have to keep listening to the same punch line ...and it wasn't even funny the first time."

He practically snorted with laughter. "It's funny that you should use that example."

"Why, what were you before, a comedian? Or have you always been a dark and mysterious wizard?"

He turned toward her and propped against the kitchen counter, crossing his arms. His hair managed to cast just enough shadow that she still couldn't see the right half of his face. But the left was definitely swoon worthy.

"You're not far off," he admitted. "And no, I wasn't always a wizard."

She raised a brow. "Really? What were you then?"

Synn wondered if he should just blurt it out or not.

"Well, I've changed a lot since then."

Lavinia laughed softly. "Come on, I've seen you naked. The least you can do is tell me who you used to be. I know you've got secrets now, just like I do. You don't have to talk about any of that. I'd just like to know what you used to do with yourself."

"I was a court jester."

## Chapter Eight

She burst out laughing before realizing that he was telling the truth. One look at his playful smirk was enough to give her pause. It was sort of a jester's smile, wasn't it?

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. And a damn good one. After that I was a traveling performer."

"Like with the circus?"

"I suppose. I was a magician who traveled with gypsies. I didn't get picky about what people called our caravan." She looked so surprised that he couldn't resist teasing her. "And just so you know, I liked to watch them dance too, especially when they took their clothes off."

Lavinia laughed and threw one of her gloves at him

Well, that would certainly explain the purple and green color scheme in his kitchen and living room. Despite the color choices, it wasn't loud. It just looked ...vibrant and alive.

"Can you juggle?"

He waved off her comment with false conceit. "Of course I can."

"How the hell did you go from being a jester to being a wizard? No, wait you don't have to tell me that. What's your specialty then?"

"Fire eating, but I was pretty good at sword swallowing too."

"No, no, I mean as a wizard. Don't all wizards have a certain type of magic they're best at?"

Synn considered that for a moment.

"Chaos. My specialty as a wizard is chaos magic." She grew very serious when he confessed his strong point. So, he decided to change the subject a little. "Don't worry, I'll tell you the rest of the story sometime. But not today."

"Synn ...you're not evil, are you?"

"Do you think I'm evil?"

"No."

She answered without hesitation. Well, that made him feel better. He hoped that his reply about his past didn't sound rude. He just wasn't ready to tell her how he became a wizard yet. It was easier to talk about being a jester. So that's what he did while he finished cooking breakfast.

"Don't get the wrong idea," he said while juggling seven oranges. "I'm nobody's fool."

"Not even mine?"

Her words made him stumble and the fruit went flying. Lavinia seemed fairly impressed when he still managed to catch them all.

"Um what?"

"I'm sorry," she said. Lavinia removed her glasses and squinted at the room. "I find myself in a difficult situation. You see for the past two hundred years or so I haven't felt anything for a man beyond friendship or just plain attraction." She wasn't sure how to proceed or if she should just shut up. "In all this time I have never dreamed, not once. And now I dream of you. Only in my dreams ...you have a face."

Synn grew very still, waiting for what she would say next. Finally he prompted, "What does it look like?"

"I can't remember once I wake up."

"It's probably best that way."

Lavinia wanted to know more, but she could hear the pain in his voice. Enough getting to know each other for one day.

"Why don't you stay here, at least until nightfall? You'll be safe, I promise."

A few hours later they were upstairs in his bedroom with all the curtains drawn, watching television. Synn was resting back against the pillows eating fruit and Lavinia was starting to doze off. It felt so odd to be awake at lunch time. It felt even stranger to be sleepy. She had never exactly been sleepy since becoming a vampire. She just sort of passed out at dawn.

"So, if you're originally from England, how come you don't have an accent?" he asked.

"Dunno. I suppose I traveled too much to ever really pick one up. I've been in the states so long that I sound sort of American now." Lavinia almost fell asleep, but then she remembered something. "How were you inside my mind last night?"

"You were weakened by your need and I took advantage. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't understand really."

"I was only able to enter your mind because you were so open to me and because you were so horny." The smile he offered her was wicked, but charming just the same.

"Well, you have a way with words."

He was still smiling, but his smile changed somehow. It looked kind instead of teasing and all that had changed was the curve at the corner of his mouth. It was amazing what he could express with only a smile.

"I used a spell, a very sexual spell to call you here. Don't worry, I really can't read your mind."

About that time a sappy greeting card commercial came on and Lavinia found herself getting all misty eyed. She tried not to listen, but as she moved back onto the pillows she accidentally sat on the remote, turning up the volume. This made ignoring the overly emotional ad impossible. They always made her angry. Even if men did do something nice it was never in such a theatrical fashion.

"Ugh, I hate those stupid commercials. Men really don't buy romantic things like that unless they've done something wrong. Most guys don't even

know how to pick out a card. Trust me, I've known plenty of men who sucked when it came to romance. Why don't they sell cards for real stuff? You know, with things guys would actually say in them?"

Synn laughed, his mouth obviously moving faster than his brain. "Because I don't think they'd make much money off of, 'Thanks for the begrudging blow job,' cards."

Lavinia laughed so hard it hurt. The joke was disgusting, but it did sound like something a guy would say. "You really are terrible."

"Absolutely," he agreed.

"You were a good jester once, weren't you?"

"You have a beautiful smile," he said as he leaned forward to kiss her. "Why don't you take a nap? I'm going to do a little research, see if I can't figure out why you're awake so early."

\* \* \* \*

When Lavinia woke up several hours later it took her a minute to realize where she was. She hadn't woken up in another bed besides hers or Jean Philippe's in a very long time. She ran her hand over the leopard print comforter and smiled. She couldn't remember the last time she had felt so happy or laughed so hard. Even though there was nothing funny about the situation she was in, Synn had a way of making her forget about the rest of the world.

The bed was decorated with black and red velvet covered pillows. The room was huge and it adjoined an equally large bathroom. The bathroom was decorated in stark black and white, which contrasted with the shockingly red silk shower curtain. It was almost dusk. That meant she had been asleep for close to four and a half hours. Lavinia had shed most of her clothes before resting on the bed earlier. All she was wearing now was her long green sweater. She padded carefully down the hall until she found a light on.

She found Synn reclining in a large leather chair in front of a roaring fireplace. He was studying a book very carefully and she wondered if he even knew she was there. Lavinia propped against the doorframe and smiled as she watched him. She just couldn't picture him as a jester.

"I'm sorry," he said after several minutes. "It didn't occur to me until after the fact how offensive my greeting card joke must have been to a woman. You see, back in the day I catered to a male audience. A disgusting, perverted, bawdy male audience who only wanted a jester who told disgusting, perverted, bawdy jokes. I'm afraid I'm ill equipped for a modern female audience."

Lavinia stepped into the room and he was positively entranced with how lovely she looked in the firelight.

"You don't have to apologize to me for who you are. I'm disgusting, perverted and bawdy."

He laughed. "You could never be disgusting, but thanks for trying. Perverted, now that I can believe."

He reached for her and Lavinia moved to sit on his lap.

"I'm still having trouble picturing you as a jester. You're just so ...

imposing.”

“It’s not that hard. Try picturing me in tight pants with jingle bells on my shoes.”

“Mm, you’re turning me on.”

“You really are a pervert.” He smacked her ass playfully before turning back to the book. “Look what I found.”

Lavinia put her arm across the back of his shoulders and rested her face against his. She was on his left side, so he didn’t mind her touching his face.

“I knew I had read somewhere about vampires who could come out during the day. But I’d never actually heard of it happening. I thought it was just a myth. They’re called Daywalkers. Some people speculated that this was what you got when vampires and humans had children together. But obviously that isn’t what’s going on here. I can only guess that it had something to do with you taking my blood.”

“That’s what I thought, but I wanted to hear what you had to say about it. Nothing else has changed in my life. I haven’t done anything different, except for drinking your blood.”

Synn closed the book and sat it on a table beside him

“Well, that must be it. Maybe it has something to do with my affinity for chaos. If there’s one thing I’m good at it’s mixing things up. It only makes sense that that magic would also be in my blood.”

“You’ve certainly turned my life upside down. Or is that my afterlife?”

He laughed. “Are you sure you aren’t a comedian?”

“Hell no. I can’t even remember the last time I told a joke.” She ran her hand inside his robe as she confessed, “I also can’t remember the last time I really laughed before today. You may have turned things upside down, but you’ve also reminded me what it felt like to be alive. Thank you.”

Synn placed his hand over hers and patted it gently.

“I can’t remember the last time I told a joke either, before today. It’s probably been a few hundred years since I even made the attempt. That’s pretty sad, huh? I don’t even know any good ones.”

She moved her other hand and began to toy with his hair. There was something so sweet and intimate about the gesture that it almost made him cry. There was such tenderness in her touch. How long had it been since a woman had touched him this way?

“So, knowing who I used to be ...it’s not a turn off?”

“No. I’ve always thought magicians were sexy.”

“Really?”

“Oh, yeah. I’ve always been fascinated with the way they made things disappear.”

“Ouch. Now that was a bad joke.”

She laughed. “Yeah, it was. But I really do think magicians are sexy.”

“It’s a shame you didn’t bring the handcuffs. I’m also quite an escape artist.”

Lavinia looked serious again when she asked, “Is there anything you

can't do?"

"I can't stop myself from loving you."

His sudden confession must have taken her breath away, because Lavinia seemed incapable of speech.

Synn couldn't believe what he had just said. But it was true, he did love her and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

"Synn, I ..."

"I'm so afraid that when you find out everything about me--"

"Hush," she said softly, placing her fingertips over his lips. "I've never even seen your face."

"I know, I'm jumping the gun here--"

"Let me finish," she said more firmly. "I've never even seen your face ...but I am so in love with you." Her eyes filled with tears. "You make my heart beat."

In that moment Synn let go of the worries he had been holding onto. If it was wrong to love her, then he would just have to be wrong. It wouldn't be the first dangerous thing he had done. And if it was the last, that was alright with him. He would have risked his life for just one breath of her hair, one touch of her hand.

"I'm sorry that I didn't consider the consequences before offering you my blood. I had no idea what it would do to you. I only meant for the blood to give us a link, a shared connection. I could feel the longing in your touch ...I know that you have been broken before ...just like me. I wanted to help you. I wanted to touch you ...to make whatever had hurt you go away. I knew that somehow I had the power to do that. But I never meant to screw up your life."

"You have brought the first light to my life in a very long time, and I'm not just talking about the sun. I have missed the light. And if I had never known you, I would have gone on missing it."

"But, I--"

She placed her fingertips over his lips again. "You talk too much, Synn. Kiss me."

God she was beautiful and at least for the moment, she was his. Perhaps some cruel twist of fate wouldn't steal her away. Maybe he would be allowed to have love in his life at long last. One thing was certain, he couldn't stand to be broken again ...not like before. If something happened to Lavinia because of loving him it would be his undoing. He would either die or lose his mind entirely. What he felt when he held her was so strong. The loss of something this precious could only cause madness. "Please, God," he thought, "not again."

Lavinia moved to straddle his waist and lifted the sweater over her head. She wasn't wearing anything underneath and Synn took a moment to appreciate the beauty of her naked body in the firelight. Her skin felt like silk beneath his hands. She whimpered when he moved to take her nipple in his mouth and he growled in response.

Lavinia could feel the fever rising within her, even as the fire in the

hearth began to dim. She ran her hands inside Synn's robe and reveled in the way he felt. His muscles were hard, but his skin was like velvet. The few rough scars only gave him character. He moved to kiss her mouth and she fought the urge to touch his face. It hurt that he felt the need to hide, but she respected his reasoning. After all, wasn't she still hiding things? If he knew she had been an assassin for the past hundred years, what would he think? But she tried to push these thoughts away. Now, with his hands roaming up and down her back and his tongue twirling around hers, was not the time to worry.

Even if she never saw the rest of his face, just the touch of his hands took her over the edge. If she were ever allowed to look into both his eyes while he fucked her, it might drive her mad. And right at that moment, Lavinia wanted to lose control. She needed him to take her to that point.

She scooted back on his lap and untied the sash on his robe. Next, she moved to rub her body against the front of his, grinding her pussy against him.

"What about foreplay?" he asked.

Lavinia pressed her mouth against the left side of his throat and licked across his pulse.

"I can hear how fast your blood is pumping through your veins ...I want you to pump me like that. Just as hard and just as fast."

At her words a slow wicked smile spread over his features. The corners of his sensuous mouth turned up as he replied, "Not so fast."

"Don't toy with me, Synn. Give me what I crave," she panted.

"Take what you need, but there will be a price."

## Chapter Nine

Lavinia took his shaft in her hand and smiled when she couldn't wrap her fingers all the way around it. Where had he been all her afterlife? She placed him at her entrance gently, then faster than he could blink she slid down onto him. He entered her with such force that it took her breath away. Lavinia practically howled with delight as she ground her body against his, taking as much of him as possible. He filled her up completely, in ways that went beyond the physical. But right now it was his body that had her full attention.

Synn delighted in the way she moaned when he touched her and the wicked grin she had when he pushed a little harder than was necessary. Then again, since she liked it so much maybe it was necessary. It was all he could do to hold back as she writhed on his lap. Sweat began to appear as a fine sheen over her pale skin and he leaned forward to run his tongue over her collarbone.

It was nearly an hour later when he whispered softly, "You've already come three times. It's time to pay the price."

"Yes," she gasped. "Tell me what you want."

"On the floor. Now."

She loved the forcefulness in his voice. Lavinia had gotten so used to being in control that she had forgotten what it felt like to give it up. She had never had a lover to take charge the way Synn was doing right now and it thrilled her. She slid backwards off of his lap and crouched low in front of the fire, awaiting his next command.

Synn rose slowly and let his robe fall to the floor. Even though she had seen everything before, there was something symbolic in the gesture. The robe was off. It was sort of like saying that now the games had truly begun. All joking had long since vanished. As Lavinia looked up at him she couldn't imagine a more serious sight. His body was hardened in a way that only battle could accomplish. Whatever he may be, this man was much more than a jester. In fact, picturing him as such was impossible to her at that moment. Lavinia wasn't looking at the man he used to be. She was looking at the immortal wizard he had become. He looked devilish and frightening ... And it turned her on something fierce.

"On your hands and knees," he said.

Lavinia turned to do as he said and wiggled her ass at him. She just couldn't help herself. She had no idea what to expect and when she felt him kneel beside her a shiver ran down her spine.

Synn leaned over and nibbled gently at her shoulder, working his way slowly down her back. He applied just enough pressure that she could feel his



teeth, but not enough to cause pain. She could feel his cock pressed against her ass as he moved behind her. Only this time when she wiggled against him it earned her ass a good slap.

The sensation was at once shocking and sexy. No one had spanked her before unless she had told them to.

“You’re the kind of woman who’s used to getting what she wants. Aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

Synn moved to cup her ass cheeks in his hands, taking the tight flesh between his palms and massaging it gently.

“I’ll bet that even when you were alive men scrambled to do as you asked.”

“Yes.”

“What a shame.”

He smacked her ass again and she squealed with delight. Synn ran his tongue over the back of her right hip as he massaged the place he had just slapped.

“All those men, bowing and scraping to do your bidding. You got used to it, didn’t you? Mindless tools, waiting for you to use them”

“Yes.”

“Well, you deserve something better and I’m gonna give it to you.”

He slapped her ass again and she gasped. “Wien?”

Synn laughed, a wicked baritone rumble that made her instantly wetter.

“Wien I’m damn well ready to.” He ran his hands up and down her back again before looking at the fading fire. With a flick of his hand the flames rose higher. “You see my dear, just like this fire you will burn for me. And you will do so at my command.”

He slapped her ass harder this time and immediately began to massage it to counteract the stinging sensation he knew the slap must have caused.

“Don’t worry, Lavinia,” he said softly. “I will always be your fool. But when we are alone, I expect you to be mine.”

He reached forward and took her long dark hair in his hands, running it over his fingers before wrapping it tightly around his right hand. She whimpered and he asked, “Do you like it?”

“Yes.”

“Am I hurting you?”

“No.”

“Do you want me to?”

“Yes.”

He wanted nothing more than to thrust all the way into her in one move. But he also knew that’s what Lavinia wanted and he intended to make her wait for it. He kept pushing into her halfway and then pulling back out. All the while he slapped her ass and pulled her hair just to hear her squeal.

When he finally entered her fully she came almost instantly and as she screamed and wiggled against him he finally lost control. Synn released her hair and leaned over her, pulling her body back against him as he came.

He rested back against the chair and stretched his feet toward the fire while Lavinia stretched out like a cat across the rug. They remained this way for several minutes until she spoke.

"No one's ever touched me that way."

"I know," he said with a sigh. "I could tell."

"Will you do it again sometime?"

Synn laughed and gave a sort of half bow which looked funny from a sitting position.

"As my lady commands."

Lavinia stretched lazily and took a really good look at the library for the first time. "Holy shit." The room was huge and nearly every nook and cranny was filled with books. "Exactly how long have you been here?" she asked.

"In Wicked City you mean? For about thirty years or so."

"How did you manage that? I mean, obviously no one knew you were here until very recently." Crap, had she given too much away?

He shrugged. "I cast a spell of forgetfulness so that the world would not remember me. Anyone who happened to see me forgot I was there before they could tell anyone. It didn't take long for all those who had known me to die. After I outlived anyone who knew my name, the rest was easy."

"And have you always hidden this?" She stopped just short of touching the half of his face which remained in shadow, then let her hand fall. "Or did you just make them forget it?"

Synn reached up to touch his face, still keeping his scared visage from her sight.

"I've hidden it ever since ...". He paused. "Always."

"And now ...how come people know your name again?"

"Someone who remembered me spoke the name. Obviously I miscalculated that whole outliving people who knew my name part."

Synn didn't say anything else on the subject. He didn't want to ruin the moment with bad memories.

"But to make the whole world forget you ...that must take some kind of power."

He was glad she was impressed with him but he didn't want to discuss the matter further.

"You know," he began softly, "I really will be your fool if you want me to."

She smiled and curled up so that her head rested against his thigh.

Synn began to toy absently with her hair as he spoke.

"I just want you to know that since it has been so long since I've told jokes, especially to a woman, you can feel free to slap me if I offend you. Besides, I kind of like that."

Lavinia laughed and pinched his thigh playfully. "You're awful. And no I don't want someone else to grovel at my feet. Not that I think you're serious about that offer."

"Oh, I never said groveling would be involved. I said I would be your

fool, not your slave.”

Ooo, there was a definite threat in his voice and she liked it.

“I stand corrected.”

“If I did what I intended you shouldn’t be able to stand at all.”

Lavinia rolled to her back and Synn moved so that he cradled her head in his lap.

“I did experience my fair share of royal courts,” she said. “You don’t have to explain yourself, I mean that. I know how lewd those places were. But that’s half of what made them so much fun.”

He grinned at her reaction to his former life. “Trust me when I say it was worse in the Dark Ages.”

“Damn you’re old.”

He laughed and scooted gently away from her.

“Be right back.”

When the wizard returned a few minutes later he brought a blanket and motioned for her to join him in the chair again. Lavinia rested her head against his shoulder while he explained more of the research he had done while she was asleep.

“As best I can tell, the sunlight shouldn’t actually hurt you. Your powers are also still there, just severely weakened during the day. I realize I must seem like an idiot to you, giving you my blood and then all this happens.” He sighed. “I really am good at being a wizard; I’ve just never had to deal with vampires before. I’ve dealt with people, with other wizards, a random sorceress or two, I’ve even had to deal with werewolves. But not one single vampire has crossed my path before you, professionally speaking. None.”

“You never even met one before?”

“Sure, I’ve met vampires. But meeting them and having anything to do with them is something different entirely.”

There was so much more she wanted to know about him. But until she came clean about her own affairs, Lavinia didn’t feel she had the right to ask. However, there were other questions she wanted answered besides those dealing with Synn’s past. And the one she intended to question had better fess up if he knew.

When she went to get up Synn stopped her.

“You are safe here,” he whispered. “Please, stay till the morning.”

“I’ll be back. There’s something I need to take care of first.”

Lavinia hated to leave him but there were things she needed to know. Now that night had fallen, getting back across town was no problem. She moved so quickly that no one even saw her. Her movements were only visible to those who were really paying attention and right now the monster overhead was far more interesting than anything on the street.

She stopped by her penthouse intent on a quick shower before changing for the evening. The night guard was obviously surprised to see her. He knew what she was and he wasn’t used to seeing her this early. He also knew to keep his mouth shut. Lavinia paid well for the staff’s silence.

She showered quickly and changed into a short black dress which dipped low in the back. The material sparkled in the light and so did the shoes she selected to wear with it. After applying some makeup and combing out her long wavy hair, she was ready to go. The rain had stopped and the wind never messed up her hair. In her opinion it only made it look wild and that was a good thing. Lavinia grabbed a pair of handcuffs and stuffed them into her small evening bag before walking out the door. She was thrilled to not have to worry with a car or hailing a cab. As she raced across town the cold night air felt like freedom and she drank it in.

She was surprised when Brandon met her at the door instead of Logan. He was easily recognizable, even without the makeup. Damn, he was sexy. The werewolf ran a hand through his dark hair as he placed his other hand against the small of her back, leading her inside.

"Logan has the night off," he explained. "It's good to see you again. I had wondered if you enjoyed the performance after you left so suddenly."

Lavinia smiled and reached into her purse. "I believe these are yours," she said, pressing the cuffs into his hand. "Thanks for the dance."

She stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek and Brandon smiled from ear to ear.

"Is Jean Philippe in?"

"Upstairs," he said. "He's all yours."

The master met her at the door. Apparently he had sensed her presence and was eager to spend some time with her. He was wearing a red shirt tonight and it made his skin look even more pale compared to his black pants and hair. The effect was striking and Lavinia couldn't help but admire him. In fact, if she ever stopped admiring Jean Philippe, she might truly be dead.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

He closed the door behind them and motioned for her to take a seat. As usual, she sat in the chair behind his desk instead of in the one in front of it.

"Oh nothing," he said casually. "I was starting to wonder if you planned to perform downstairs, the way you've been perfecting your disappearing act."

"Jean, I want to ask you something and I'd really like for you to answer me. Obviously, I can't make you. But after all the years we've known each other, I would hope you would tell me the truth."

Her voice was soft and there was something in her tone that tugged at his heart. He had barely laid eyes on her in three weeks and now she showed up with this wounded note in her voice. What was going on?

"Fine," he said. "But I have questions of my own first. For instance, where have you been lately? And why after over two hundred years are you refusing the offer of my company? For that matter, why are you refusing Judas and Logan as well?"

"I haven't refused them"

"No, just ignored them. Why?"

His questions didn't sound angry, but they did sound insistent and just a little bit hurt.

Lavinia looked him in the eye and answered truthfully, "I've taken a new lover."

He seemed a little surprised. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"You and I have never had that type of relationship, I didn't think it was necessary."

"You're right," he said. "We have never been exactly romantic with one another. But, Lavinia we have been friends." Jean Philippe knelt in front of her as he said, "I was worried about you."

Lavinia reached out to touch his face. "I'm sorry, Jean. It never occurred to me that you would feel this way."

He rose suddenly and turned his back. "That's because I never gave you the impression that I had a heart. It's not your fault. But I have been worried. The least you could do is let me know you're alright. For all I knew you were lying on the side of the road somewhere with a stake through your heart, waiting for the sun to evaporate your remains."

He really had been worried. It made her feel like shit. Lavinia stood up and wrapped her arms around his waist. His cologne was soft and familiar. She snuggled her face against his shirt and breathed deeply. Familiar was good.

"I've always cared about you," he said softly. "Even though we weren't in love ...I don't want to see you get hurt."

## Chapter Ten

Lavinia just stood there for a moment, unsure of what to say.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "You're right. I should have told you where I was and what was going on ...but I would be risking the safety of the man I've been with if I did that. I never meant to betray your trust." She turned him to face her as she said, "And I have always cared for you too. I've never been in a situation like this before."

"Shh," he said. "You don't have to apologize anymore. I'm just glad that you're alright." Jean Philippe moved past her and sat down behind the desk. "What's your question?"

"Why does the council feel the need to get involved with what's going on in Wicked City? A wizard has nothing to do with them"

There it was again, that almost weepy tone. When had he heard her sound like that before? It was like a switch was flipped and suddenly Jean Philippe understood.

"You're in love with him Fuck!"

"Jean, I--"

"Tell me I'm wrong," he challenged. "Tell me you haven't been having sex with the wizard Synn, that he isn't the one you've been running to every night." He crossed his arms defiantly. "Well go on, tell me. Cause I'd fucking love to hear it."

He let loose a string of curse words in French and Lavinia didn't know how to respond.

"Do you know what a shit storm this has created? Do you have any fucking clue what is going on right now?"

"Why don't you tell me, since you know everything," she spat.

"The council has decided that taking care of the problem in Wicked City would improve their human relations worldwide."

"You mean they would let people think that it was you and your people who took care of the problem making vampires look good to everybody."

"Yes. Obviously the council cannot make themselves known to those outside the vampire community. Does that answer your question?"

"Not entirely. Why him? Why assume that he's the problem?"

"Because according to all their sources, he is. Once they have definite proof that he is here ...you know what they'll do."

"Fuck them"

Jean Philippe stood up and took her by the shoulders, shaking her gently. "Lavinia, you know what they'll order us to do. How can you put me in this situation? Already I am breaking the law"

"How are you breaking the law? I'm the one that's been sleeping with him"

He lowered his eyes and his voice as he said, "And I am the one who will not report you for doing so."

She knew the risk he was taking in covering up her actions. If it were known that he had lied for her, he could be put to death. Lavinia trembled as he brushed back her hair and kissed her forehead.

"Tell me what you know of him. It will stay between us."

She believed him and told him everything except the part about being able to go out during the day. If word got out that Synn's blood had that kind of power he would be drained dry. Not by Jean Philippe of course. She trusted him. But she felt it was best not to voice such things, just in case anyone else might learn of it.

"He is not a murdering madman, Jean. I know it. I don't care what anyone says, this man is not a fiend. I have met fiends before."

"Yes, but have you slept with them? Forgive me, ma chéri, but perhaps he is just a really good actor."

Maybe if he saw and felt the things that she had, he would understand. Lavinia took a step closer to him and began to unbutton his shirt.

"I'm going to show you something," she said. "I know that you can see my memories through my blood."

"You don't have to do this," he said softly. "I only meant that--"

"No, I want you to see. I want you to know."

Lavinia ran her hands up and over his chest and wrapped her arms around his neck. As she brought his face closer toward hers, Jean Philippe turned and sank his fangs into her throat.

She opened her mind to him and memories rushed over him. He saw that first night in the alley and the loneliness in the wizard's touch made him want to cry. In a flash of sensation he felt what Synn's touch did to Lavinia and understood why she loved him. He also saw the way he hid his face and as he pulled back from her, a tear slid down his cheek.

"Why does he hide?" he whispered.

"I don't know."

She stayed with the master for another half hour. She hadn't felt right keeping things from him and it felt good to talk to him. She was surprised when he didn't ask about her being able to go out in the day. Apparently that memory had not transferred somehow so she didn't bring it up. Maybe what happened during the day didn't enter her blood-memory as other things did?

"I will tell Judas and Logan," he said. When she went to protest he held up his hand. "As much as they can hear and within reason, of course. You should know by now that I am trustworthy."

"I'm sorry."

"You really don't need blood?" he asked. She understood what he was asking. Was Synn really enough to satisfy her? "Just him?" he prompted.

"Just him."

"When will you tell him the truth about who you are?"

"When it becomes necessary."

"Come here. Let me help you heal that bite. You wouldn't want to

arouse suspicion.”

Jean Philippe reached for her and she moved easily into his arms. Lavinia pressed her lips against his chest and sank her fangs in directly over his heart. He moaned and wrapped her tighter in his arms. Biting him had never felt so intimate before. She knew it was because he was letting her share some of his feelings through his blood for the very first time. Jean Philippe really did have a heart and her secrets were safe with him

“Thank you,” she said, pulling back. “I should go now.”

He walked her to the door, but put his arm out to stop her when she went to leave.

“If he is not the cause of all this turmoil, I suggest you find who is, before the council decides to eliminate the threat.”

“I’m trying, but he doesn’t know either.”

“Be careful, ma chéri, I have sensed an unnerving presence these past few nights.”

“I know I felt it too.”

He watched her leave and smiled to himself. Who would have ever thought that Lavinia would fall in love again? Perhaps this time things would work out somehow. It only took her two centuries to get over her last broken heart. He didn’t want to see that happen to her again. But if it did, Jean Philippe would be there to pick up the pieces.

\* \* \* \*

“What the fuck?!”

The council’s spy had not felt such a presence in years. He was almost certain of Synn’s general location ...But what the fuck was she doing here? The one he had sent was gone, that much had become clear weeks ago. Yet there was some remaining trace of magic that he couldn’t figure out. This was either going to get really nasty or really interesting. Either way, his work was almost done.

\* \* \* \*

Lavinia wondered how and when she would tell Synn everything he didn’t know about her. She felt that it needed to be soon in order to stop the council from harming him. But not tonight. She had left him with confessions of love. It would be rude to return with confessions of cold blooded murder. Even though said murders had been conducted by order of the vampire council, it was the principle of the thing. So, she picked up a few things at her penthouse and headed back downtown to Synn.

When he opened the door he found Lavinia dressed to kill. She was carrying at least six feet of chain and about three pairs of handcuffs.

“Alright, smartass, let’s see you get out of this.”

\* \* \* \*

“She has taken a new lover,” Jean Philippe said.

Judas seemed alright with this news, but Logan was obviously confused.

“And suddenly she doesn’t want us? Werewolf blood has been the only thing that has kept her from attacking people on the streets.”



Judas laughed. “Well, I wouldn’t go that far, but it did help her make it through the night.”

“And sex,” Logan continued. “What about sex? She feeds from it. Are you telling me that after ten years she doesn’t need me anymore?”

“Are you jealous?” Judas asked.

“No,” he answered softly. “I’m afraid. Lavinia is my friend. I know what it takes to keep her hunger satisfied. She is incredibly powerful and I am afraid to see what would happen if that power went unchecked.”

Jean Philippe propped against the desk and studied the werewolf for a moment. He understood exactly where he was coming from and searched for the right words to explain.

“I have been worried about her too. Lavinia laid down the ground rules from the beginning. ‘I need you to be a part of my life, but I cannot love you.’ I think we can all agree that we have loved her regardless, in our own way. And I believe that she cares for us all. For me, Lavinia has been my family, she is the only real connection that I have and we have that still.”

“She kept me from killing myself after I was turned,” Judas said. “She has been my best friend for the past hundred years. I just want to see her happy.”

Logan ran a hand through his white blond hair and flopped restlessly onto the sofa in the corner of the room. “I have been her protector, her daytime guard and her occasional lover for the past ten years. She is precious to me.”

“She is precious to all of us,” Jean Philippe said. “But we are all still friends, we still share a connection to her just as we do to each other. Lavinia never lied to us about what she needed in her life and she has not betrayed us.”

“But she doesn’t want to have sex with us anymore?” Logan asked.

“Don’t be offended, Logan. Do you remember what it felt like when the beast took over you for the first time?”

“Of course. It was terrifying. I was out of control.”

“The powers that Lavinia possesses rule her in much the same way. If you found one person who could tame that, just one, wouldn’t you be thrilled?”

“Yes.”

“Me too,” Judas agreed.

“Fine, but he can’t keep her to himself. Not entirely. After all the times she has taken my blood, I belong to her. I am her animal to call. We are bound by blood. I will be her protector for all eternity whether this new guy likes it or not,” Logan said. “Hell, I’ll probably outlive him.”

“I doubt that,” Jean Philippe answered.

“Who the fuck is he anyway? Who could possibly have that kind of power?”

“An immortal wizard,” Judas answered.

\* \* \* \*

It took him a little while without the use of magic, but Synn finally managed to escape her little trap. Once this was accomplished, he was

starving.

“Care to help me cook?”

“I don’t know the first thing about cooking,” Lavinia answered. “It’s been so long since I ate anything. I barely remember the names of spices.”

“Then this will be fun.”

Synn put on his long purple robe and motioned for her to follow him into the kitchen.

Lavinia watched as he seasoned some steak and started looking for a knife. Even though she was enjoying her time with the wizard, she knew that it must shortly come to an end. She needed to get down to business and at least tell him about her other lovers. After all, she owed them that much.

“Synn, I realize that this is incredibly bad timing ...but there are some things I need to tell you.”

He continued rummaging around in the drawer. Apparently the several dozen knives in plain view were not what he was looking for.

“If you feel you need to,” he said.

Holy shit, how was she ever going to say what was on her mind?

“As you know I’m a succubus. I don’t just feed off of blood, I feed off of sexual energy. Sometimes one can be taken instead of the other, but usually I need both. I have been this way for a long time and I--”

“Have other lovers, yes I know.” He turned back to her and smiled at the stunned expression on her face. “I understand what a succubus does. You didn’t strike me as the kind who would enjoy random men every night. I naturally assumed you would have more than one regular bedfellow.” When she didn’t respond he asked, “Am I wrong?”

“No.” She was shocked by his perceptiveness, but relieved at the same time. “There are three actually.”

“Do you love them?” His voice was soft and kind and it made her feel weak in the knees.

“Not like I love you. They are dear to me. We’ve been together for a long time. They are my family.”

“Will you tell them about me?”

There was so much in that one question. Did she want him exclusively? Would she share their relationship with those who were closest to her? All this and more in just a few simple words.

“I have already told one of them. He volunteered to tell the others. But one in particular has been on my mind. Logan. He is a werewolf. He’s my protector, my daytime guard, my ...”

“Animal to call?”

“Yes.”

“If you are bound to him by blood, then you owe him an explanation of your whereabouts.”

“I know. I’ve never met anyone like you before. I wasn’t sure how to handle all of this. Hell, I’m still not sure.”

“I understand,” Synn said, turning back to search for the knife. “You didn’t know what I would mean to you. If I was just a passing fling or

something permanent, let alone if you wanted me exclusively or not.” He closed the drawer and put his hands flat against the counter. “So, which is it?”

## Chapter Eleven

Lavinia wrapped her arms around his waist, pressing her face against his back.

“Permanent,” she whispered. “And if you don’t throw me out the door, exclusive.”

Synn turned in her arms causing his robe to open wider. Lavinia rubbed her face across the soft hair on his chest and breathed in his scent.

“If they care for you, they will understand.”

He accepted her so easily. Lavinia wondered if she should tell him the rest of her story, but decided not to press her luck. She kissed his chest, gently rubbing her lips over his skin.

“You’re not angry that I’ve been sleeping with three other men on a regular basis?”

“I’d prefer that to random strangers.” He laughed softly at the look she gave him. “Besides, it’s not like I took a vow of chastity for the past seven hundred years.”

At that Lavinia laughed too. “Thank you, Synn. It’s a relief to know you understand me.”

“If they do really care, they’ll most likely want to meet me.”

“Are you alright with that?”

“Sure. My identity isn’t a secret anymore. Might as well do the right thing here and let them know that for the first time in hundreds of years I have completely honorable intentions toward a woman.”

\* \* \* \*

For the first time ever, Lavinia woke up the next morning in the arms of the man she loved. He was lying on his right side with her facing him curled tightly against his chest. The first thing she was aware of was the warmth of his body and the soft masculine scent of his cologne. His slow even breathing let her know he was still asleep. With every breath his stomach brushed against hers and the hair on his lower abdomen tickled just a little bit. It made her smile. She scooted back in order to get a better look at him. His dark hair shimmered in the morning sun. Soft black curls fell over the only side of his face she had been allowed to see. He was beautiful. Everything about him spoke of power and every curl of his full lips spoke of pleasure.

As she watched him sleeping, Lavinia realized he was all she had ever wanted in a man. He was tall, dark, and at least partially handsome. She couldn’t be certain since she hadn’t seen all of his face. But that didn’t matter. He was strong enough to protect her, but gentle enough to treat her with care. Not to mention he was well endowed and had a sense of humor. What more could a girl ask for? He just flat did it for her.

Now if she could only find a way to convey that knowledge to her closest friends without hurting their feelings. She felt like she had bungled things with Jean Philippe and intended to give it another shot. The hard truth was Lavinia was just not used to having to explain herself and she sucked at it. She wasn't used to making apologies either and she sucked at that too. When she realized this she suddenly understood how empty her life had been before she met Synn. She had lived a harsh, uncompromising existence, devoid of most feeling ...and especially love.

Just because she wasn't good at something didn't mean she couldn't learn. Lavinia didn't want to be the type of person who couldn't apologize. But she especially didn't want to be the type of woman who hurt those close to her. They had done nothing to deserve it which made her unexplained absence seem even worse.

Even though she had told Jean Philippe she was sorry if her behavior had hurt him she didn't feel like "I'm sorry" quite covered it. After two hundred years of friendship he deserved something more. Then again ...what more was there to say? The fact that she had caused him to worry mattered to her, but she wouldn't have changed a thing. To have acted differently would mean she might have missed out on knowing Synn. Lavinia took another good look at the wizard and knew that "I'm sorry" was going to have to be good enough. But maybe if she said it again she would feel better.

Synn was completely exhausted and barely noticed when she slid from the bed. The only thing he was aware of was that the right side of his face was touching the pillow so he didn't have to worry about covering it up.

She kissed him softly and felt a fire run through her body, settling right between her thighs. Damn, he wasn't even awake yet and he did this to her.

"I'll see you later," she whispered.

Synn blew a kiss in her general direction, but never opened his eyes. He needed to recover after last night.

The only clothes she had at Synn's place was the dress and shoes she had worn the night before. Even though he said the sun shouldn't hurt her, Lavinia didn't want to take any chances. For a vampire there were few things worse than a sunburn.

She opened his closet to look for a cloak. Almost everything in his closet was either purple, green, black or red. There were very few items that differed from this pattern. However nothing looked "clownish." On the contrary his wardrobe had a dark, creepy sort of appeal about it. There were belts with chains, leather shirts and pants with numerous buckles and even a whip or two. There were also lots of cloaks. She selected a black one even though she liked the red better. She reasoned that black would draw less attention.

Thunder nearly rattled the foundations of the building. Lightning crackled through the air and hurt her ears with the unusual sound. She borrowed Synn's sunglasses from the nightstand and took a peek out the bedroom window. Goosebumps rose on her arms at the sight that awaited her. The

Leviathan was growing. It's hideous, misshapen body looked to have elongated further and its head and mouth looked larger too.

She jumped when Synn wrapped his arm around her waist.

"It's alright," he said softly. "You're safe here."

Lavinia turned away from the monster before the sight of him made her sick.

"I hope you don't mind, I borrowed your cloak and glasses. I need to go uptown to take care of a few things."

"In this?" he asked, pointing to the storm outside. "It looks worse than ever."

"I'll be back tonight, I promise."

Synn looked out again before closing the curtains in disgust.

"There is one more spell that may give me some insight into what's going on. I should try it tonight, before things get any worse."

"Should I stay away tonight then, to give you time?"

"The spell must be performed after the moon has risen. After that it will take me a few hours." He kissed her forehead the way Jean Philippe always did and it made her smile despite what was going on around them. "I would feel better if you returned after that. It won't take all night."

"Okay."

Synn loaned her a pair of his gloves, which were much too big, but kept her hands out of the sun. Even though few rays of light made it through the storm clouds, Lavinia didn't want to take any chances.

The rain was harsh and unrelenting. She did her best to keep the cloak held tightly about her, but the wind kept whipping it out of her hands. Lavinia was terrified the first time her hood slipped off. But Synn was right, the sunlight didn't burn her. Still, she snatched the hood back up as quickly as possible to help block the monster overhead from her sight. Stupid fucking vampire elders. If they had any idea where Synn was located, this fresh hell would probably be enough to push them into action.

"What am I going to do?" she mumbled to herself. "I can't hurt Synn, I just can't. But if I don't follow orders ...I risk Jean's safety."

Lavinia waited until she was half a block from Synn's house before she hailed a cab. The driver dropped her off in front of her building and she hurried in out of the storm.

Logan saw the woman at the end of the hall. She was wearing a long black cloak and soaked through from the storm. And she had great legs. The cloak kept flapping open. Despite his foul mood he smiled. They looked a lot like Lavinia's legs. Fuck! Those were Lavinia's legs!

She threw back her hood and stood in numb silence. Logan was waiting in front of the door to her penthouse.

"Logan ...what are you ..?"

He looked from her to the light streaming in from a window at the end of the hall.

"Lavinia? But ...how?"

He hit the floor so fast it took her a second to realize he had fainted.

Since she was the only one who lived on the top floor, no nosy neighbors came rushing out to see what had happened. Lavinia stepped over the werewolf and opened the door.

“This would have to happen when my strength is gone.”

She crouched down beside him and brushed the soft blond hair back from his handsome face.

“Logan, I’m so sorry,” she whispered. “This is my fault. I should never have left you in the dark.” She glanced back into the penthouse. “I’ve got to get you inside.”

Lavinia kicked off her high heels before attempting to move him into the room. She studied him for a moment trying to figure out the best way to get him inside. Logan was wearing dark brown pants. When she touched his thigh she noticed the leather was still wet. At least he hadn’t been waiting for her long enough to dry. That meant he hadn’t been there more than an hour or so. He was wearing a long matching coat, and no shirt underneath. Maybe she could grip him better without a shirt on. This could work.

Logan was tall, muscular and extremely heavy. She tried putting her hands underneath his arms, but ended up smacking his head against the door when she tried to turn him.

“Oh,” she said, stooping to rub his head. “Sorry.”

Lavinia ended up dragging him into the penthouse by the ankles and propping him up on a pillow beside the chaise lounge. She couldn’t resist admiring his masculine beauty. He was powerful and gorgeous, and he belonged to her. Many vampires had a human servant and if they were powerful enough, some had an animal as well. She was uncomfortable with the term but that’s what Logan was, her animal. She was responsible for him though the idea hadn’t really sunk in yet. She had wiped up the wet trail his clothes had made and was just slipping out of the cloak when Logan woke up.

He watched as the cloak slid to the floor and Lavinia shook out her long dark hair. The back of her dress was open, exposing the creamy skin along her spine. She tossed her hair from side to side and he tilted his head to watch her as if he were in a trance. His eyes roamed down her body and paused at her bare feet. Then he remembered the high heels she had been wearing when she came walking up the hall. In daylight! All the reasons he had been waiting outside came back to him and so did a terrible pain in his head.

“Ouch. What did you do to me?”

She turned around with a start, but laughed a little when Logan started rubbing his head. It wasn’t the fact that he was hurt that amused her, it was the confused look on his face.

“You fainted. I tried to carry you in but I dropped you against the door.” She crouched down beside him and moved his hand so she could look at the bruise that was forming on his forehead. “I’m sorry, but I have almost no strength during the day.”

Logan blushed. He couldn’t believe he had fainted! Then again, he’d never seen a vampire up during the day before. It was quite a shock.

“And exactly what the fuck are you doing up during the day in the first

place?”

She moved to sit on the lounge chair beside where he was propped. Instinctively, Logan moved closer to her.

“Would it have anything to do with the fact that you’re sleeping with a wizard?”

Lavinia’s jaw dropped, but she quickly recovered. “How do you know about that? Jean Philippe said he wouldn’t tell about--”

“Judas had already figured it out, he didn’t have to tell us.” Logan grunted as he moved to sit beside her and rubbed his head again. “But it would be nice if you had told me.”

“I suck at this, Logan. I’m not used to having to apologize or to explain myself. I don’t mean that to sound superior, it’s just the way my life has always been. Even when I was human I never had to answer to anyone. My father was always in a world of his own. For the most part I just had myself. And once I was turned, Jean Philippe wasn’t my father or my mate so I didn’t really have to answer to him” She paused to loop her arm through his. “This all happened so fast ...I didn’t have time to think. But I want you to know that I never meant to upset you or anyone else. ‘I’m sorry’ doesn’t quite cover it, but that’s all I know to say.”

The werewolf sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

“I know that I haven’t exactly acted like a guard. I don’t live with you and I don’t watch your every move like some do. But I have never been far behind. To disappear without at least letting me know you were safe ...”

“Was inexcusable, I know. You’ve only been mine for the past year, Logan. I’m not used to this. But that shouldn’t suggest that I don’t want you around.”

“I have been yours for the past ten years. It’s only in the last eleven months that I officially belonged to you according to the rules of the vampire elders.”

Logan put his hand over hers, covering them both as if she were a child. He was big and warm and Lavinia took comfort in his nearness. “I will watch over you for all eternity and if this wizard ever hurts you I will see to it that he is killed. Immortal or not, you are mine to protect. If he hurts you, I will find a way.”

“He’s not that kind of man.”

Logan shifted slightly and she looked up into his pale blue eyes.

“Then tell me, Lavinia, what kind of man is he?”

She spent the next hour explaining as best she could what her relationship with Synn was like. To her surprise, Logan seemed to understand.

“If you want to end the sexual part of our relationship, I’m alright with that. I won’t lie and say I won’t miss it because I will. But mostly, I just miss you. I’m not like Judas and Jean Philippe. I’ve been lonely.”

She knew he was referring to the fact that the vampires slept together even when she wasn’t around. But that was nothing new. Jean Philippe had been bi-sexual for as long as she’d known him. Judas too. Lavinia thought that was sexy, so it had never been an issue. Especially since they let her



watch from time to time. Logan had never participated, but he was always invited.

“I’ll explain everything, I promise. But let me take a shower first. My hair is sticky from the rain and--”

“And you smell like sex,” he interrupted.

His smile was sarcastic, but Lavinia knew he was just teasing her.

“There’s some bacon in the fridge, make yourself at home.”

She always kept a few things on hand, just in case Logan stopped by as he often did. Lavinia hadn’t realized how much their regular routine had slipped until that moment.

“Can I join you instead?”

“Suit yourself.”

Since Synn understood the relationship between a vampire and their animal, he would understand their need to be close to one another. She had been showering with Logan for ten years now and in all that time it was rarely ever sexual. They just enjoyed the closeness. Lavinia sensed his need for comfort. The city was in a state of chaos, their lives had been turned upside down and now a strange wizard was taking up all of her time. She understood why he had been waiting for her.

Lavinia slipped the straps down her arms and let the short black dress fall to the floor. She started adjusting the water temperature while Logan peeled out of his leather pants and hung them from the back of the door to dry. After hanging his coat on the other side of the door he walked over to check the water.

“I just want to be close to you,” he said softly. “I knew that our relationship was out of necessity before and not because of love. I’m not offended that you want him exclusively ...I’m afraid this is just too good to be true. For you, I mean. If he ever stops being able to satisfy your hunger, what will you do?”

She rested her palm flat against his chest and closed her eyes, taking comfort in the steady rhythm of his heart.

“I can always count on you, right?”

“Always.”

## Chapter Twelve

While they showered Lavinia explained to him all of the reasons that he didn't need to worry. Logan listened with a raised eyebrow and a skeptical grin.

"You asked before about how I was able to be out during the day. Well, it's because I took his blood. Can you imagine the kind of power that takes? Just a small amount of his blood has made me a Daywalker."

"I thought those were just in fairy tales."

"So did he until I showed up on his doorstep yesterday at 10:30 in the morning."

"Holy shit."

She laughed. "Yeah, that's what he said."

They discussed the matter a little further before Logan asked, "Well, isn't he going to be mad that you're showering with a werewolf?"

"I don't think so. I told him about you."

He looked surprised, and then his eyes began to sparkle with obvious pride.

"You told him that I was your protector?"

"Yes and that I had made a terrible mistake in not letting you know what was going on with me. He understood. He said that if you were bound to me by blood then I owed you an explanation."

"Hmm. Maybe I misjudged this wizard."

"If he knows about vampires and their protectors, then he must know of our desire to be near each other." She put her arms around his waist, resting her face against his chest. "I've missed you, Logan." He patted her back gently. "Are you really okay with me only having sex with Synn? Really?"

"Just as long as I can still sleep in the same bed with you from time to time and have an occasional bite."

She laughed softly and he said, "Seriously, that's all it takes. I love you in a completely different way. It is my duty and my desire to watch over you. I hunger for your nearness."

"I feel like that's not fair to you."

He smiled. "It's what I want. Being near you and seeing to your safety makes me happy. Besides, your bite is even better than sex. If you cut that out then we are going to have a serious conversation."

She hugged him again, grateful for his understanding and his friendship.

"If you ever want to be released from your eternal vows to me, I'm sure Synn could find a way."

Logan pulled her back and shook her gently. "Why would you even say such a thing?"

"Just in case you ever change your mind. I don't want you to feel that

you haven't got a choice."

"You worry too much. I'm telling you, this is what I want." His stomach growled. "And some bacon. Bacon is always good."

Logan put on a robe and Lavinia wrapped up in a blanket before following him into the kitchen. He only kept a few things at her house, food, a toothbrush, and a clean bathrobe. She sat at the table while he cooked.

"You must have seen the changes in the monster then?"

"Yes, first thing."

"Synn saw it too?" She nodded. "And what does he think about it?"

"He's going to perform a spell right after moonrise tonight, see if he can figure out what's going on."

"Hmm" He turned back toward the refrigerator. Lavinia knew what he was looking for.

"I bought some eggs a few nights ago," she said.

She enjoyed grocery shopping for Logan. It made her feel normal sometimes.

While he started making an omelet she brought up the subject of going out in the daylight again.

"You know no one knows about me being able to go out like this except for you and Synn."

"But I thought that Jean Philippe had gotten the information from your blood?"

"He did, but for some reason what happened to me during the day didn't transfer to him. I don't understand it, but he doesn't know."

"Are you going to keep it that way?"

"For now. I trust him and Judas. I just didn't want to mention it at the club. If someone were to overhear, there's no telling what would be done to Synn."

Logan nodded his agreement as he turned back to the stove. "I think that's wise. His blood would bring no-telling-what on the black market if people knew."

"Exactly. I kept it to myself for his protection, not because I didn't trust Jean Philippe."

After he finished breakfast Logan went into the bedroom and stretched out across the mattress.

"I'm exhausted," he said with a yawn.

"You haven't been resting?" Lavinia asked, following him into the room.

"I've been too busy worrying about you. That's why I took off from work the other night. I was going to try to sleep, but I still couldn't."

"I'm tired too. Yesterday I took a nap for the first time since I was human. I think I'll do the same today." She moved further into the room and dropped the blanket that had been wrapped around her.

Logan smiled and slid from the bed in order to turn the covers down.

"Can I interest you in a really big teddy bear?"

\* \* \* \*

It sounded like an explosion had gone off outside. Lavinia awoke to the

sound of Logan snoring softly and the feel of his big warm body curled up against the back of hers.

“Logan, did you hear that?”

He snorted, but didn't say anything. A second later the sound went off again. The werewolf jumped and sat straight up, flinging back the covers and nearly rolling Lavinia off the bed.

“What was that?!”

Lavinia slid from the bed and went straight for the closet. “I don't know but it can't be anything good.”

“Where are you going? I'll come with you.”

“I'm either going to the club or to Synn. I'll eventually go to both, I'm just trying to decide where I should go first. What time is it?”

Logan looked at the clock. “It's 6:00. The sun set thirty minutes ago.”

Even though she had no idea what was going on, Lavinia felt a sense of urgency to get out of her penthouse and do something about it. She put on a pair of black jeans and a formfitting black top. She was zipping up her knee high boots when she noticed Logan standing in the bedroom door, already dressed and waiting for her.

“I think there's something you should see,” he said solemnly.

The way he spoke those words gave her a terrible chill.

“What's wrong? Do you know what's happening, is it that bad?”

But Logan wouldn't answer any of her questions, he just took her by the arm and led her into the living room.

“I was looking to see if there was anything about the noise on television. This is what I found, it's live.”

There was a man on top of a building with the Leviathan circling overhead. The man was wearing a long red cloak and looked to be wearing a silver mask. There were slits in the mask for his eyes and mouth, but his face was completely hidden. Behind him was a crowd of people and they looked terrified.

“Hostages,” Logan said.

The footage was being filmed by a camera crew in a chopper. They didn't have sound, but it really wasn't necessary. The news anchor's voice announced, “We've just received a message about what's going on. I'll read it now. ‘I am Synn. Come sundown tomorrow this city is mine. All those who wish to be spared have until then to get out of Wicked City. Those who remain will become my slaves or they will die.’”

“No!”

Lavinia fell to her knees in front of the screen.

“This can't be! Logan, that's not Synn. He wouldn't do this. He wouldn't!”

Logan helped her to stand and they watched in horror as the scene unfolded before them. There was a flash of light directly over the building where the man in red stood. It looked as if a porthole had been opened and through this opening the monster stuck his ugly head. The man in the red

cloak stepped out of the way and watched as the Leviathan began to eat the people on the roof. They ran in terror, trying to escape. But it was useless. One by one they fell prey to the monster.

“Oh, my God,” Lavinia moaned. “There has to be something we can do. This is too much.”

She ran into the bathroom and threw up. Of course nothing came up but blood. Until that moment she hadn’t even known that a vampire could throw up.

“I can’t stand this,” she panted.

Logan handed her a damp washcloth and helped her to stand again.

“This isn’t right. Who would do such a thing?”

“I’m more interested in who could do such a thing. I mean, who has that kind of power? If it isn’t Synn then why does this guy want him to take the blame so much?”

They walked back into the room in time to hear another thunderous explosion. It looked like the porthole had been closed. The blast of power had knocked back the man’s hood. Even though his face remained hidden, Lavinia saw his hair. It was light brown.

“Synn has black hair,” she said, grabbing Logan by the arm. “See, I told you it wasn’t him.”

“Well, that may be enough to convince you, but there’s no telling what the council will do now. If they have found him then I’d say he’s fucked whether he’s guilty or not.”

“No.”

“We should go to Jean Philippe, see what he has to say.”

When they got downstairs the place looked deserted. Even the night guard who was normally very reliable had left his post. One look out the front windows told them why. People were running down the street, screaming and fleeing their vehicles in terror. Car alarms were blaring and some people were fighting each other over cabs or to get into their own vehicles.

“This is crazy,” Logan said. “What are we going to do?”

“Jean Philippe will most likely be in his office at Sinful Delights. I can run there, but I’m not leaving you in that mess outside. The parking lot appears to be blocked, so we can’t get to my car and obviously taking a cab is out of the question.”

Logan took another good look out the windows and sighed.

“I don’t like to do this in public, but I don’t see how I could possibly upset these people any worse than they already are. Will you take my clothes?”

“What are you going to do?”

Logan slipped out of his coat, folded it and handed it to Lavinia.

“The only thing I can do to get across town in a hurry.”

He unzipped his pants and began to slide them down. Two women who were running in opposite directions outside crashed into each other as they tried to get a look. Logan saw them out of the corner of his eye and grinned as he handed the pants to Lavinia.

“Well,” he said, “they’re going to get their eyes full, but not the way

they thought.”

It had been a while since she'd seen Logan turn and though it wasn't exactly a pleasant sight, Lavinia couldn't look away. His hands began to lengthen first. She could hear the bones breaking and reforming as his skin became covered with golden blond fur. As usual, she found the process more fascinating than terrible. Logan had been a werewolf for the past twelve years though he was considered an alpha after only two. He turned more easily than anyone she had ever seen. His hair became longer, spilling over his shoulders in a wild, golden tangle. He growled and his teeth lengthened into fangs. In that split second when he was caught between man and beast, he was one of the sexiest things she had ever seen. The obvious pain in his expression made her reach out to him. It wasn't his physical pain she found upsetting, it was the emotional pain behind his eyes.

Logan looked down at her hand before throwing back his head with a howl. As he did this his chest expanded and a carpet of blond fur spread over and down his abdomen. The bones of his lower legs lengthened and his feet became gigantic paws. His face began to lengthen as well and in a few short moments his transformation was complete.

Both the women who were watching outside fainted.

Logan stepped in front of her and Lavinia ran her hand over the fur on his chest. She could feel his heart beating hard underneath her palm. Logan was big to begin with, six foot four to be exact. But as a werewolf he was over seven feet tall.

His hands were enormous and still human in shape, though covered with fur and adorned with long black claws. Logan's hands were not the only parts of his body that retained a human shape. In fact, the only parts that were clearly wolf were his head and his feet. Werewolves' legs transform in a way that makes it look like a wolf is standing on its hind legs. From the knees up his powerfully muscled body still appeared human.

Lavinia knew the pain it caused him to be seen like this. Logan had never been ashamed of being a werewolf, but he was very sensitive to people's reactions. He hated being called a monster. Not jokingly like most other werewolves and vampires did to each other, that didn't faze him. It was when people ran in the opposite direction screaming the word that it hurt his feelings.

Logan put one clawed hand over hers and said as softly as he could, “We should get going.”

His voice had been deepened by the change and it rumbled almost like thunder, causing his chest to vibrate beneath her hand. Lavinia bundled his clothes underneath her arm and Logan stooped down to follow her through the door outside.

The people closest to them screamed and ran. One woman pointed at him and Lavinia hissed at her. “Get away,” she said, before the woman could call him names.

“Monster,” the woman said as Lavinia extended her fangs.

“That's right I am. But he's just a werewolf. Now get the fuck out of

my way.”

The woman stumbled past them, her eyes wide with terror.

“An enormous sea monster in the sky and this bitch is upset by me?” Logan snorted and shook his head. “Okay, what’s our best route given the circumstances?”

“Well, normally I would say the rooftops, but not with that thing up there. How about 52nd street and then head West?”

“Sounds good to me. You lead.”

## Chapter Thirteen

Lavinia normally ran so fast that to anyone who looked, she was a blur. Few vampires had this ability and it had always served her well. However, werewolves are also extremely fast so she didn't have to slow down significantly in order for Logan to keep up. Even though they were clearly visible most people were too caught up in what was going on around them to pay much attention. They got a few startled screams and gasps, but that was about it.

They were halfway to Sinful Delights when she saw something so terrible she could go no further. Lavinia stopped suddenly and Logan nearly ran her down. There had been a traffic accident. At a glance it was unclear how many people were hurt. What had caught her attention was the car that appeared to be the least damaged. An unconscious woman was in the driver's seat with three children in the back. There were two men trying to pull them from the car, apparently so they could steal it. From the looks of them they were also a part of the accident. They had a few minor cuts and bruises, but their car was totaled.

"Get out!" one of the men yelled, snatching a young boy through the window he had just broken.

"Let him go!"

Lavinia stepped forward and hissed, giving the men a good look at her fangs.

"And if I don't?"

Logan growled and even though he was on her side it gave Lavinia chills.

"Let the boy go or I'll eat you both," he rumbled. "Now put the child down and step away from the car."

The other man started to back away, but the one holding the boy stood his ground. Apparently this wasn't the first time he had seen a werewolf.

"You won't eat us," he spat. "It would ruin your image. Werewolves have worked too hard to become a part of society and vamps too. We need this car to get out of the city and we're going to take it."

"The hell you are."

The man never knew what hit him. Lavinia punched him so hard that as he stumbled back he spat out several teeth. The child he was holding screamed and fought, but the man still didn't drop him.

The youngest child, a girl of about six, started crying loudly from inside the car. Then, what looked to be the oldest child stepped out. Lavinia guessed him to be about thirteen.

"You can have the car, just leave my brother alone."

He tossed the keys at the man's feet. Instantly he dropped the other boy, but when he reached for the keys Lavinia caught him in the face with a



knee. She continued to throttle the man, slapping him back and forth with her open hand. When she backhanded him for the last time, he was knocked back and fell into Logan's arms.

The werewolf smiled down at him and the man pissed his pants.

"Look around you human. The city has gone to Hell. No one will notice if I have a little bite."

The man wrenched himself free and ran with his companion, shrieking all the way down the alley to their right.

"Were you r-really going to eat him?" the oldest boy asked. He was visibly shaking and it made Logan ashamed of how he had behaved. These kids had been through enough without seeing something like him

"No," Logan answered, his voice softening as he addressed the child. "How badly is your mother hurt?"

"I don't know. She's breathing."

"We won't hurt you," Lavinia said.

"I figured that out when you didn't try to kill us." The boy who had been snatched through the window tried to smile at her as she helped him to stand. "Thank you."

"What are your names?" Lavinia asked.

Logan moved around to examine the woman behind the wheel.

"John, Kevin and that's our sister Any."

"She may need a couple of stitches and she probably has a concussion," Logan called over the top of the car. "We should get her to a hospital. They can treat her as an outpatient and they can still get out of the city before tomorrow night."

Despite what the two thugs had thought, the car was not drivable. So, Lavinia carried Any and Kevin while Logan carried their mother in his arms and John on his back. They couldn't move as quickly as before, but they made good time. The nearest hospital was five blocks away and it looked like a ghost town compared to normal. There were a few nurses and doctors who had stayed behind in order to care for those too sick or too injured to leave the city.

Dr. Reese was outside taking a smoke break when they came running up.

"Holy mother of fuck. What the hell is going on here?"

He looked from Logan to Lavinia's fangs and pulled a gun on them. It didn't surprise her that based on the state of things, those who remained behind would be armed. It did surprise her when he aimed the gun at her, despite the fact that she was carrying two children.

"Wait," she said. "We're not trying to hurt anybody. They were in an accident."

"Yeah," Any yelled. "They saved us and our mom. Some men were trying to kill us."

The doctor trembled a little at her words and lowered the gun.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've never actually seen a werewolf before and ... you just can't imagine the kind of stuff I've seen since sundown. I don't even know if this is loaded. I stole it off of an EMT that was in here

earlier.”

“Can you help her?” Logan asked. “She’s unconscious, but her wounds don’t look serious.”

“Y-yes,” the doctor stammered, taking a step closer to look at the injured woman.

He cleared his throat before he spoke again. “I can treat her in just a few minutes. My sister is packing up right now. I’ll see to it that they all get out with her, even if she’s still unconscious.”

“Thank you.”

Once they had the woman on a stretcher and the children were in the care of the doctor’s recently arrived sister, Logan and Lavinia turned to leave.

“Wait,” Any called.

When she stopped in front of Logan he knelt down to see what she wanted. She stared at him for a moment as if uncertain of what to do. Then out of nowhere she threw her arms around him and said, “Thank you.”

Logan sort of whimpered and Lavinia knew it was because he was crying. She felt tears stinging the backs of her eyes too when Any released him and smiled up at her.

It was only after they had left and were completely out of sight when Logan broke down. Despite the need for them to hurry, Lavinia gave him a minute to collect himself and pretended not to notice how hard he was crying.

Before long they passed the intersection where they had stopped to help the children and were surprised to find Logan’s clothes, right where she had dropped them. Lavinia was tucking his clothes back underneath her arm when she heard Logan growl.

“What is it?”

“An unfamiliar vampire.”

He turned in the direction of the scent he had picked up and Lavinia followed his gaze. The vampire who was moving like a shadow down the other side of the street was someone she had hoped to never see again. His short black hair was slicked back and he was dressed to match her black attire. But, that seemed appropriate for an assassin. As soon as she saw him she knew they were screwed.

“Shit.”

“You know him?”

“His name is Lao. He works for the oldest vampire in China. His master is on the council. That might explain his presence. But he never works alone. If he’s here, then they’ve sent in a death squad.”

“But they couldn’t have gotten here so fast. They must have already been on their way, waiting for orders or something.”

“Maybe. The council has ways of helping people travel fast. I’ve heard rumors that the head of the council can travel through mirrors. The point is they’re here and Synn is in trouble.”

Once they arrived at the club, Logan transformed in the alley and got dressed as quickly as possible.

The door had barely opened before Jean Philippe hugged them both.

“You’re alive.” He whispered something else in French and kissed them both on the mouth.

“Do you have any idea what’s been going on?”

“About the threat on the city? We saw it on the news,” Logan answered.

Jean Philippe looked Lavinia in the eye as he said, “I saw enough of Synn through your memories to cast doubt on whether or not that man was actually him. When did you see him last?”

She hesitated. “This morning.”

“This ... What?”

“I’ll explain later, but not here. Too many ears.”

Jean Philippe was obviously shaken, but he collected himself quickly. “Very well. What did you do or what did he say before you left?”

“He was planning to perform a spell just after moonrise to see if he could figure out what was going on. He said it would only take a couple of hours, then he wanted me to come back. Jean, that wasn’t him on television. I know it wasn’t.”

He nodded grimly. “I believe you. But ...the council has already--”

“I saw Lao in the street. Tell me Jean, what have they done?”

“First of all, they have issued a statement that I am to make to the press in a few minutes. Camera crews are setting up in the back lobby as we speak. The elders are taking control of the city for the protection of everyone, and of course for their personal gain. They’ve also given orders that the wizard Synn is to be detained at all cost. Their spy was able to learn his general location, but not his precise whereabouts.”

Lavinia’s heart stopped and her mouth went suddenly dry.

“What kind of orders exactly?”

Jean Philippe couldn’t meet her eyes as he answered, “Dead or alive.”

Lavinia turned and ran for the door.

“What!”

She spun back and nearly hit Logan who obviously intended to go with her.

Everything that Jean Philippe felt for her was in his eyes. He didn’t want her to get hurt or killed by getting in the way of the council.

“I can still follow orders and save Synn. The council said dead or alive. I’m going to make certain it’s alive.”

She raced out before he could say more and Jean Philippe tried hard to pull himself together. He had to go downstairs and face the cameras. It was vital that he appeared in control.

Moments later as Lavinia and Logan found themselves back on the streets, Jean Philippe’s handsome face appeared on every screen possible. His voice echoed from every radio within range and they slowed down only slightly to hear his message.

“As master vampire of Wicked City, I give you my word that this threat will be dealt with by the preternatural community. We are asking that all humans please evacuate the city. Those who remain will be protected if possible. We do not wish for human life to be lost, but ending this threat is

our priority. As you know, traditional weapons have been ineffective against this creature. It is for this purpose that the military has agreed to give us a chance to handle things as we see fit. The borders of Wicked City will be closed at sundown tomorrow. Armed guards will be stationed there. If you are a human watching this, you should be running.”

## Chapter Fourteen

Across town, Synn paid no attention to the news. He was already in the middle of his spell and soon the truth would be revealed to him. He was down in the basement, which looked more like a mini-museum of some sort. Books and odd little objects lined the shelves which took up all of the wall space. Enormous area rugs covered the floor of the surprisingly comfortable room. It looked nothing like a basement.

White candles ringed the room and in the middle of that was a table where Synn was working. On the table sat a small burner and on this burner, a small cauldron bubbled. He was about to do something as unprecedented as the vampires taking control of the city. He was going to summon his grandfather's spirit for help. Even though he had the ability, he had never before called on the ancestor whose great power he had inherited, whose lineage had become both his blessing and his curse.

He always imagined it would be too painful to see the old man. Even though what happened wasn't his fault, it would be a reminder Synn didn't welcome. But now was not the time for second thoughts. Much more was at stake here than his personal feelings and past regrets.

He collected a handful of dried herbs from the table and sprinkled them liberally over the boiling mixture. Heavy vapors began to rise from the cauldron and he held his hand in the midst of them. Without hesitation he lifted a ritual knife and made a small cut in the palm of his right hand.

As the blood dripped into the cauldron he said, "Blood of my blood, return to me and offer me your counsel."

The vapors rose higher, nearly six feet into the air before drifting back over the table and forming what was clearly the shape of a man standing before him. Though ghostly and thin, it was clearly his grandfather. From his long flowing robes to his equally long white hair, he was the man Synn remembered.

The instant his eyes focused on Synn's face a deep sadness passed over his ghostly features.

"Is this what he did to you?"

His grandfather's voice was barely more than a whisper. But he didn't need to speak up for Synn to know who he was talking about.

"Yes," he answered softly.

"So, when he couldn't find me .?."

"It was not your fault."

"And yet you have waited seven hundred years to contact my spirit. I am sorry, child."

As Synn looked him in the eye his feelings for the old man were still evident as was his respect. This seemed to erase some of the sadness in his

ancestor's expression.

"There are more important things at stake right now, Grandfather. This has nothing to do with him"

The ghost pointed a finger in the air as if raising his hand in a classroom

"Ah, but it does, my boy! He is the one you are looking for."

Synn shook his head. His grandfather must be confused.

"No, I'm looking for a way to get rid of a monster, a Leviathan."

The ghost shook his head and made a gesture with his hands as if wiping something clean.

"No, you are looking for the one who controls him. And for clarity. Allow me to show you what is going on in this city. After all, that is why you summoned me, is it not?"

He waved his wraithlike hand over the cauldron and the surface appeared almost mirror-like. At first Synn only saw himself, but then more things became visible on its surface. He saw Jean Philippe giving his speech. He saw the council's assassins scouring the city for him and he saw Lavinia in the midst of them

"No," he gasped. "That can't be why she's there."

Synn knew there were things about Lavinia he didn't know, just like there were things she didn't know about him. But an assassin? And coming for him? No, it wasn't possible. There had to be some other explanation. Maybe she was just returning to him as he'd asked.

"There is more," his grandfather answered.

Synn looked back into the cauldron and caught a glimpse of the man he could never forget, no matter how much he wanted to. He also saw what had been done to the people on the rooftop earlier in the day and nearly threw up.

He growled as he looked at the long hated image.

"That's not possible. He didn't have the spell. He should be long dead by now"

"All will be revealed in time," the ghost replied. "I have shown you as much as I can. But I assure you, it is him"

Synn went to say something else, but the ghost held up a hand to stop him

"Time is short. Let me tell you how to banish this monster."

\* \* \* \*

Lavinia's senses were alive as they had not been for quite some time. She felt everything around her, becoming one with the night in order to better find her prey. Logan followed, but at a distance so as not to give her away. They circled the area where Synn's home was located until she finally found Lao. He was standing on the same rooftop where she had first watched Synn and he was adjusting his rifle, aiming directly for the window. Since he hadn't been invited in, up close and personal was out of the question. But dead was dead and he obviously intended to take Synn out as soon as he stepped in front of the window

Lao was good at what he did. There was no chance he hadn't heard her

approach or felt her presence. The wind was close to hurricane force and it whipped her hair about as Lao turned to face her. He ran a hand through his dark hair and smiled. It was an evil grin that gave Lavinia chills.

"You have come to fight me," he said. "That much I can tell. I can see it in your eyes. What I don't understand is why. We are both agents of the council, enforcers of their will, and this is their order."

Lavinia sneered and his smile broadened. "Don't give me that load of crap as if you have honor, as if you follow some kind of code. Your master sent you here because you're the best, I'll give you that. He knows that if you eliminate the threat it gives him more leverage to try and overthrow the council. It's what he's wanted for years. You don't care about this city or—"

"Or this wizard?" he questioned, raising an eyebrow. "You are too transparent. Your heart is on your sleeve, as the expression goes. Or in this case, it is in your eyes." Lao took a step forward and the gravel on the rooftop crunched underneath his feet. "How is that possible?" He laughed and there was a threat even in that sound. "Your detachment is legendary, surely you must know this. Lavinia the Heartless they call you in China, trusted by only a few but feared by all." She was surprised at this and that seemed to please him. "Yes, they still remember your visit to my country. Or should I say Jean Philippe's visit? I have even begun to suspect that you are The Reaper. After all, his handiwork is mostly found here, in Wicked City."

"Enough talk," she said harshly. "You can think whatever you want about me, but you will not harm Synn."

Lao found this so amusing that he nearly doubled over in mock laughter.

"You don't even have a weapon," he taunted. "Unless you managed to stuff something else down those tight pants I'd say you're out of luck."

Lavinia walked over to a ventilation pipe sticking through the roof and wrenched it loose with little effort, turning back to Lao with a menacing glare.

He pulled out what looked like a stick from his pocket. With a flick of his wrist the stick extended to about two feet in length.

"You have sealed your fate," he said softly.

The howling wind nearly drowned out Lao's battle cry as he launched himself at Lavinia. She held the pipe up and deflected his first blow, but his second caught her in the back of the hamstring, dropping her to one knee. She was reminded painfully that Lao also possessed superhuman speed.

"Motherfucker," she yelled.

Lavinia still held the pipe in both hands. She moved her left shoulder forward as if to follow through with a punch, but instead of extending her arm she extended the pipe and hit Lao in the right kneecap.

He screamed and stumbled backward.

"Bitch," he hissed as he made another attack.

He swung several times and missed as she just barely dodged his blows. Finally, he managed to catch her by the hair and snatched Lavinia toward him. As he did this she let his momentum add force to her strike and brought the

pipe up right between his legs. When Lao fell forward she caught him in the face with her knee, sending him sprawling on the gravel rooftop.

The Leviathan streamed past overhead with a roar and she jumped. She had been so caught up in the fight that she'd forgotten about the monster. Her temporary distraction was all Lao needed. He kicked Lavinia's legs from beneath her and was on her in an instant, straddling her waist and holding the pipe across her throat.

"You're going to die here tonight," he said through gritted teeth. "And before I kill your wizard I'm going to show him your body."

Lavinia kicked her leg high and hit him in the back of the head, but the blow lacked the necessary force to knock him off of her. She tried to wiggle enough to move Lao further up her ribs as he attempted to strangle her. She didn't actually want to get out from under him but she needed more leverage for what she planned to do.

In order to apply more force, Lao moved slightly and Lavinia seized the opportunity. She lifted both her legs just enough to lock his head between her feet, pulling him backward until she was strangling him with her ankles. But since oxygen isn't necessary for a vampire, she couldn't choke him out. So, she broke his neck instead.

Lavinia quickly got to her feet, still limping slightly from the blow to her hamstring. Breaking his neck wasn't enough to kill him and if she didn't act quickly, he would recover. She put one boot on his chest in order to hold him still, but Lao had already snapped his head back into place.

"You know I didn't come alone," he said.

A bone chilling howl echoed up from the alley and she knew that Logan was on his way up.

"Neither did I," she said, before driving the pole through his chest.

Moments later Logan leapt up from the fire escape. He was once again transformed and from the blood on his mouth and hands she guessed he had taken out at least part of the vamps Lao had brought with him.

"Anything I can do to help?" he asked.

She glanced back down at Lao and said, "Yeah, tear his head off."

With Lao's head and heart removed, they could focus once more on the reason they had come, protecting Synn.

"You go to the wizard," Logan said. "I'll take another look around. Make sure he's safe. Don't let him leave the house."

Lavinia placed her hand over his chest and gently rubbed his fur.

"Thank you, Logan."

Lavinia let her hand fall to her side and turned toward Synn's home as it began to rain. She crouched on the edge of the rooftop, staring down into his window, wondering what she was going to say. If his spell had indeed revealed what was going on in the city, had it revealed what was going on with her also? She perched on the ledge for another moment before dropping down into the street and crossing to his front door.

She was just about to knock when the door swung open. Synn stood before her, wearing a long blood red robe. The hood was pulled back, but most of his



face remained in shadow. The way he looked at her ...the way his presence felt. It was a subtle change, but she knew something was different.

"Synn, I was just ..."

He looked down at her, standing there in the rain and knew he had to at least give her a chance to explain.

"Waiting around to kill me, I know. Won't you come in?"

Her boots squished as she moved across the floor and took the chair Synn gestured toward in the living room.

"Have a seat." Before she could say more he continued. "For the first time in centuries I have found someone to love. Please tell me that was not a mistake. I saw you tonight ...out there with those assassins. And yes I know they were sent for me." There was long pause before he said softly, "And so were you."

It broke her heart to hear the pain in his words, but there was little she could do now besides explain. Or at least make the attempt.

"I'll tell you everything," she whispered. "Just give me the chance."

Synn took a seat across from her on the sofa and opened his arms wide.

"Go on."

"I assume you know of the vampire council? Of their existence, I mean."

"Yes. I have for quite some time."

How the hell was she going to sum this up?!

"Well, Jean Philippe, the master of this city, works for them. He is an enforcer for the vampire council. I work for him." She placed a hand over her heart, attempting to stop its frantic beating as she carefully chose her next words. "I am known as The Reaper. I have been an assassin for the past hundred years. I haven't done half the things they say. But the other half ... I certainly have."

It took all she could do to look at him as she continued. "I have killed without remorse and I have done so multiple times. Some think of me as a hero and to others I'm the boogeyman. The orders that were given in regards to you were that you should be detained 'dead or alive.' I came here to make certain it was alive. I never meant to hurt you, Synn. But this is what I am. It's what I have been for a long time. If you can't accept that, I understand. But please believe I did not come here to harm you."

He took a deep breath and ran a hand through his dark hair.

"Tell me, how you came to know Jean Philippe."

Well, at least he appeared to be willing to hear her out. That was a good sign, wasn't it?

"The night I was attacked, he rescued me. When I told you I didn't remember anything before waking up in a pool of blood ...that wasn't entirely true. The man I was dating was named Richard."

Synn winced at the obvious pain it caused her to even use the name. He felt like an asshole, like this was all his fault. But he didn't stop her. He needed to hear this as much as he felt like she needed to say it.

## Chapter Fifteen

“I was expecting him that night and he arrived on time.”

A tear slid down her cheek and Synn fought the urge to reach out to her.

“I was so in love with him that I failed to see what he really was.

When I think back I can see the signs, subtle things I should have picked up on. But as they say, love is blind. And some times it's just plain stupid. I walked out onto the balcony with him to look at the moon.”

Lavinia closed her eyes, reliving in vivid detail the night she had died.

“The moon was the last thing I saw while I was alive. Not before the breath left my body ...but when I was truly alive.”

More tears slid from beneath her lashes, but her eyes remained closed. If she had opened them she would have seen that Synn was crying too.

“It was so beautiful, and full that night. I've always felt like the moon understood me. I know how crazy that sounds. I'm well aware that there isn't really a man in the moon. But it used to help me to pretend there was. He had seen what happened to me that night ...and he alone understood my pain. While I watched the moon, completely entranced by the sound of Richard's soft voice, I felt his lips against my throat. I'm not sure what happened, but in that instant I knew something was wrong.”

She kept her eyes shut tight as she continued to relive that night like a movie inside her head.

“I fought him I jerked away and ran back into the room. Apparently he wasn't expecting resistance, because I got away easily enough. I grabbed my crucifix from the bedside table and when he lunged for me I pressed it against his forehead.” She sobbed and put a hand over her mouth.

Synn was now on the edge of his seat, but he couldn't go to her yet. He needed to know the truth.

“I'll never forget the sound ...the smell of burning flesh. He hit me so hard that I passed out. When I came to he was gone and I was covered in blood.” She sniffed a few times before continuing. “Took me a minute to realize it was my blood. I tried to scream but I had no strength left. He had torn my neck so savagely ...I'm not even sure if I could have screamed if I had the strength. And then I saw him Jean Philippe leapt over the railing. The first thing I saw was his fangs and I thought for sure I was dead. But then I noticed his eyes. His concern was obvious when he looked at me. He knelt beside me and quickly assessed my wounds. Then, he took my hand and said, ‘You are dying. I can save you, but there is not much time. You will live a cursed existence ...but you will live.’ I nodded my head, because I couldn't speak. Jean Philippe made a small cut on his arm and let a drop of his blood fall into my mouth. In a matter of seconds I could feel myself

healing. It hurt, but it was an improvement from the numbness I was starting to feel before.”

Lavinia opened her eyes and found Synn kneeling at her feet.

“As I drank his blood I felt hatred so strong. It burned in my chest like that crucifix had burned Robert’s skin. No one would hurt me again. I felt so strong, so powerful ...and yet a part of me was obviously missing. A part I didn’t know I still had until I met you.”

She started crying harder and as she leaned forward, Synn took her into his arms.

“I’m sorry, Lavinia. When I saw you with those assassins ...I had to know the truth. I’m sorry for doubting you.” He rose to his feet and moved across the room turning his back. “You have shared your past. You’ve laid your scars bare and I accept them” He paused before whispering softly, “I accept you.”

Lavinia started to say something, but he held up his hand as if he knew she was about to speak. His back was still turned.

“If we are going to make it through this, then you should know the truth about me. Not what people have made up in fairy tales and certainly not what they’ve said on television.”

He sighed, resigning himself to the fact that she would either accept him or leave once he was finished. There was nothing he could do now to change that.

“As I told you before, I wasn’t always a wizard. I was a jester and a traveling performer ...and Synn is not the only name I have. My grandfather was a sorcerer. He dedicated his life to the search for immortality. Only when he found it, the cost was too great. When a wizard dies, if he has blood heirs, he can choose to leave them his power. It is passed down through the blood and this is what happened to me. I gained his power along with his life’s work.”

Lavinia rose and moved closer to him. She wanted to touch him but knew this was not the time to offer comfort. She also knew somehow that Synn had never told this to anyone before.

“After his death and my inheritance of his work, another wizard came looking for him. His name was Zorn. When I told him that my grandfather had died, he took me instead. I wasn’t strong enough to refuse. He had me bound by so many spells ... He wanted me to cast the spell my grandfather had found, the spell for immortality. I refused. He said if I didn’t cooperate ... that he would kill my wife.”

Lavinia’s heart ached to hear what had happened to him so long ago. No wonder he had shut himself away from the world.

“So I cast the circle and spoke the words. All that was left was to sacrifice an innocent life. He was going to kill me. I was to become the sacrifice.” Synn’s voice shook as he continued and his body began to tremble slightly as well. “He took the ritual knife and held it high. God, I can still see it. It was like time stood still. The blade glinting in the firelight and those eyes. Those fucking evil eyes.”

The wizard was now shaking almost uncontrollably.

“At the last second, my wife threw herself in front of his blade.”

Lavinia gasped and Synn began to weep openly, his sobs echoing between words.

“For the spell to be complete, the innocent blood must be smeared above the heart of the one offering the sacrifice. As she fell, she ran her hand over my chest. The wizard was furious, but I was strong enough then to break free.”

Synn turned toward her, but kept his head down.

“I escaped, but not before he did this.”

He lifted his head, pushing back his hair and revealing his scared face.

Lavinia cried as if someone she loved had been killed.

“Oh, Synn,” she whispered, “I’m so sorry.”

He wasn’t sure what to expect. But the compassion in her eyes certainly wasn’t a worst case scenario.

She closed the distance between them and with trembling fingers, reached out to touch his scars. He had a thin scar directly above his right eye. It looked like a straight line, extending about two inches above and two inches below his eye. But the worst of the damage was done to the side of his face. Upon closer inspection she could see that the right corner of his full lips was slightly turned upward. Not because he always smiled, but because it was the beginning of a heinous scar. The blade that made the cut must have been sharp, because the scar was a clean, perfect line. It almost looked painted on, but the slight rise to the skin shattered the illusion. One half of his face was forever carved in a smile.

His dark eyes looked deeply into her own before looking down at the floor. He was expecting rejection. Instead he felt her fingertips, softly tracing his scars and wiping away his tears. She stood on tiptoe and pulled him close. When he felt her lips against his ruined skin it felt like someone was squeezing his chest, like he couldn’t breathe. And at the same time ...his heart was finally free.

“I love you,” she whispered. “This doesn’t change how I feel. Nothing could change that.”

Synn held her tight, tighter than he’d ever held anyone before. No one had ever accepted him. Always he’d had to hide his true face, only letting people see what they could handle. They could never handle the truth. And the truth was, he wasn’t perfect. But, one half of him was and that was the half he had always shown the world. He wanted to say “Thank you,” but words just fell short for what he felt. So he held her for several minutes and just cried.

“Why would anyone do this?” she asked softly.

“He tried to carve me into the clown he said I was, undeserving of such power.”

Lavinia pulled back and wiped her eyes. “How horrible. What ever happened to him? Please tell me you got revenge.”

“Unfortunately, no. As for what happened to him we’ll get to that in a

minute. What happened to Richard? Did you ever get revenge?"

Lavinia shook her head.

"I never saw him again. Jean Philippe even helped me look a few times, but we could never find him"

Synn wiped his eyes and turned toward the kitchen.

"I need a drink."

"What. What did you mean we'll get to that in a minute? He didn't have the spell for immortality. So, he's dead right?"

"Like I said, I need a drink."

Lavinia followed him into the kitchen, but didn't press the issue. She could tell Synn needed a few minutes before he finished whatever it was he needed to say. She sat at the kitchen table and removed her wet boots while he rummaged through the cabinets. While he did tequila shots she studied him. The scars were bad, but they didn't ruin him, not to her. He was still devastatingly handsome ...he just happened to have a few scars on the right side of his face. His sensuous mouth had not been ruined. His dark eyes still held the power to captivate. And his shoulder length hair periodically covered the damage anyway. It gave him a Phantom of the Opera sort of appeal, only much less damaged.

"So in all these years, you never showed anyone else your face?"

He shrugged. "Well, there was this one woman. We dated for a little while and I thought she could handle it."

Lavinia was surprised at the twinge of jealousy she felt. She tried hard to keep it from her voice.

"How did she take it?"

He laughed. "She ran screaming. I never saw her again."

"Insensitive bitch."

"Yeah, that's pretty much what I thought."

"Did you care for her?"

Synn smiled. He knew what she was getting at.

"I wasn't in love with her if that's what you mean. We hadn't been seeing each other long, but it still hurt my feelings."

"So no one else has ever seen then? That's sad."

"Well, my grandfather saw it."

Lavinia's brow knit as she gave him a confused look.

"But I thought you said your grandfather died before it happened."

"He did. But I was just down in the basement talking to his ghost. He took it rather well, I think. It must have been hard for his spirit, knowing what had happened all these years ..."

Synn poured himself another shot of tequila.

Lavinia was still confused, but she didn't want to talk too much about a painful subject. Still, there was one more thing that she wanted to know

"Can I ask you something about the immortality spell?"

He downed the shot and poured another.

"Shoot."

She watched him for a second or two, hoping that her question would not

upset him further.

“How come the spell gave you immortality, when you weren’t the one who made the sacrifice? I’m sorry to ask something so ... Well, I’m just sorry to bring it up again. But wasn’t this other wizard the one who actually killed her?”

“Yes,” he said softly. “He took her life ...but I did make the sacrifice. I think the magic knew that and gave the power to me instead. I’ve wondered about that a lot of times, spent a lot of sleepless nights trying to figure it out. That’s the best I could come up with.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your wife,” Lavinia said. “Was she ...?”

“She was nothing like you,” he said, smiling at her surprised look. “Nothing can ever take her place in my heart. But I am not in love with a ghost. I don’t mean that to sound harsh. She died nearly seven hundred years ago. I will always love her, but Fate has given me another chance. I really would be a fool if I denied what I felt for you.”

Synn crossed the room and stopped beside where Lavinia sat, staring down at her. He reached to touch her face and she leaned into his touch, pressing a light kiss against his palm

“I love you for who you are, not for who you remind me of.”

She smiled up at him “Do I remind you of anyone?”

“Some times I think that you do. But when I try to remember anyone else ...there is only your face. Only your smile when I close my eyes.”

Lavinia opened his robe and wrapped her arms around his waist. He was naked beneath the heavy fabric and he shivered slightly as his body was exposed. She pressed her face against the curve of his hip, but her touch was not sexual. She just needed to touch him

Lavinia started telling him about what had happened just before he opened the door. She made it as brief as possible, not wanting to retell all that had been done to Lao. It wasn’t that Synn was squeamish. She just didn’t want to talk about decapitation while holding onto the man she loved.

“Would his bullet really have killed you? When I heard the words dead or alive, I didn’t even stop to remember you were immortal. Pretty stupid of me, huh?”

“No,” he said softly, stroking her hair. “Your concern is touching. Now if this guy shot me in the head. Hmm Maybe.”

She pulled back to look up at him

“Really?”

“It depends. If it was just a shot to the head, I might survive. He’d have to blow my head clean off to kill me. I can’t regenerate as quickly as a vampire or a werewolf, but I will eventually heal. If they were to attack me aggressively enough, where I had no time at all to recover, yes I could be killed. But they’d have to try really hard.”

“Wow”

He walked back over to the tequila, but this time he closed the bottle.

“The spell you performed tonight, was it to talk to your grandfather?”

“Yes. I thought he could help figure out what to do.”

“So, what did he have to say?”

For some reason she felt the urge to check the curtains as she asked. The bay window was completely blocked, all curtains closed. The assassins were all vampires. They couldn't come in uninvited, so taking a shot from a distance was their only option. And the curtains were closed. So, why was she so nervous?

“Well, he told me how to banish the Leviathan.”

“Really? That's fantastic!”

“Yes, but it can't be done until morning. He didn't say why, but the spell must be performed in the light of day.”

“Did he say anything else?”

“He said that Zorn is the one responsible.”

## Chapter Sixteen

“Zorn? The one who ..?” She gestured toward his face. “You’re joking, right?”

Synn laughed, but not like he found any real humor in the situation.

“Darling, even my sense of humor isn’t that dark.”

Lavinia sat back down because she suddenly felt too weak to stand.

“But, how?”

“He said that all would be revealed in time.”

“So, what do we do now?”

“I was hoping you had an idea.”

Before either of them could continue the conversation, someone knocked at the door. They exchanged a questioning look before Synn turned to answer.

“No, wait. It might be--”

But he had already opened the door.

“Logan,” Lavinia said.

He was back in human form and dressed once more. He was wearing the same dark brown leather pants and matching coat which nearly reached his ankles. Except for a few smears of blood he had missed underneath his chin, there was no evidence of what he truly was. But as he faced the wizard Lavinia realized how tall Synn was. She had of course noticed this before. But as he stood directly in front of the six foot four werewolf and looked down at him slightly, it made quite an impression.

Lavinia stepped forward and cleared her throat, causing both men to look at her.

“Synn, this is Logan, my guard and one of my closest companions.”

“Yes,” the wizard said, extending his hand. “Lavinia has told me about you.”

They shook hands and he gestured for Logan to enter the room

“Please, come in.”

Logan must have seen the scars, because Synn made no effort to hide them. If they bothered Logan at all, he gave no indication. Instead he turned toward Lavinia and said, “I’ve taken out the rest of Lao’s death squad.” He shrugged. “Are you sure that was a death squad? I’ve heard so much about them. They didn’t seem that bad really.”

“You are so full of crap,” she said, unable to hide her smile.

“Seriously, they weren’t that tough.”

“Well, they weren’t expecting to have to deal with an alpha werewolf,” Synn pointed out. “And thank you for saving my ass. Your help is much appreciated.”

Logan laughed and the sound helped Lavinia to relax. She hadn’t expected their first meeting to go so well.



“I think I’m going to like you,” Logan said.

“Glad to hear it. But we need to figure out what we’re going to tell the council about their death squad. Or rather, what Jean Philippe is going to tell them when they all turn up deader than usual.”

The three of them sat down at the kitchen table and after about an hour of deliberation, they had a plan. They also filled in the blanks on the wizard’s past so that Logan was up to speed. The death squad was going to be blamed on Zorn. Jean Philippe could tell the council that another unidentified wizard had interfered. The council would figure out it was Zorn once the rest of their plan played out. Synn would make a statement to the press, revealing his true identity as well as telling them that Zorn was the name of the imposter. He would out them both in one move, forcing Zorn to give up the act and state his true purpose. But this would all be done after the Leviathan had been dealt with.

“I’ll call Jean Philippe and get his press contacts,” Lavinia said.

“Most news stations still have someone to represent them staying behind.”

“I have never understood that,” Logan said, shaking his head.

“Me neither,” Synn agreed. “But we’re going to take advantage of them being here. If we could just figure out a way to get to Zorn. He managed to hide from us for God knows how long before this. He may be able to escape the city.”

“Michael,” Lavinia whispered. “Holy shit. We should go see Michael.”

Lavinia couldn’t believe she hadn’t thought of this before.

“You mean bloodsucker, Michael?” Logan asked.

“What?” Synn looked from one to the other, as if hoping for an explanation.

“There’s a vampire named Michael who owns a club a little further downtown. It’s called Sanguisuga, it means ‘bloodsucker’ in Latin.”

“Well, that’s very interesting, but what does it have to do with finding Zorn?”

“Michael is the son of The Chronicler, who keeps records for the vampire council as well as some private family records for other vampire elders. But he doesn’t just keep up on vampire stuff. The Chronicler is nosy and so is his son. If anyone knows the inside story on what’s going on, it’s Michael.”

“Even if he knows anything, what makes you think he’ll help us?”

Lavinia shrugged. “He won’t. At least not willingly anyways. He’s an asshole and a bone dust addict. But if I can catch him in a good mood, he might give away enough for us to figure out if he really knows anything or not.”

Bone dust was a drug made from the crushed bones of the dead, along with a few other choice chemicals. It was also one of the few drugs that vampires could consume. It was snorted in powder form like cocaine. And from what Lavinia had heard, it had much the same effect.

Synn looked doubtful.

“Hey, it’s a place to start,” Lavinia said. “Once the Leviathan is gone Zorn may cause more damage if we can’t find him”

The wizard signed resignedly. "Okay. Where is this club again?"

After going over the plan once more Lavinia realized they wouldn't have much time to do everything they needed to do. The club was very dark and gothic. It was a cross between a tomb and a rave being held at a twisted sort of carnival. They needed to dress for the occasion.

"Our best bet is to get into the dressing room down at Sinful Delights," she said. "But how the hell are we going to get there and then get all the way back downtown? With everything going on..." Lavinia threw up her hands. "I could make it, but you two couldn't. Not before the place closes for dawn."9

"It's still a long time before dawn," Logan said.

"Yes, but not when you figure in the time to get ready, time to get there, time to question Michael and--"

"Wait," Synn interrupted. "I have something that can help."

He walked over to the kitchen cabinet and took out a small blue bottle. The look on his face said that clearly this was the answer to their problem. However, the look they gave him in return said they clearly didn't understand.

"It's a teleport potion," Synn explained. "I can drink this and for the next six hours I can teleport."

"What about us?" Logan asked.

"If you hold onto me you can come to."

Logan laughed and Lavinia gave him an odd look. "Sorry. For a minute there I thought he was The Ghost of Christmas Present." She still gave him that look. "You know 'hold onto my robe' and all that shit?" He threw up his hands. "Forget it."

Synn drank the potion before remembering he was naked beneath the robe he wore.

"Are you sure this dressing room is going to have something to fit me? I don't want to go to a club naked."

"You'd cause quite the sensation," Logan joked. "But yes, you should be able to wear some of my stuff. There's not that much difference in our size."

Actually there was very little difference except for about two inches in height. Other than that, Logan was a bit wider in the waist. Synn considered the werewolf carefully and nodded his agreement. Not a significant difference.

"Alright then, it's time to get this show started. Lavinia, give me your hand. We don't have any time to waste."

"How will we get there exactly?" Logan asked. "You know since you've never been."

"As long as one of us knows where we're going, we should get there just fine."

"Should?"

Before Logan could ask another question Synn grabbed his wrist. They arrived in the dressing room with a loud crash. Logan stumbled into one of the chairs and fell on the floor. Lavinia tripped and hit the wall and Synn just fell flat on his back laughing.

“Sorry,” he said. “I haven’t done that in a long time. Is everyone okay?”

“Fine,” Logan grunted.

“Yeah, I’m okay.”

The backstage area of Sinful Delights was huge and so were the dressing rooms. They had arrived in the main room that held most of the costumes worn by the various performers. The regular staff, like Logan and the other bartenders also had costumes here. Sometimes they wore them, sometimes they didn’t. You never knew what you were going to get when you visited Sinful Delights.

Lavinia flipped through the rack of clothes quickly and pulled out a black sequined corset.

“Jean Philippe isn’t here,” she said.

“Can you sense that?” Synn asked.

“Well, I could if I tuned in to him. But I just know. If he was here, he’d have already come to find out what all the noise was about.”

Logan walked over to one of the vanity tables and started pulling out different kinds of makeup.

“He’s probably at his other daytime resting place battenning down the hatches.”

“Probably. I’ll have to get up with him later and let him know what’s going on.”

Logan turned back to Synn. “Are you going to um...Would you like to cover your scars or show them?”

Synn didn’t take offense at the question, but considered it carefully.

“I haven’t decided yet. Let’s see what I’m wearing first.”

They decided on matching outfits and were dressed in record time.

Lavinia ended up with the sequined corset, a calf length silk skirt with a spilt up the front which reached to mid-thigh, fishnet stockings and knee-high stiletto boots. The ensemble was complete with a pair of lace gloves which reached past her elbow and had a sort of spider web pattern mixed with roses. Her hair was piled loosely atop her head with a few artificial black roses pinned on one side.

Logan was wearing only black leather pants, and a leash, which clipped onto the chain belt at Lavinia’s waist.

Synn was wearing an outfit almost identical to the one Brandon had worn the night he danced for Lavinia onstage. The pants were leather, with buckles up the calves and around the thighs. The matching shirt was tight and long sleeved. There were several buckles across the ribs and some which extended down the arms. He borrowed a pair of Logan’s boots to complete the outfit.

Before Logan had become a werewolf he was a very successful makeup artist. It was hard to find work when people were afraid you might contaminate them. So, working at the club was a treat for him because he still got to help out with the makeup sometimes.

“All done,” he said.

Lavinia inspected herself in the mirror. Her skin was naturally pale

and Logan had taken advantage of that, adding bold colors to her eye shadow. Purple and green combined both above and below her eyes and mixed well with the fake lashes he'd applied. They were two-inch-long, thin raven's feathers and they brushed her face softly when she blinked. He handed her a bottle of body glitter, bringing her attention back to the fact that they still had to do Synn's face.

"Spray this over your breasts," Logan said, pointing at the bottle. He turned to the wizard then. "So, what are we going to do with you?"

Synn remembered flashes of the dancer he had seen through Lavinia's eyes, the night he had called her back to him. He also remembered how much the dancer's appearance had turned her on.

"Can you make me look like a Harlequin?"

A few minutes later, his makeup was complete. His face was painted white, with dark shadow around his eyes. Logan had traced the scar above his right eye so that there was a thin black line both above and below. With a little more make up, both sides matched. His lips were also painted black. Logan had traced the scar here as well, curving up slightly to follow the line of the permanent smile and then painting the other side. He also added a single tear drop underneath Synn's right eye. The effect was striking.

Logan turned him in the chair so that he faced Lavinia and her breath caught. He was dark and frightening ...and yet he was the sexiest thing she'd ever seen. The corner of his lips curled slightly in a roguish grin and her heart fluttered. His dark wavy hair looked disheveled, but that only added to his wild appearance. He looked like he could tear her apart ...and he'd enjoy it. She had never wanted him more.

"You look amazing," she said breathlessly.

"So do you," he answered.

Synn's eyes moved over her with a hungry appraisal. She was devastating, but now was not the time.

"It does suit you," Logan said, gesturing toward Synn. "I think it's some of my best work."

"Aren't you going to paint your face?" Synn asked.

"No time. I'll wear a mask."

Logan selected an opera mask covered with long purple feathers. After adjusting the mask he turned toward Synn and handed him a leash.

"I know you don't expect me to wear that."

Logan laughed. "If you want to explain who you are that's fine with me. But we won't get far with Michael that way."

"He's right," Lavinia said. "Michael will be able to sense something different about you. I can just say that you are my human servant and he won't question the matter any further. If we are linked by blood, then that would explain your magic to him."

Synn took a step forward and reached for her. He bent down as if to kiss her, but stopped just short of touching her lips, which were painted crimson and outlined with black.

"But we are linked by blood," he whispered.

His voice made her shiver with anticipation of being alone with him again. She wanted to forget all about saving the city and just throw him to the floor. But she couldn't do that, and she knew it.

"Then we won't be lying to him"

She sighed regretfully as she looked him up and down once more. Maybe they would get a chance to dress up like this again, when they had more time.

"We should get going," Logan said from behind them "We're wasting interrogation time."

Synn laughed. "I thought we were just going to see if he knew anything."

"Guess what happens if he does?" Logan asked.

Lavinia answered, "We beat the shit out of him till he tells us the rest. Now let's get going."

## Chapter Seventeen

They decided it would be best not to teleport into the middle of the club. So, they teleported themselves about a block away. This allowed them to make an entrance without raising suspicion.

Wicked City was almost completely deserted by this time, except for vampires and other creatures of the night. Jean's message was still being broadcast once every hour. There were several low-flying blimps which passed between the tops of the buildings and his face was on every one of their large screens.

It hadn't rained for a few hours and the wind had died down to a low roar. Their walk was almost pleasant. There was a slight chill in the air. The scent of hundreds of different types of cologne mixed with werewolf pheromones on the night air.

"We're almost there," Lavinia said.

"I can hear the club," Synn agreed.

"I can smell it."

They stopped so that both men could make sure their leashes were properly attached to Lavinia's belt. She looked up at Synn and squinted a little. Two inch lashes took some getting used to. She blinked a few times and smiled when she noticed the way he was watching her.

"You'll need to walk a little behind me," she explained. "Just for protocol sake. Michael is stupid about that sort of thing."

"He never got over thinking that vampires are superior," Logan scoffed.

"Look, we both know he's an asshole. We aren't here to socialize, but it does need to look that way."

They rounded another corner and Sanguisuga came into view.

"I remember when this used to be an opera house," Synn said.

Even though she didn't particularly like Michael, Lavinia loved the look of his club. Its dark, gothic style perfectly reflected the culmination of everything that was Wicked City. The music pumped a bold and sexual rhythm out into the street. Lavinia smiled as they approached. Thanks to Synn the craving to feed from the crowd wasn't strong. But that didn't mean she couldn't enjoy a little light snack while they were here.

Bloodsuckers of various different shapes and sizes stood out front. Some were accompanied by their human servants. Others had brought their animal. Few were powerful enough to have both, which put Lavinia instantly at the top of the food chain.

Tall Roman style columns stretched upward on either side of the entrance. She walked right past them and all the people waiting in line. Lavinia's hands tightened slightly on the chains which connected to her companions. She may not have looked it to anyone else based on the smile she

wore and the graceful sway of her hips, but she was nervous. What they were about to do was very dangerous. But she didn't see another option.

The vamp at the door was almost as tall as Synn. His lean frame was sporting a purple leotard and thigh-high black boots. He was also wearing a black jester hat with red jingle bells. Synn laughed just a little in spite of himself. He just couldn't help it.

"I hope I never looked like that," he whispered to Lavinia.

Fortunately, the vamp at the door didn't seem to overhear. He turned and looked down at her with a smile.

"And you are?"

"Lavinia," she purred, letting the magic of her voice flow over him. When he rolled his eyes appreciatively she knew that using her magic was the correct decision. "I bring greetings from Jean Philippe."

"Ah," he said. "And who are your guests?"

"My animal and my human servant," she said, gesturing toward each as she spoke.

Apparently he didn't think their names were important. This was good, because she didn't intend to give them

"Enter," he said, clapping his hands loudly. As he did this the red curtains directly behind him parted. The ornate door they revealed was quickly opened and the music poured out even louder. The sweet smell of lust filled the air and Lavinia breathed deeply.

"I'll let Michael know you're here. I'm sure he will want to receive you in his private chambers."

"Thank you," Lavinia replied, bowing slightly.

The vamp smiled and made a grand flourish as if beckoning her forward. They had to stay close together as they moved into the club so as not to be separated. The music pumped through their chests like a second heartbeat. The song was dark, wicked and intensely arousing. Synn put his hands on her waist. The move was a possessive come on that was not lost on her as she took a look around.

The old opera house was still visible in much of the architecture. High ceilings arched gracefully, with lanterns hanging at intervals throughout. There were also dancing vampire girls hanging in cages from the ceiling. Some of the dancers blew flames down toward the audience, which stopped just short of actually touching anyone. There were a few small stages in different corners of the room where other performers could be seen. One was juggling knives while another was swallowing swords. A few female vamps who must have been contortionists were doing a very provocative dance across from the sword swallower. It was like a gothic opera mixed with a carnival.

"I like it," Synn said, yelling over the music.

"I knew you would."

Logan unclipped himself from her belt.

"I'm gonna have a look around. See if I can figure out where Michael is. If anyone asks, I went to the bathroom"

"Sounds good to me."

As Logan wound his way through the crowd in the opposite direction, Lavinia turned back to the wizard.

"We should act natural. If that guy at the door is really going to tell Michael we're here, it would look suspicious if we're all in different places. Especially since I introduced you as mine."

"Mmm" he said, pulling her closer. "I like the sound of that." He held Lavinia tight, crushing her small frame against the tall, sinewy length of his. He let his hands roam up and down her back and felt himself growing harder from just the smell of her perfume. "I know we're here on business, but I can't deny myself every pleasure."

His voice, which possessed a magic all its own seemed to wrap around her. She closed her eyes and welcomed the touch.

"And what pleasure is it you seek?" she asked silkily.

"A dance."

Two simple words, and yet they conveyed such passion. A new song began to play. Slowly, deftly the music wrapped around her senses like a delicate vine. Synn kept one hand on her waist, letting it slide as he moved around her in a slow circle, unclipping his chain. A dark fire reflected in his eyes as he watched her, hungrily anticipating the moment he could claim her again. They moved together, so close that they cast one shadow on the floor as they began to dance. The dance floor was packed. Others brushed against them but they neither noticed nor cared. They had eyes only for each other.

The way they looked didn't make them stand out from the crowd. But the energy they were generating certainly did. Michael could feel it even from the back of the upstairs balcony where he sat. He moved to look out over the crowd, trying to figure out where the intense sexual energy was coming from. His long blond hair spilled forward and the vampire at his right leaned over also, her hands roaming over him. He pushed her back, uninterested. His emerald eyes sparkled as they settled on Lavinia. Yes, the energy must be coming from her.

Michael stretched his arms wide and floated into the air. He drifted just above the crowd until finally stopping a few feet from Lavinia and Synn.

Lavinia had been aware of him since he left the balcony, however she did not look at him.

She leaned in close, pulling Synn down toward her. His lips were only a breath away when she whispered, "Don't acknowledge him. Michael likes to watch."

"And are we going to give him a show?"

Lavinia only smiled in response. She ran her hands over the buckles that ran across his ribcage before resting her palms against Synn's chest. The steady rhythm of his heart helped her to focus. She closed her eyes and tuned into the people around her. The tension in the air was palpable. Many were excited about having the humans gone. Others were thrilled with the prospect of taking some action of their own against the evil spreading over the city. And some had just come out to get their freak on. Whatever their reasoning the excitement in the crowd was mostly manifesting itself as sexual



desire.

“Brace yourself,” Lavinia whispered.

She began to pull from that desire. People moved closer to them involuntarily, as if they were physically being drawn to her. The crowd tightened around them as Lavinia threw back her head and moaned. Those closest by trembled at just the sound of her voice. All of their fantasies flowed through her mind in a jumble. Their darkest thoughts, their deepest most forbidden desires became a part of what she felt. The raw power of such a sensation almost outweighed how arousing it was.

In an instant she threw this power back at the crowd. A wave of lust hit them so hard that many fell to the floor.

Synn thought he could see the shock wave in the air, rippling through the audience as even he stumbled back. He had sensed Lavinia’s power, but he truly had no idea she was capable of something like that. It was both amazing and frightening at the same time. Before he could think more on what just happened, he noticed Michael moving closer.

“Lavinia.” Her name was more of a sigh which escaped his lips as Michael’s feet touched the floor beside her. He was around six feet tall and would have been seriously sexy if he wasn’t such an asshole. “It’s been a long time.”

“Yes,” she agreed, turning toward him

His eyes raked the wizard from head to toe with a lusty appraisal.

“And who is your friend?”

“This is my human servant.”

“Really?” Michael looked him over again. “Because he doesn’t feel human at all.”

“Maybe it’s because I’m standing so close by,” Logan said. He stepped from behind Synn and moved to Lavinia’s other side, blocking her somewhat from Michael.

“Ah. I see you brought your favorite animal as well.”

“My only animal,” she corrected somewhat bluntly.

“You are always welcome here. But I suspect this isn’t just a social call. Shall we go to my private chambers?”

Michael turned and a path cleared through the crowd as if by command. He didn’t wait for her reply, but simply began walking away. Lavinia looked to her two companions before taking hold of their chains and following the other vampire. She tried to hold her head high and to walk with determination. But this was getting more dangerous by the minute.

Michael led them past the main stage, where a magic show was about to start, and down a long corridor. By the time they stopped in front of a door, the music was only a soft memory, buzzing distantly in the background.

He unlocked the door and bid them enter. The room was lush. Everything was decorated in blood red draperies and golden enamel of some sort. It was dark and garish, and perfectly suited to the man who stood before them

“I’m surprised Jacque didn’t let me know you were here.”

Lavinia assumed that Jacque was the vamp wearing purple who had let them

in.

“He didn’t have time. We’d only just arrived.”

“Hm”

Michael opened a bottle of blood and poured himself a glass. He inclined the glass toward Lavinia as way of invitation and she shook her head. He didn’t offer anything to Synn or Logan. The wizard apparently took his cue from Logan and simply stood beside Lavinia, wherever she moved in the room

“Suit yourself.” Michael rested back against a large red chair which slightly resembled a throne before turning his attention back to the matter at hand. “Now, what brings you here?”

Lavinia smiled, deciding that perhaps it would be best to be nice. After all, sometimes nice actually worked. She took a seat on the chair across from him and leaned forward slightly as she spoke.

“This isn’t easy to say, Michael. I have some ...inside information about what is going on in Wicked City. It looks as if there are two wizards at work here, not just one.”

“Really?” He raised an eyebrow, but didn’t seem particularly interested.

“As I’m sure you already know, one of the wizards is named Synn. His location has been found and a death squad was dispatched tonight to take care of him”

“And?”

“And ...they were found dead.”

Michael swallowed hard and put down his glass.

“You think the wizard Synn did this?”

“No. But I think another wizard did. I also think it was the other wizard who fed those people to the Leviathan. What I don’t know is where to find him”

Michael laughed nervously. “I’d like to help. But I fail to see the connection. What has any of this got to do with me?”

“Cut the bullshit, Michael.” Okay, so much for being nice. “Do you or do you not know the wizard Zorn?”

The way his eyes widened at the mention of the name was answer enough. In one swift move Lavinia pulled a knife from her boot and straddled Michael’s waist. She pulled his head back with one hand and placed the sharp blade against his throat with the other.

“Where is he?” When he didn’t respond she pulled his hair harder. “Tell me where to find Zorn or I will saw your fucking head off.”

“Or maybe we should just send a note to daddy about how you rob graves to feed your habit?” Logan suggested from behind Michael’s chair.

“No,” he said. Obviously he was more afraid of his father than death. “Just let me go.”

“I’ll loosen my grip,” Lavinia said. “But I’m not letting you go.”

She eased back with the blade and Michael rubbed his throat. However, she was still straddling his waist and it would be easy to kill him if she chose to.

“How did you know I knew him?”

“I didn’t. But The Chronicler knows just about everything and so does his son. I felt it was safe to assume that if such a person were here, you’d know more than just his name.”

“What do you want to know exactly?”

“Everything you know.”

“I was only aware of his presence in the city for the past six months or so. I know that he has spies here, but I don’t know who or how many. I also know that he’s after Synn, because the one time I met him he told me so.”

## Chapter Eighteen

Michael's confession was chilling.

"He actually mentioned Synn by name?"

"Well ...not exactly. He wrote it down. He came to me, I'm assuming because I had contacts, and asked me to help him."

"What kind of help?" Logan pressed.

"He wanted me to help him spread some rumors about this Synn fellow. But he said that I should wait for his signal. Something about the name not being spoken until he was ready to break the spell."

"Motherfucker," Synn growled. "Well, at least we know who started the rumors and broke the spell."

"What spell?" Michael asked.

"Shut up." Lavinia put the knife back at his throat. "You forget everything you hear us say, got it? And if The Chronicler hears about this it's your ass."

"Easy," Michael said, putting up his hands in surrender. "I don't give a shit about politics. I'm in this for me. Right now it is in my best interest to be on your side, whichever side that is?"

"None of your business. Is that the only contact you've had with Zorn?"

"Yes."

"How did he pay for your help?"

"Cash and drugs, how else?"

Lavinia shook her head. "Where can we find him?"

As soon as Michael gave them the address Lavinia rose to leave. She slipped the knife back into her boot without another word and turned for the door.

"Wait. You do know that he controls the Leviathan? If you kill him that monster will be free."

"I thought you didn't care about anything but yourself."

"I might be one of the ones eaten if he gets loose."

Lavinia laughed. "We've got something that should take care of the monster."

"Does Jean Philippe know about this?"

He was trying to imply that she was doing something behind the council's back and it pissed her off. The council didn't need to know everything. But that didn't mean she was being dishonest.

"Of course. And so will the council, just as soon as I report back to Jean Philippe."

"Nice doing business with you."

She flipped him the bird over her shoulder as she exited the room.

Once they were back onto the street, Lavinia breathed a sigh of relief.

“That went much better than I expected,” she said.

“Do you think he told us everything?” Synn asked.

“Not a chance. But we know enough.”

“I thought we were going to get to beat the shit out of him” Logan said, clearly disappointed.

Lavinia laughed. “Maybe another time.”

They teleported back to Sinful Delights and returned their costumes. Synn was back to wearing only the long red robe, but at least it covered everything.

“So what now?” Logan asked.

Synn moved to the sink in the back of the room and began to wash off his face paint.

“We wait till morning. It’s the only thing we can do. I can’t kill Zorn until the Leviathan has been dealt with, and that can only be done by the light of day.” He squeezed out the cloth he’d been using and black and white paint swirled down the drain. “Michael was right. If he is killed, the beast will be free.”

“Shit.” Logan’s posture was in complete agreement with his reaction as he crossed his arms and began to pace the room.

“We’ll get him” Lavinia said. “But right now, we need those press contacts from Jean Philippe.”

“Well, that’s something we can do,” Synn agreed. “I want this guy dead more than anybody and having to wait till morning is nearly more than I can take.”

“But you can kill him as soon as you’re done with the monster, right?” Logan asked.

“Not exactly. I’m supposed to wait until nightfall to go after him”

“Bullshit. Says who?”

“Says my dead grandfather.”

That was the strangest thing Logan had ever heard, but he knew better than to question a wizard too much. Besides from what he had heard about them their reasoning rarely made sense to anyone else. He just kept pacing and tried to work it all out in his head.

Lavinia had just finished removing her fake lashes. She was listening to their conversation and trying to figure out what to do next.

“I should talk to Jean Philippe,” she said finally. “He needs to know what’s going on before someone from the council might contact him” She rose from the vanity table where she’d been sitting and crossed toward the door. “You can come too,” she said to both men. “I’ll need his computer though. It should be upstairs.”

When Jean Philippe wasn’t in his office at Sinful Delights, he kept the place locked. He considered keys unreliable and only used them when necessary. This door was coded to his fingerprints as well as Lavinia’s. The small pad by the door scanned her hand and the lock clicked open.

“I thought you could communicate telepathically,” Synn said, coming up the stairs behind her.

“We can. But I thought he might have something to say to Logan and this would make things easier.”

Before she entered the room he stopped her. His hand rested gently on her shoulder, yet there was an urgency to his touch.

“I kept a low profile at the club, because we were trying to keep my identity from Michael. Do you want Jean Philippe to see me now?” He hesitated before adding, “Like this?”

She knew he meant his scars and not the fact that he was wearing only a robe. Her expression softened as she looked up at him and lightly touched the right side of his face.

“I see nothing wrong with your appearance. But if you don’t feel comfortable, he doesn’t have to see you now. It’s up to you.”

With that she entered the room and walked over to Jean Philippe’s desk. She opened the slim computer on the desktop and dialed his other number. After doing this she opened the computer until it lay flat on the desk, like an open book. In a matter of seconds Jean Philippe’s image appeared, a perfect hologram floating just above the open screen.

“I’ve been waiting for news.” He sounded nervous as he looked her up and down. “You look unharmed. Is everyone else alright?”

“Logan and I are fine and Synn is with us.”

The hologram rotated around until he was facing the wizard, who had been standing against the back wall. Synn’s long red robe was closed so that he didn’t appear naked and the hood was pulled up. When the vampire looked at him he took a few steps forward and pushed back the hood.

“A pleasure to meet you,” he said.

Synn didn’t bother trying to cover his scars. He realized after showing himself to Lavinia how tired he was of always hiding. Jean Philippe would either accept him or turn away. There was nothing else to it.

As he moved the hood back, the robe opened more to reveal his well sculpted chest. Jean Philippe saw the scars. But they were only a part of the picture. And the picture wasn’t unpleasant at all. He could see instantly why Lavinia was so attracted to him. From the way he carried himself to his ravishing good looks ...he would have made a wonderful vampire.

“The pleasure is mine,” Jean replied evenly. “So, what happened tonight?”

“We took out the entire death squad,” Logan answered from the doorway.

“You did what?”

“But, we have a plan,” Lavinia said quickly.

“There are some other things you should hear first.”

Synn gave Jean Philippe a brief sum up of his past, because without that the whole reason for Zorn being in Wicked City made no sense. He also told him about the spell to summon his ancestor’s spirit and what the old man had to say.

“I’m terribly sorry,” Jean said softly. “So, you think this wizard is here for some sort of revenge?”

“It’s all I can come up with.”

“And your grandfather, he didn’t know why exactly either?”

“Unfortunately, no. But I do know how to get rid of the Levithan and I will do so as soon as the sun rises.”

“That will do wonders toward clearing your name,” Jean agreed. “By the way, I believe you. But it’s everyone else we need to convince.”

“Thanks.”

Jean listened quietly as they told him the rest of their plan.

“So we’re going to tell the council that Zorn interfered because of his need for revenge. That he wanted to take out Synn personally. Hmm That might work. Plus, we followed their orders. Synn is in your custody, alive. And tomorrow he will prove himself by eliminating the monster.”

“Something like that,” Synn agreed.

“The contacts you asked for are on the computer,” Jean said to Lavinia. He told her the name of the file. “They aren’t password protected.”

“Where are you, Jean?” she asked softly. “Are you safe?”

“Yes,” he answered, smiling at her concern. “And Judas is with me. We are in my tomb.”

He referred to his underground resting place as his tomb. It was located only a few blocks from Sinful Delights and it was three hundred feet below ground. It was also very well furnished.

“I figured he was,” she said. “That’s why I didn’t ask before. I knew that if you were safe then he was safe.”

“Can you return to your home tonight?” Jean asked Synn. “Do you think it’s safe?”

“I have little choice. The supplies I need for tomorrow are there. Besides, I’ve got enough protection spells on that place to keep out most anything.”

Jean Philippe raised an eyebrow. “Most anything?”

The wizard shrugged. “I’ll have to take my chances.”

Logan stayed behind to start contacting the press while Synn and Lavinia teleported themselves to her penthouse. The hotel was deserted, just as it had been when she and Logan left several hours before. The only difference now was the eerie silence which had replaced shouts of panic from before. It seemed that all of her human neighbors had long since departed.

Synn took a look around to make sure the place was secure while Lavinia got some of her things together. At least for the next few nights, she was staying with him. Not just because he’d asked her to, but because that was where she wanted to be.

As Synn entered the bedroom he caught sight of Lavinia, bending over to take something from her chest of drawers. He had wanted her from the first moment he heard her voice calling to him in the darkness. He wanted her now... only this time was different. If things went badly tomorrow this might be the last time.

Lavinia turned as she sensed him behind her and seemed to understand what he was thinking, just by the look in his eyes. There was no need for words. This might be their last night together. She closed the drawer behind

her with her foot and tossed the clothes she had been holding onto the bed.

The shutters hadn't been closed for the coming day and soft beams of moonlight peeked through the partially open curtains. Synn took another step toward her and her heart hammered against her ribs. Logan was a consummate lover as was Judas. Jean's expertise was mesmerizing. And of course, there had been others. Men who had helped her forget the past, forget her loneliness ...for a while. But no one had ever made her feel the way Synn did. He could touch her heart without ever saying a word. And even in darkness, he had become her light.

He was standing over her now and as he looked down at her, she thought her heart might break. His face was gently outlined by the moonlight. Each line became silver, each hollow a dark plane, blending with the shadows.

He opened his robe wide and with a casual shrug, let it fall to the floor. He stood before her, looking like a god of moonlight and shadows. Every muscle, a ripple of gold, every line silver, every curve an inky black.

If they never saw each other again, this is how she would always remember him

Lavinia unzipped her boots and pushed them aside. Synn watched as she pulled the dark shirt over her head, committing every line and curve of her delicate body to memory. He would either taste victory tomorrow or know defeat with her memory held close to his heart. She unzipped her jeans and moved them down slowly. The luscious curve of her hips made his heart pound faster. All of her was beautiful, but he especially liked the soft curve of muscle just underneath and directly between her breasts. It began at the top of her abs, the only visible muscle unless she flexed, along the flat plane of her stomach. Her throat had already begun to flush with arousal. The soft pink color was spreading rapidly up to her face.

Synn closed the remaining distance between them and unclasped her bra with practiced ease. Lavinia moaned as the fabric fell away and pressed herself against the front of his body. Each soft curve of hers melding with the hard firm lines of his.

She reached between them and took his shaft in her hand, stroking him gently. He lifted her up, sitting her down on top of the dresser as he lowered his head between her thighs. With one swift motion he ripped the crotch from her lace panties and placed his lips against her clit. Lavinia cried out with both shock and delight as she pressed herself against his face. He placed one hand over her breast and Lavinia raised that hand to her mouth. She pulled his index finger between her lips, sucking it hard.

Synn moaned and the sound vibrated against her skin, sending a ripple of pleasure through her body. He rose suddenly, taking her face between his hands, her lips only inches from his as he entered her slowly. Lavinia felt her pussy stretching as he slipped inside her. She ached with need and as he entered her fully she could already feel the beginnings of orgasm

"I need you," she whispered against his lips. Synn moved faster and she wrapped herself around him. Still they remained face to face, lips against lips as she whispered, "I have always needed you."



He pulled back slightly, his body glistening with sweat as the moonlight continued to play off his skin. Lavinia turned her head and took his finger in her mouth again. The sight was highly erotic and nearly more than he could take. He watched as her full lips formed a perfect "O" as his finger slipped in and out of her mouth, mimicking what he was doing to her body.

The symbolism was obvious to Lavinia as well and she sucked his finger harder, moaning as she pulled his skin between her teeth. He moved his finger away from her slowly, tracing the line of her lips with its tip, trailing down her throat. Lavinia put her hands against the back of his neck, pulling him down to her once more. Face to face once again she breathed his name against his lips.

"I'm coming," she whispered.

## Chapter Nineteen

Moments later they still clung to each other, neither willing to let go for fear of what tomorrow might bring.

"I've never made love like that before," he said softly.

"Me neither."

"I think that's because I've never loved anyone this way before."

"Everything's going to be alright," Lavinia whispered.

She had to believe that and so did Synn.

\* \* \* \*

Jean Philippe straightened his shirt once more before pressing the button to call the council. He had been speaking with representatives thus far and not the actual members of the council, though he was sure they were listening. Only Alucard, the head of the council, knew the location of the other members. If they were to tune in via-satellite like he had done, they could easily be traced. It was for this purpose that he spoke with a representative. He was surprised when a hologram of The Chronicler appeared before him. Though he was not a member of the council, he worked for them and was considered an elder.

His hair was so blond it was nearly white and his blue eyes seemed to always glow. He fixed Jean Philippe with a somber gaze and asked, "Has the wizard been dealt with?"

"He is in our custody."

"Alive? That is unexpected."

"Not really when you consider the fact that he is as immortal as you and I."

The Chronicler's smile was not entirely devoid of humor. "Did he give you any trouble?"

"Lao and the entire death squad were wiped out, but not by Synn's hand."

The other vampire snorted. "And he told you this? You can't believe him"

"My people saw it themselves, but they were too late to stop what was happening."

The Chronicler's hologram leaned forward, his blue eyes glowing brighter as he asked, "And what exactly did happen?"

"Another wizard interfered. Synn recognized him though it is the first I have heard of him. His name is Zorn. He eliminated the death squad. I can't be sure as to his reasoning, but after talking with Synn, I believe he may have interfered for personal reasons."

Jean Philippe went on to repeat the story of Synn's past, exactly as it had been told to him. At first The Chronicler's expression was unreadable. But then he let out a sigh that sounded heavy with emotion.

“I need to tell you something, Jean,” he said softly. “Something I was only authorized to reveal if ...if something like this ever happened.”

Jean Philippe waited for what felt like a long time before he finally continued.

“Zorn is the name of the spy who was sent into the city.”

Jean was shocked. “The one the council sent in?”

“The same. He readily admitted that he was descended from wizards, but whatever powers he has he was able to disguise them enough that no one recognized his potential. I don’t need to tell you how serious this is. If he can hide his powers even from the elders ...”

His words trailed off and for several minutes they sat in silence.

“Synn believes this was done for revenge,” Jean said softly.

“That is certainly possible,” The Chronicler agreed. “Does Synn truly think he can eliminate the Leviathan?”

“He does.”

“Now that we know he has lied to us, Zorn needs to be dealt with as well. If Synn can accomplish this, his slate will be cleared as far as the council is concerned.”

“Will Alucard agree to this?”

“Yes,” a deep voice answered from somewhere behind The Chronicler.

Jean Philippe knew without being told that it was Alucard who spoke. Though he didn’t step forward enough to be seen, his presence could be felt even through the satellite connection.

“See that it is done,” Alucard said. “I will inform Lao’s master of his fate.”

With that the transmission ended and the hologram faded before his eyes.

Jean Philippe sat in stunned silence for a few minutes. He needed to tell Lavinia what he had just discovered. But there wasn’t time, even with their telepathic connection. He could feel dawn’s approach. Even though it was urgent, his news would have to wait.

\* \* \* \*

Lavinia watched from the foot of the bed as Synn finished his preparations. She had left him alone to conduct whatever rituals were necessary. Though he had told her to rest, she couldn’t. He had just entered the room a few moments before and smiled sadly when he found her waiting.

“Logan is asleep on the couch downstairs,” he told her. “He said he finished making all the calls last night. Everything is ready for the press conference this afternoon. All we’re waiting on is ...me.”

Synn was dressed in black from head to toe. His long coat looked more like a cape and its blood red liner gave him a vampirish sort of appeal. When he placed a quiver of arrows on his back Lavinia could no longer keep her questions to herself.

“You never told me exactly what you’re going to do.”

Her voice trembled and it broke his heart to know that he was the cause of her distress.

“Are you going to shoot it with an arrow?”

“Yes.”

Lavinia sat back with a sigh and pushed back the thick leopard print comforter.

“You’ve got to be kidding me?”

When he turned to face her Lavinia felt her heart, which thanks to Synn had a constant beat these days, flutter painfully. His hair fell forward as he turned, covering his scars. But even if they had been visible they would not have distracted from his dark beauty. In fact, they sort of added to it.

“The creature’s hide can only be penetrated by an arrow dipped in magical blood.”

“You mean your blood?”

“Yes. In order for the Leviathan to be banished from this realm he must be ordered to do so. That means I have to take control of him. To do that, the magic in my blood has to be more powerful than the one who now controls him.”

“And are you more powerful than Zorn?”

“We’re about to find out.”

Synn made a move toward the door and Lavinia leapt from the bed.

“Become my servant,” she said, her words tumbling out in a rush. “We are already bound by your blood. Take mine and you will become even stronger. My power will be your power, it will strengthen you several times over. Through the connection to me, Logan will add to your strength as well.” He hesitated a moment and she turned him to face her. Her touch was gentle against his face and there were fresh tears in her eyes when he looked down at her. “Please, Synn. I will never make you act like my servant. You will never be my slave.”

“But I will always be your fool,” he said softly. “We have to act quickly, the sun is rising.”

Synn put down his arrows and followed Lavinia to the bed. They were both fully dressed, since she had attempted to sleep in her clothes. She removed her shirt and with the tip of her fingernail, made a small cut above her heart.

“Drink,” she whispered.

The wizard gasped as her power flowed over him. He bent down, gently placing his lips against the cut. He expected the warm coppery taste of blood, but Lavinia tasted nothing like that. Her blood was like a fine wine. Synn sucked harder at the cut and felt a surge of power as her blood flowed into him.

“Blood of my blood.”

Lavinia pulled his face away from the wound and with her blood still on his lips she kissed him.

“Flesh of my flesh,” she whispered against his lips.

A moment later she rose to her knees and sank her fangs into his neck. Synn cried out as he wrapped his arms around her, but not with pain. He had never been more aroused in his life. Never had such passion and power flowed

through his veins. He wanted to spread her legs wide and take her right there. But there wasn't time. He had to go.

Lavinia sensed his urgency and when she withdrew from him a wave of power rushed over them knocking them both in opposite directions. Lavinia fell against the pillows and Synn fell off the foot of the bed.

"Are you alright?" she asked breathlessly.

"Fine." Synn got to his feet a bit shakily, but he felt amazing. "That was incredible. I feel so ...alive. I wish we had more time to discuss this, but --"

"I'm going with you," she said, pushing off of the bed.

Lavinia snatched on her shirt and was already zipping her boots before he could think of a reason to protest.

"But if anyone should see you!"

She went straight to his closet, undeterred.

"It's daylight," he objected, but his words lacked conviction. "I don't want people to start asking questions about why you're out during the day. You don't want that kind of attention."

"I'll wear a cloak and I'll keep out of sight," she said.

She put on one of his long black cloaks and closed it tightly in front before pulling down the hood. Her face was covered fairly well. Only her chin was visible.

"You'll have to make an effort to keep it pulled down during the storm" he said.

"I can't let you go alone," she said softly. "I just can't."

When they got downstairs Logan, who was supposed to be sleeping, was waiting beside the door. He was wearing black leather pants and a matching t-shirt.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

About forty minutes later they were on the same rooftop where the Leviathan had eaten several helpless people. Synn had chosen this spot specifically. Not because of what had happened to the people, but because a portal had already been opened there once. It should be easier to open it a second time.

Logan and Lavinia stood several feet behind the wizard. They were blocked from most of the storm by a small storage building on the roof. They were also blocked from the news chopper directly off the other side of the building.

Synn stood tall in the middle of the roof, his long dark shadow spread behind him like a cloak. The sun was almost fully risen and the monster had just turned in their direction. Gale force winds assaulted him but the wizard stood his ground. Sounds of the chopper echoed in his ears as the rain pelted his body like ice covered needles. This alone created quite a picture, but the show had yet to start.

He stretched his right hand toward the sky and spoke words that neither Lavinia nor Logan understood. Blue fire ignited the sky directly over them and as the flames peeled back to form a perfect circle, Lavinia knew that the

portal was now opened.

Logan pulled Lavinia tight against his chest as the storm became suddenly more violent. Synn's coat billowed about his body, flaring out as if it had a life of its own. The monster was nearly upon them. Its roar echoed above the thunder and its foul stench carried on the wind. Synn took the bow from his shoulder and removed a single arrow from the quiver on his back. He held the tip of the arrow tightly in his right hand, squeezing just enough that the metal pierced his flesh. Blood ran down his hand and dripped onto the rooftop before he finally released the arrowhead and took aim at the creature.

The Leviathan swooped down toward the dark figure on the roof. His mouth was open wide and his tongue lashed out. He got a little bit closer before Synn released the arrow. It went straight down the monster's throat. The creature's eyes went wide. It coughed violently and thrashed its head from side to side. And then ...it started to fall.

"Shit."

Synn turned toward Lavinia and Logan at a full run. Lavinia screamed as he took her in his arms and leapt from the roof. Logan followed and in a matter of seconds they landed on a rooftop not far below. Synn rolled quickly to his feet and turned back toward the monster. Just as he looked back the beast crashed into the building where they had been standing. Its massive body knocked out three buildings as it fell and they watched with a mixture of awe and horror.

"I thought you said you were going to banish it," Lavinia said breathlessly.

"Obviously I underestimated the power in my blood."

By the time they got back to Synn's house, footage of what had just happened was all over the news.

"Wow," Lavinia said as she watched the scene from a different angle.

"Really impressive," Logan agreed. "And you can't see us, so that's a plus."

"You get just a flash of the two of you when I go running toward the side of the building," Synn added. "But no one could tell who you are."

Synn's left side had been facing the camera the whole time. Even when they zoomed in, they couldn't see his scars from that angle. He had sort of hoped they would get a glimpse so that when he revealed himself at the press conference it wouldn't be so dramatic.

Clouds still lingered, but the storm had died down considerably. Aftershocks, almost like those following an earthquake shook the city every few hours since the monster's death. Now all they had to do was wait until sundown and find Zorn. But before that, they had to get ready for the press conference.

While Synn cleaned up he continued to listen to the news. Since the city had been almost completely evacuated, no one was killed when the monster fell. He breathed a sigh of relief. Logan stuck his head into the bedroom just then.

“I don’t think you should change clothes,” he said. “You look like a monster hunter, like a slayer of evil wizards.”

His grin was contagious and Synn couldn’t help but smile in return.

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. All dressed in black and that long coat. I like it.”

“Me too,” Lavinia said, moving in front of Logan. “It suits you.”

“And what about you two? You do plan to go with me?”

They both nodded.

“I’m wearing what I’ve got on,” Logan said.

Lavinia shrugged. “I thought I’d put on a suit.”

She changed into a simple but elegant black suit and gave her makeup another go over. By the time this was done, the designated hour for the press conference had arrived. Lavinia walked into the living room where the two men waited.

“Jean Philippe is supposed to meet us there,” she said.

Synn rose, placing his hands gently on her shoulders as he spoke. “He is your master, Lavinia. He will know that something has changed.”

He was referring to the fact that he was now her human servant. They were linked by blood, both his and hers. And he could feel the power almost like an electric current flowing through his veins. Would it always feel this way?

“Jean knows I love you,” she said softly. “He will understand the choice we made.”

## Chapter Twenty

Logan could feel the difference as well, because through his connection to Lavinia he was also tied to Synn now. He and the wizard had been discussing their newfound connection before Lavinia entered the room. They all shared strength and power so truthfully, Logan didn't mind. The only thing that concerned him was their vulnerability. If one of them was hurt now, they all could potentially be injured. Not so much with little injuries. But if one of them were to be killed...that could pose a problem.

Since Synn didn't want to take a chance on anyone seeing him before he meant to appear, he took another potion. Jean Philippe was startled when they appeared behind him in the back lobby of Sinful Delights.

"Oh," he said, straightening his red silk shirt, "I didn't realize you could teleport."

"A temporary potion," Synn said, waving off the comment.

The master vampire smiled wryly. "Well, you're all over the news. In case you missed it, a replay of you slaying the monster is playing on all the floating screens across Wicked City."

Synn cleared his throat nervously. "I actually did miss that."

The vampire laughed. "It was quite impressive."

"Good thing I didn't kill him, huh?" Lavinia said sarcastically.

Jean remembered what The Chronicler had told him and his expression grew serious.

"I was only joking," Lavinia said.

"It's not that. I spoke with The Chronicler last night. There are some things I need to tell you." He glanced at the clock on the wall behind them. "We should have enough time if I hurry."

Lavinia and Synn exchanged a look. They were both afraid that Michael had told his father about their "conversation." But that was not the case.

Jean repeated what he had learned as quickly as possible and everyone gasped when he revealed that Zorn was the council's spy.

"And they had no idea what he was?" Synn asked.

"That is what concerned The Chronicler most. They knew he was of wizard descent, but he was able to hide his true powers from them. Most likely, this was not the first time he has spied on their behalf. But I wasn't told that. I figure he's been working for them for a long time."

Synn nodded. "That's probably a safe assumption. And they want me to take him out?"

"That's right. Of course, you wouldn't be alone. All of us will help in any way we can."

Lavinia and Logan chimed in their agreement.

"It's just as well," Synn said. "I was planning to kill him anyway."



They could hear the camera crews getting ready on the other side of the door, in the main part of the back lobby.

"Someone should go out there," Logan said.

"We can go ahead," Lavinia answered, taking the werewolf by the arm. "Take your time, Synn."

The wizard walked toward the full-length mirror at the back of the room and turned so that the right side of his face caught the light. He sighed heavily and Jean Philippe took a step toward him. His touch was gentle against Synn's back and the wizard did not object.

"So, you will not hide your face from them?" It wasn't a question, but a statement of fact. The wizard sighed again and Jean Philippe patted his back. "There is something so tragically sexy about scarred beauty," he said softly.

At these words Synn turned to face him. Jean Philippe ran his fingertips very lightly over the scars. The smile he offered the wizard was bittersweet. "They do not ruin you mon ami, they make you who you are."

Although the vampire was incredibly sexy, his words nor his touch conveyed anything more than friendship. The kindness he displayed nearly brought Synn to tears.

"Thank you," he said, patting the vampire's hand which rested on his shoulder.

"Perceptions of beauty, they have changed much since The Dark Ages. I think you will find the world much more accepting than it used to be."

Synn didn't offer a response, but he hoped Jean was right. When he turned toward the door the vampire put out a hand to stop him.

"I'll go first," he said. "Let me introduce you." His words were soft, yet insistent.

Since he didn't relish the thought of speaking to the reporters in the first place, Synn nodded his agreement. He followed the vampire out of the room and onto the small platform which overlooked several rows of chairs. Considering that the city had been almost completely evacuated, he was surprised at how many reporters showed up. However as he focused more closely on the room, he could sense that not all of them were human. That might explain the high turnout. Synn felt his stomach flutter nervously as the vampire stepped up to the podium and adjusted the microphone.

"If I could have your attention please," Jean Philippe said. The slight hum of conversation died down quickly and he smiled as a few cameras flashed. "As promised the threat of the Leviathan has been brought to an end. However, this was not done by the preternatural community. As you could no doubt tell by the footage which has been shown, the threat was eliminated by this man." He gestured to his right where Synn stood. "The real wizard Synn."

Jean Philippe stepped back from the podium and as the wizard took his place Jean was surprised to notice the shadows which hid Synn's face. The room came alive with noise. Questions were flying left and right and cameras flashed with wild abandon.

"Are you really Synn?"

"Did you organize this attack on the city just to make yourself look

like a hero?"

"Are you insane?"

"Are you in league with the vampires?"

"Are you single?"

On and on they went, though the question about him being single both startled and amused him

"Quiet, please," Synn said. His commanding voice gave no room for refusal. "I'd like to address what Jean Philippe has said first. It's true, I am Synn and the man who first appeared claiming to be me is obviously not. He is also a wizard and his name is Zorn. I met him centuries ago and have no idea why he chose to attack Wicked City. Truthfully, I thought he was dead."

"Why did you wait till now to come forward?" a man on the front row asked.

"It all comes down to saving face or saving ass," Synn answered bluntly. "It's a little too late for my face, but I thought I might still save my ass." A few reporters laughed, but they seemed confused by his statement about his face. He had yet to reveal his scars. "I wasn't planning to become publicly involved until Zorn started hurting innocent people. What's worse, he claimed to be me." He glanced back at Logan. "Do you have those visuals I asked for?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to show you something," he said to the crowd. Logan held up an enlarged image of Zorn standing on the rooftop, just before he let the Leviathan eat several hostages. "The man in this picture is standing straight up and he only reaches to here," he said, pointing to a spot on the photo. "Now I measured this structure before the building was crushed under the weight of the falling monster. This little shed is nine feet tall. That would make him about six foot two." Logan held up a second image of Synn standing in the same place, just before he killed the Leviathan. "As you can clearly see, I am significantly taller. Six foot six to be precise. And we have different color hair."

"Couldn't you have colored your hair?" a woman asked.

"I could have. And you are welcome to have my hair tested if you like. Tests will show that this is my natural color and I haven't used any chemicals in the last few days, other than shampoo."

"Couldn't you have just used a potion or spell?" another female reporter spoke up. "You are a wizard after all."

"I could have. But I don't know of a spell that would make me grow four inches, even if I could manage the hair color." A hum of conversation broke out again and Synn silenced it with a wave of his hand. "The reason I tell you this is because he is still out there and I want you to be aware of the obvious differences in our appearance. Oh, and there is one more thing."

The shadows suddenly vanished from the right side of his face. As this happened the wizard ran a hand through his dark hair, revealing his face in dramatic fashion. The crowd grew silent after a few initial gasps of shock.

"I will never hide my face from you," Synn said. "You will know me by these scars. Despite how they look, I will never wear a mask like the coward

in that picture and I will never harm innocent people. But I'll tell you what I will do." He released his hair, letting it fall forward once more to partially hide his face. "I will see to it that this man is found and punished for what he has done. With the continued help of the preternatural community and the indulgence of the government, I will do my best to bring this conflict to a swift conclusion."

The crowd was uncharacteristically silent. But Synn could easily read their minds. And the thought they shared most was could he be trusted.

"I know what you're thinking," he said softly, "and I can be trusted."

"Really?" a petite blond asked. "How can you be sure that's what we were going to ask?"

Synn's smile was wicked as he tuned in further to her thoughts.

"Do you really want to know?"

"I asked didn't I?" she answered boldly.

His evil grin only added to his charms as he replied, "Besides wondering if I'm trustworthy, you're wondering if Logan here is wearing any underwear. Oh, and you're glad the podium is glass because you seem to be enjoying a good view of my crotch. And to answer your next question, yes I am an asshole and no, I didn't stuff."

Jean Philippe fought the urge to not laugh harder than he already was as he stepped forward to say, "I believe this press conference is over."

Once they were safely behind closed doors again, Lavinia turned to Synn with a smile. "Only you could discuss such a serious situation and still manage to leave people laughing."

He shrugged. "Well, that used to be my job."

"I thought you said you couldn't read minds."

"I said I couldn't read your mind. Humans are easy to read and most werewolves can be read with only slightly more effort. No offense, Logan."

"And vampires?" Jean Philippe asked, butting into the conversation.

"Vampires are a bit more complicated. I have to be invited into their mind first."

Jean Philippe laughed. "Well, isn't that ironic?"

"I'd really like to discuss this and your plans for killing Zorn, but I am starving," Logan said. "Isn't anyone else hungry?"

The two vampires gave him a sarcastic look.

"Never mind."

There was a full kitchen for the staff to use located on one of the underground levels of Sinful Delights. It was here that they continued their conversation while Logan cooked a steak. Synn said that the consumption of meat would interfere with his ability to perform any type of defensive magic. So, he was having a salad.

Jean Philippe said he had "already dined." And thanks to Synn, Lavinia was still satisfied from their encounter the night before.

Jean Philippe slid back from the small table and studied the wizard for a moment.

"You speak of humans as if you aren't one."

“Wizards have never been entirely human, as I’m sure you know. Even though I think of myself as human, I’m really not.”

“Yet you are human enough to become her servant.”

Synn put down his fork. “I was wondering when you would notice.”

“I noticed immediately, but the timing was inappropriate to bring up the subject. Actually, I knew before you arrived tonight.”

“Through your connection to Lavinia?”

“From the news. You said you were going to banish the monster, not kill it. I assumed that since you put your blood on the arrow first, that must have been the key to the spell.”

“That’s right.”

“Well, that was one hell of an impact for just a few drops of blood. That would take incredible power.”

Synn smiled. “You’re very clever.”

“No, I just pay attention. I’m guessing that your blood is also the key to Lavinia’s newfound abilities.” He was referring to the fact that she could now go out in daylight.

“You are correct.”

“I’m sure you know this, but be careful that no one else learns about the power in your blood. I’m afraid it would bode very ill for you.”

\* \* \* \*

Zorn awakened with a start. He turned on the television with a sense of foreboding. His instincts were right. Even without watching the news he could sense that his monster had been slain. He’d felt it. He could also sense another power drawing ever closer to his location. It must be Synn. What he didn’t understand was why he had such a keen sense of her. He had known who Lavinia was and that she was in Wicked City, just as he had known about Jean Philippe. What he couldn’t figure was how he knew she was coming now too and what the hell did she have to do with Synn?

\* \* \* \*

The building didn’t look like much. Synn double checked the address Michael had given them. Yep, this was the place. He and Lavinia stood outside what looked like an abandoned hotel. It had long since been condemned. Logan and Jean Philippe were waiting less than a block away. They would attack if necessary on Synn’s signal. Judas was back at Sinful Delights with half of the local werewolf pack. They were on standby just in case. However it went down, Zorn was going to die, of that they were certain. The most frightening thing about his hiding place was, it was only a few blocks from Jean’s club.

As they entered the building a dark figure appeared at the top of what used to be a very grand looking staircase. Even though Synn couldn’t make out his face, he recognized his voice.

“Be gone!” Zorn yelled. He thrust his right hand toward Lavinia and sent her flying through the open front door.

Lightning shot from Synn’s fingertips in response. His reaction was instant and almost involuntary. Zorn shrieked and fell to his knees.

“So, it was you who killed my monster.”

“I thought it only fair that I killed something of yours. Though I doubt you had any feelings for that creature.”

Zorn laughed, a high pitched, bone chilling sound.

“Haven’t you learned by now that I can take whatever I want from you, if it suits my purpose? You weren’t strong enough to stop me before and you’re no different now.”

Lavinia was just about to re-enter the building and Synn feared the worst. About the time that he unleashed an enormous bolt of lightning, another tremor shook the ground. Aftershocks had plagued the city since the Leviathan fell, but none this bad. Just as the lightning hit Zorn, the ceiling came crashing down on his head and the floor gave way beneath him. Synn raced forward to the spot where the other wizard had stood. It looked like he had fallen into a pit covered in rubble. Before Synn could look closer, sparks from his lightning bolt caused the rotten timbers from the ceiling to ignite. He ran from the building, driven back by a wall of flame.

## Chapter Twenty One

It had taken hours to put out the fire, even with the help of the volunteer firemen who had remained in the city. Twenty minutes later Logan and Jean Philippe were still helping to search the wreckage that used to be a staircase.

"I don't think we're going to find anything," one of the firemen said to Synn.

The wizard's face was covered in soot and ash. He wiped the back of his hand across his brow, making another black streak.

"We have to," he said, breathless from sorting the mess as well. "If I don't have proof that he's dead ...we can't be sure that the city is safe."

"He's right," Jean Philippe said. "It would be best if we could recover a body."

Once the fireman walked away Synn turned to the vampire. "I don't like this. It was too easy. I didn't even get a good look at his face."

"Are you saying there is some doubt as to whom you buried in this rubble and then set on fire?"

"No. I would know his voice anywhere. It's just that I ..."

"Wanted to look in the face of your nemesis one last time," Jean said. "I understand."

"I think this might have been a trap," Synn said.

"That is possible," the vampire agreed.

\* \* \* \*

Three days later, the aftershocks had stopped with minimal damage. However, the storm remained. That alone let Synn know that Zorn must have survived. But, no one else wanted to believe that. Everyone seemed to be celebrating Zorn's demise and the death of the Leviathan, even the vampire council, which had extended their warm congratulations to Synn on a job well done.

It was only at his insistence that the borders to Wicked City had remained closed until the death of the wizard Zorn could be confirmed. He didn't want to risk people's lives needlessly. It seemed that Synn had become something of an overnight sensation. Word of his bravery, power, and massive sex appeal had spread to every television, radio station, and many gossip magazines. The expression "sexy as sin" was an old one. But when people wrote it down now, they were spelling it with a "y."

Although he wanted to be able to say it was safe to open the city back up, he did not want to have to do any interviews. He was reluctant to accept that people found him that attractive. Jean Philippe's words kept echoing in his head, "Perceptions of beauty, they have changed much since The Dark Ages." Apparently, that was so. If his scars were mentioned, it was to discuss the

mystery behind them. No one called him grotesque or disfigured. Like Lavinia and Jean Philippe, they saw it as simply a part of who he was. Even though he was reluctant to be in the spotlight, he found the sensation as liberating as it was unnerving.

\* \* \* \*

It was on the eighth day since his alleged death that Zorn returned. His presence was marked by a return in the ferocity of the storm. This did not go unnoticed by Synn. When he pointed out the storm and his suspicions to Lavinia, he could think of only one solution.

“How flexible are you?”

“What?” Lavinia was obviously caught off guard by the question.

“Michael would never let us into his club again. I’m sure he’s figured out who I am by now. But everyone else may not recognize me with the face paint.”

“Huh?” Lavinia’s expression said clearly that she wasn’t following his train of thought.

Synn ran a hand through his hair in irritation, though his anger was not directed toward her. “I’ll bet that little shit knows something about this damned storm. I seriously doubt Zorn will be in the same place twice.”

She had known all along that he didn’t believe Zorn was dead. But she still failed to see what that had to do with her flexibility.

“What makes you think that Michael will know where he is this time?”

“Because last time Zorn came to Michael for help and he led us into a trap. He may be planning something similar this time.”

Lavinia crossed her arms as she walked toward him. “So, you want to sneak back in and try and figure out his plans?” She laughed. “I understand that we need to do something, but I don’t think it will work.”

His smile was sarcastic. “What did you have in mind then? Go in guns blazing, balls to the wall and force him to talk.”

She shrugged. “Something like that.”

Synn turned toward the window, gazing out at the night and the storm clouds that wouldn’t go away. When he didn’t respond to her comment she asked, “What’s your plan and what has it got to do with me being flexible?”

“We’re going to put on a magic show.”

\* \* \* \*

The city had returned to a state of semi-normalcy. Some shops were open again, but were mostly run by their werewolf or vampire employees. The few humans who remained were starting to come out again. Synn’s presence in the city made them feel safe. Some people had even offered public apologies on the radio for ever suspecting him of foul play. Everyone was really pulling together to clean the place up. There were no longer any signs of traffic accidents or broken shop windows from a few weeks before. It would have taken crews of humans twice as long. But with vampire speed and werewolf strength, Wicked City looked pretty damn good.

One reason Synn was glad to see the city in an almost normal state was that cab drivers were working again. He was all out of teleport potions and

didn't have the time to make more.

"I could just run and get my car," Lavinia said for the third time.

"Even with your speed, that's all the way across town. Besides, the rain would wash off your makeup. Let's just take a cab," Synn said.

They were back in the dressing room at Sinful Delights and ready to go to Michael's club. Only ...Lavinia didn't want to leave.

"You can't seriously expect me to go out there like this."

Synn took a step back and smiled. "I don't think you look bad at all."

She was wearing a skin-tight leotard. Half was black and the other half white. The colors divided right down the middle of her body. There were a few white diamond patterns on the thigh which was black and a few black diamonds on the breast which was white. This wasn't so bad. However, her shoes had jingle bells on them and so did the matching jester hat she wore. Her long hair had been worked into a bun and tucked underneath the hat. Her face was painted white, the shocking crimson of her lips the only color she wore. She was also wearing a thin black mask that went just across her eyes.

Synn was dressed exactly as he had been on their first trip to Sanguisuga. And though he looked dark, sinister and still somewhat sexy, Lavinia felt like a fool. But he was right, they needed to do this. Without a thorough disguise she would most certainly be recognized. All of the evidence Synn had pointed out to her made her also believe that Zorn was not only alive, but possibly still in Wicked City.

She sighed resignedly. "Does it make me look fat?"

Synn's laugh was a throaty, masculine sound that sent a line of warmth down her spine.

"Don't be ridiculous."

This time Lavinia smiled too. "Oh, darling I couldn't possibly be any more ridiculous if I tried. You know, I doubt Jean Philippe would approve of this plan."

"Is he nearby, can you sense him?"

The club had opened for business again too. Even though it wasn't completely packed, they would have to slip past anyone who might wonder where they were going.

"He's upstairs. Logan is on the other end of the building and Judas is across town at his shop."

Lavinia sighed. "Logan is going to be mad that we left him behind. He is my protector after all."

"So am I," Synn replied softly. "I'll take the blame if he's angry. I'm not doing this to spite him but I really think that Logan will be recognized. Besides, he smells like werewolf. Didn't you notice last time that all of the performers were vampires?"

Actually, she hadn't. Wasn't she the feared assassin known as The Reaper? And didn't he used to be a court jester? And he had noticed this instead of her?

"No. I didn't."

"Well, I did. I think that if we aroused their suspicion we'd never get



a chance to look around, let alone find Michael again.”

“You’re right. I just don’t want to hurt his feelings.”

Synn placed his hand on her shoulder. His touch was gentle, but his tone was firm

“Logan isn’t a child. He’ll understand.”

They slipped past the bar with only a few odd looks. Lavinia tried to walk softly and not draw attention. But the bells on her shoes jingled and every curve of her lithe body was revealed by the tight suit. Oh yeah, people looked.

As they stepped outside Synn opened the large red umbrella he’d taken from the coat closet in the dressing room. He hoped no one would miss it before they could get back. The rain had slackened since they’d first entered Sinful Delights. With any luck their makeup wouldn’t get washed off before they could get downtown.

Lavinia didn’t even finish raising her arm to hail the cab. The driver was staring so hard that he had almost come to a stop anyway. Synn opened the door and ushered her inside before closing the umbrella with a flourish and getting in beside her.

“Um where to?” the driver asked, staring at one and then the other.

The situation wasn’t without humor and Lavinia fought back the mad urge to giggle suddenly. They must look like a couple of escaped circus performers. This was absurd.

“Sanguisuga,” she answered. “It’s downtown, do you know the place? I can’t remember the exact street.”

“Yeah,” the man answered hesitantly. “I know the place.” He looked at them again and shrugged. “Well, that explains it. You folks performing tonight?”

“Yes,” Synn answered.

“Well then, you’ll be wanting the servant’s entrance around back. Am I right? Going through the front takes forever.”

They exchanged a look. Neither of them knew there was a servant’s entrance.

“That’s right,” Synn said. “Thanks.”

Just as the top of the old opera house came into view, the driver turned down a side street. After a few short turns, they came to a stop directly behind the club. There was a vamp who met people at the door here too, but he looked more like a bouncer than the welcoming committee. Synn paid the driver as Lavinia slid out the other side and smiled at the tree trunk guarding the door.

The rain had completely stopped for the moment. However, the cold wind tore through her leotard like ice covered fingers. Lavinia shivered as Synn walked around the car toward her. He tucked the red umbrella underneath his arm with a bit more flare than was necessary and she realized that he was already in character.

Thunder rumbled as they approached the vampire guard. Synn’s smile was both charming and slightly unnerving in its coolness. Power radiated from him

and it didn't take a gifted psychic to feel it. Ever since he had taken Lavinia's blood and become her human servant, he was unable to hide his power. He had said it would take some getting used to, but now would have been a good time to be able to cover it up.

"Who are you?" The guard's voice was like metal being dragged over rocks. When he asked the question his eyes flashed red. Obviously he sensed Synn's power and was not easily intimidated.

"We're part of tonight's entertainment. Why, didn't anybody tell you?" Synn's voice was smooth as silk and as wicked as his name sounded.

The guard looked them both up and down, pausing on the jingle bells on Lavinia's shoes.

"What's your name?"

"Gwynplaine."

The way he spoke the name made Lavinia wonder if he'd used it before. She sensed something through their connection, but before she could understand what, the feeling was gone.

"I'm a magician."

"Who's she?" He nodded toward Lavinia and she smiled wider to cover her nervousness.

Synn gestured toward her as he said, "This is my lovely assistant."

To their surprise the guard threw back his head and laughed. The sound boomed like the thunder above, but was not quite as pleasant.

"Well," he said, "every man needs one of those."

He stepped back and opened the door.

"Find Jack behind the stage. He'll let you know when you go on. Until then, the lounge is down the hall on your left."

As the door closed behind them Synn looked down at her. His eyes widened slightly and she smiled. The look he gave clearly said that getting in had been easier than he expected. Lavinia agreed.

"Should we go to find this Jack person first?" She spoke softly, making an effort to keep her voice down.

"I suppose so," he answered, taking a look around.

They were standing at the back of a hallway which stretched in three directions. To their right appeared to be many dressing rooms and rest rooms, judging from the amount of traffic and half dressed performers moving about. To their left voices and laughter could be heard, no doubt coming from the lounge. That meant the stage must be straight ahead.

Lavinia slipped her hand in his as Synn started down the hallway. Her bells jingled and she couldn't help but laugh just a little. Why the hell she wanted to laugh under the circumstances was a mystery even to her. There was just something so laughable about the situation. Never in a million years would she have imagined herself dressed like this and getting ready to be an assistant in a magic show. After spending the last hundred years as a cold, unfeeling assassin...Yes, laughable was a good way to describe it.

"If we check in with him that'll give us a reason to be back here. With any luck, we'll have what we need before we have to go onstage. But just

in case, you never did answer my question. How flexible are you?"

He stopped and turned back toward her. The instant their eyes met he started laughing.

"I don't mean it like that, pervert. Wong sort of disappearing act, though I did have one in mind. I was thinking that it would look nice if you could do some flips or some sort of acrobatics."

Lavinia smiled. "I think I can manage that."

He winked. "Alright then, let's find Jack."

Jack was about six feet tall, slender, dressed completely in green, and had the most shockingly red hair either of them had ever seen.

"What do you guys do?" he asked as they approached. "Wait, let me guess. You're contortionists."

The wizard's grin gave away his lecherous thoughts. "Um no. I'm a magician and this is my assistant."

To her surprise, Lavinia struck a pose on cue and Jack smiled approvingly.

"Fine." He looked at his watch. "You go on in thirty minutes. Props are behind this area here, if you didn't bring your own. If you don't need them more power to you."

As they walked away Lavinia whispered, "Now what?"

"Do you think you can find your way back to Michael's chambers from here? I want to have a look around."

"And if he's there?"

"We'll deal with that when we have to."

She sighed. "Alright, follow me."

After only two wrong turns, Lavinia reached a familiar hallway. Her jingling wasn't much louder than the music in the far back of the building, but she doubted she'd be able to sneak up on anyone. She put her hand on the door to Michael's private chambers and turned the knob slightly.

"It's locked," she whispered.

Synn moved his hand in front of the door, making the same odd sort of wave she'd seen him do that first night outside his house. The lock clicked and the door moved back just a bit. The lights were out and neither of them could sense anyone inside.

"Let's make this fast," the wizard said.

They moved quickly inside and locked the door behind them.

"What are we looking for?"

"Anything that might have anything to do with Zorn."

"Well, babe I doubt he's going to just have it lying around," she drawled.

"You said his father was The Chronicler. Well, I've known record keepers before. They have the urge to write things down. That is, if they enjoy their job. After several hundred years I think it's safe to say that The Chronicler enjoys his. If Michael is anything like his father there will be something here. A ledger, anything. But he will feel the need to keep record of any deals made."

“From what he described before, Zorn had proposed a business deal. I guess that makes sense.”

Lavinia moved toward a desk at the back of the room. She slid the top drawer open and cringed at what she saw inside, falling to the floor almost instantly.

“What’s wrong?” Synn came rushing over. When he looked into the drawer he thought he understood the problem. “Ah, a cross. I’ll close this for you.”

“No, not just any cross,” she said breathlessly.

He took another look. Though it wasn’t very large, diamonds and rubies were encrusted around the cross which was most likely solid gold with a large ruby shaped like a heart in the center.

“Okay, a very valuable cross.”

“My father gave me that cross.”

“What?”

Lavinia tried hard not to cry. She fought back the tears and rose to her feet, her hand covering her eyes from the holy object.

“I’d know it anywhere. He had it specially made for me. Look at the back. There should be an inscription. ‘To L.’”

Synn turned the cross over. Sure enough, it was there.

“What does this mean?” he asked.

“That’s the same cross I used to burn Richard the night I was attacked. I have no fucking idea what it’s doing here.”

Lavinia peeked underneath her hand. She wanted so much to see her father’s present once more, a small reminder of her human years. She could look at holy objects, but only for a short time and she had to squint as if looking at the sun.

“How could a vampire have this?” he asked.

“We can touch holy objects with gloves,” she said. “And look at them if we wear sunglasses.”

“Hmm. I never knew that.”

About that time the door started to open.

“Looks like we’re back to your plan,” Synn said. “Balls to the wall.”

Michael stepped inside and closed the door before he saw them. He was dressed like a swashbuckling musketeer and his scarlet coat fanned out as he turned quickly in their direction.

“Lavinia what are you doing ...in that outfit?”

Synn suppressed the urge to laugh. Michael was more offended at her fashion faux pas than her breaking into his office.

“And you,” Michael said, quickly turning his attention to the wizard, “I know who you are.”

Synn smiled. “Good, then we can skip the introductions.”

The wizard reached his hand toward the door and the lock clicked, the knob glowing blue. Michael tried to leave, but it was no use. He had been sealed inside the room.

“What do you want?”

“We want what we asked for the first time,” Synn replied evenly. “Tell us what you know about Zorn.” He was still holding the cross in his left hand and he lifted it enough that the vampire could see what he carried. Michael put a hand across his eyes. “And tell us why you have this cross.”

“Zorn gave it to me.” Michael cringed as the wizard drew closer with the holy object. “Even if I don’t like crosses, that thing’s worth a fortune.”

“So, it was payment?”

Synn stopped halfway, giving Michael time to answer.

“Yes.”

“Payment for what?” Lavinia shot from across the room

When he didn’t answer Lavinia was instantly on him. She punched Michael in the face, slamming his body into the floor with the force of hers. He let her. He had looked directly at the cross and was almost paralyzed by its power. Lavinia could feel it behind her, but as long as she didn’t look directly and it didn’t touch her flesh, she’d be alright.

Synn tucked the cross into his pocket and though Michael breathed a sigh of relief, he was still pinned to the ground by Lavinia.

He put his hand on her thighs as if to throw her off.

“I wouldn’t,” she said. “You may be stronger than me, but if you try to lift me I’ll break every one of your ribs and rip out your throat before you can get up.” She squeezed her thighs tighter against his rib to emphasize her point. Her right hand was already positioned just above his jugular. “It would be such a shame though, to waste all that perfectly good blood.”

Michael stared at her for a minute. But his blue eyes did not hold anger. He looked tired.

“I’m sick of being in the middle of this bullshit,” he said. “Yes, Zorn gave me the cross as payment. I don’t know where he got it.”

“It was given to me by my father,” Lavinia said softly, not sure why she was telling him. “I lost it a long time ago.”

His eyes widened in surprise.

“I can understand your interest, but I have no idea where it came from.”

She shook her head as if clearing it. “Never mind that. What was he paying you for?”

He shifted slightly beneath her, like the question made him uncomfortable. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth where she’d hit him. Lavinia licked her lips as she watched.

“For keeping my mouth shut and for leading you into his trap.”

“So, it was a trap,” Synn said, but he spoke to himself.

“Where is he now?” Lavinia prompted.

“I don’t know.” She tightened her thighs on his ribs. “Honestly. He didn’t give me a location this time, even for a trap.”

“When did you see him?” There was a slight growl to his voice and if Lavinia hadn’t known better, she would have thought Synn was channeling Logan’s beast.

“Tonight.” He winced as Lavinia tightened her grip again, involuntarily this time. “Not an hour ago.”

“What did he say?” she asked. “I know he didn’t give you a location, but he must have said something.”

Michael swallowed hard.

“I betray my father’s confidence if I tell you,” he said.

“Your father? What has he got to do with this?”

“Not him” he said, shaking his head. “He would never deal with someone like Zorn. It’s about one of the prophecies he keeps.” He paused for almost a full minute before continuing. “Zorn said that Pestilence was on its way.”

“What the hell does that mean?” Synn asked.

“Tell us,” Lavinia urged. “You’re not betraying your father’s confidence if you help us to carry out the orders that he helped to give. He wants Synn to kill Zorn.”

“But Zorn was their spy,” Michael gasped. “Why was I not told of this?”

“You’ll have to take that up with him but the orders came straight from Alucard.”

Michael seemed lost in thought as if trying to recall the prophecy in its entirety.

“I read it long ago,” he said softly. “I don’t know if my father has considered its possible link here, but I certainly have.”

“Tell us,” she repeated.

“When the great beast circles the city and man has lost control, the dead shall rise and Pestilence shall befall them. Darkness and Light shall become one for neither can exist without the other.”

After he spoke an unearthly chill hung in the air. None of them knew exactly what to say, but they all agreed that the prophecy was about Wicked City.

“I don’t know anything else,” Michael whispered. “I swear.”

Lavinia rolled to one side and extended a hand toward him as she rose. Surprisingly, he accepted her offer and let her help him to his feet.

“I think you should remind your father of that prophecy, if he hasn’t already thought of it,” Lavinia said softly.

Synn opened the door and without protest from Michael they started back down the hallway. Neither of them spoke, unsure what to make of his words. Out of nowhere Jack came running toward them.

“Where have you two been?” he said, taking each by the wrist. “You’re on!”

They nearly stumbled trying to keep up with him as Jack pulled them behind the stage.

“Ten seconds before curtain,” he said and turned the other way.

“Shit. What are we going to do?” Lavinia said, looking up at Synn.

“A disappearing act. Follow my lead.”

The curtain went up and the interior of the club came into view. The music didn’t stop, but it lowered considerably so that those who wanted to hear the show could. Synn ran onto the stage with a series of flips and tumbles that impressed the hell out of Lavinia and the audience. After one last high flip, he landed like a cat on his feet and took a deep bow.

“Ladies and gentlemen, my lovely assistant.”

He gestured toward her with a flourish and Lavinia did the only thing she could think of. She turned around quickly, her bells all jingling. Next, she executed three perfect backhand springs before coming to a stop beside Synn. She took a bow like he had done, smiling, pleased with herself for not falling. She hadn't done that in at least a hundred years.

Synn's smile said just how impressed he was with her abilities.

“Tonight, we are going to perform a trick so spectacular, that it will be our entire show.” He removed something from the pocket on his leather pants, but Lavinia couldn't see what. “We are going to truly disappear.” He turned to Lavinia and gave her a chaste kiss. “My dear, it has been nice knowing you.”

With that he threw whatever it was in his hand against the floor of the stage. Smoke rose before their eyes and gasps could be heard from the audience along with shouts of, “They're gone!”

“Have we really disappeared?” Lavinia asked.

“No.” He took her by the hand and ran behind the stage, heading for the exit. “It's only an illusion. Hurry before it wears off.”

They slipped out the back door and right past the oversized bouncer. They were running full out down the side of the street.

“Wasn't it just smoke? Surely they could see us through it?” Lavinia asked.

“No.” Synn came to a stop finally, hiding behind a building. “The smoke was magic, not the actual trick. They can't see or hear us until the smoke clears. That's why we had to hurry.” He finished catching his breath while Lavinia thought over what he'd just said.

“I've been meaning to ask, how do you lock and unlock doors so easily? Is it a spell?”

“I'm partially telekinetic.”

“Partially?”

“I can move objects with my mind, but only if they are metal. It requires a lot of energy and focus, so I don't do it often. But it comes in handy when I forget my keys.”

He put his hand against the small of her back and they started walking down the sidewalk, well out of sight from the club they had just left.

“What about electronic locks, like the one on Jean's office?”

“I'm shit out of luck there. I can only manipulate the old fashioned kind. By the way, nice flips. I had no idea you could do that.”

“You too,” she said, smiling. Then her thoughts returned to the prophecy and the smile vanished. “We should go talk to Jean Philippe.”

They hailed another cab, but this time Lavinia ignored the strange looks the driver gave them. Her thoughts were in a dark place. Pestilence couldn't be anything good and Zorn had said it was coming. And what was he doing with her old cross?

Synn saw the worried lines forming on her forehead and tried to lighten the mood.

“So, how did you learn to tumble like that?”

She smiled, obviously grateful for the distraction.

“You remember me saying how I loved to watch gypsies perform? Well, I wanted to learn some of their tricks. I saw a beautiful gypsy once who could do amazing acrobatics.” She laughed. “Took me fifty forevers to learn that.”

“You did it well.”

They arrived at Sinful Delights and stood just outside the door. Lavinia was about to knock, but then lowered her hand.

“Do you know what Pestilence is?” she asked.

“I’ve got a theory.”

He explained what had happened once they got upstairs. Jean Philippe and Logan listened silently. At last, he answered Lavinia’s question and gave them all his theory.

“If he is referring to pestilence as mankind understands it that would be like a plague or something. But if he is referring to Pestilence with a capital P, then it could be much worse.”

“Worse than a plague?” Jean Philippe asked.

Synn paced the room as he spoke. “Pestilence is supposed to be the last surviving ancestor of the Horrors of the Ancient World.”

“What sort of horrors?” Logan asked.

“Ancient beasts, demons mankind has not seen the like of for millennia.”

“Fuck me.”

No one else spoke up, but they all agreed with Logan. Lightning split the sky like the crack of a great whip and they all moved to look out the window

“The flash came from there,” Synn said, pointing to a spot on the east side of the city.

“I know that place. That’s over around the Cathedral.”

“Oh, no.” There was considerable grief in the wizard’s voice, but his understanding came too late. “He’s after the graveyards.”

“My God, what for?” Logan asked.

“He’s raising an army of the dead.”

They all watched in mute horror as a shape began to form in the distance. A great hulking beast made of dark light and spirits. It lumbered through the streets slowly, large enough to be seen even from such a distance.

“Pestilence,” Synn whispered. “It will walk over every graveyard in the city, infecting the dead with its madness.”

“We’ve got to do something!” Jean Philippe yelled. “We can’t just stand here! How can it be killed?”

Synn looked defeated, but only for a second. “It can’t be. But the one who summoned it can. If Zorn dies, the monster will be banished to its own realm”

Lavinia was confused. “But you said that if Zorn was killed, the Leviathan would have been free.”

“Different beast summoned from a different realm. The Leviathan was actually a living thing.”



“And this isn’t?” Logan asked.

“And this isn’t.”

## Chapter Twenty Two

“At least let me change shoes and get some weapons,” Lavinia said. “I can’t fight an army of the dead in these.” She indicated her jingle bell shoes and Jean Philippe smiled wryly.

“You know where I keep my weapons stored, and there’s a pair of your boots in my closet. Hurry.”

Synn would help them but his main concern was finding Zorn. Jean Philippe had remembered the way Lavinia located Synn the first time and offered him the charm.

“I thought it was useless now that she used it to find you. But I forgot, one use for each wizard. We could only find you once. Now we can use it to locate Zorn, but it will only work this time.”

Synn took the ordinary looking key from Jean’s hand and slipped the chain it hung from around his neck. “Once is all I’ll need.”

Lavinia removed the jester hat and shoes quickly. Even though she still wore the leotard, she now had on knee high combat boots and was busy strapping on weapons when Judas entered the room.

“Jean just told me what happened.”

That was all he said. His long red hair flared about him like a cape as he knelt down and started pulling guns from the bottom drawer of one of the cabinets. Jean Philippe’s weapons stash was impressive by anyone’s standards. It was an entire walk-in closet, filled to capacity with every weapon you could imagine and lots of ammunition.

Lavinia strapped on the custom made vest which held twelve knives, all silver and sharpened to perfection. The vest curved around underneath her breasts and the blades ran all the way to her sides around the front. She zipped it quickly before strapping a samurai style sword to her back. After strapping a small plasma gun to each thigh, she was good to go.

Judas preferred to go old school when it came to guns. He went straight for the antique drawer. He was taking an AK-47 and a flamethrower, which Logan was helping him strap to his back.

Logan was planning to transform before they went outside.

“What about you?” Lavinia asked, turning to where Jean Philippe stood in the doorway.

The vampire removed his silk shirt and tossed it aside. The sleek muscles of his upper body rippled with the movement and Lavinia’s breath caught. She didn’t regret her decision to be with Synn exclusively. However, she could not help admiring the master’s beautiful body when it was right in front of her eyes.

He kicked off his shoes as he answered, “I’ve got everything I need.”

She nodded. He intended to take his true form then. It had been a long

time since she'd witnessed his transformation.

\* \* \* \*

From his view on the roof, Synn could see Pestilence clearly. He could also see the hundreds of zombies, shambling along in front of it, not far from their location now at all. The storm was getting worse. The clouds had taken on a sinister sort of blue/black darkness and the moon was the color of fresh blood.

He held the key high into the air.

"Show me where Zorn is hiding."

A bolt of lightning hit the key with such force that he trembled. But like Lavinia, he was not harmed in any way. A beam of light shot straight through the air, pointing the way.

\* \* \* \*

"We're going to have to go right through them," Synn said as he joined the others downstairs. "In a few minutes Pestilence and all those zombies will be blocking the main exit leading downtown. We'll have to fight our way through to get to Zorn." He pulled what looked like the hilt of a broad sword out of the back of his pants. "Besides, if we don't kill them the zombies will infect every living thing left in the city."

"I'm ready when you are," Logan said. His voice was now the deep rumble of the wolf. He had transformed while they waited for Synn and his amber eyes glowed in the semi-darkness of the room.

"You're going to fight them with a hilt?" Lavinia asked.

"This is a spirit sword," he explained. "I found it in Michael's office."

"I haven't seen one of those in centuries," Jean Philippe said.

The spirit of a fallen enemy was said to occupy such a sword. However, for the magic to work, their spirit had to be willingly given.

"Whoever lives within this weapon, we'll fight together tonight," the wizard said.

They all stepped out into the street. Rain began to fall softly and as Lavinia turned toward Jean Philippe he began to transform. In an instant his skin became so pale that he seemed to glow from within. His eyes became that magical solid green, which seemed to swirl with untold depths. He opened his mouth and his fangs extended to twice their normal length. Claws grew from his fingertips as well as from his feet. He leaned forward, then back. As he stretched his arms wide, magnificent bat wings extended from his back. His transformation was complete.

He glowed, like a perfect marble statue. His black hair stood out in sharp contrast and so did his pants. The rain poured over his shoulders and down the curves of his rigged abs. Parts of him looked like something out of a wet dream and the other parts, something out of a nightmare.

Dark hair clung to his face and neck. He stretched his arms and wings wide as he asked Lavinia, "Is it all that you remembered?"

"Even better." She smiled appreciatively.

"Here they come," Logan growled.

The zombies were coming up the street, a groaning, shambling nightmare. They moved like some type of hellish parade, coming closer and closer to where everyone stood, waiting. And in the distance behind them Pestilence. The monster never seemed to fully take shape. Its shadowy head resembled that of a goat. And though it clearly had four legs, they sometimes had hooves and other times looked like hands. Faces could be seen passing over the surface of its strangely liquid-like skin, flashes of people screaming, swimming through the darkness that was Pestilence.

Shouts and howls could be heard in the distance as other vampires and werewolves joined the fight.

“Fuck this,” Logan rumbled. “I’m not waiting around.”

He charged the zombie horde with a blood curdling howl, leaping into the midst of their numbers as he began to rip them limb from limb.

Along sword which looked to be made completely from light extended from the hilt that Synn carried. With a fierce battle cry he followed the werewolf.

Lavinia looked up into the rain. Streaks ran through her white face paint and the wind whipped her hair like a long dark cloud about her shoulders. She looked every bit like her grim moniker. The strangeness of the leotard and mask, which covered only her eyes, added somehow to the image. The Reaper stood waiting. Let the others charge, she would save her energy for the kill.

As the first wave of zombies reached them she drew her sword. Like the samurai who had once wielded the blade, she believed in only drawing the weapon to kill. Each strike was a killing strike. No wasted motion. She sliced through the enemy like butter. Judas followed closely, burning their remains to ash so they could not rise again.

Jean Philippe swooped down on the horde, lifting them into the air with his claws and ripping them apart. He left their remains to fall to the ground where Judas could burn them.

Those who fell by the spirit sword Synn carried did not get back up. They were turned instantly to ash, even if he only nicked them in the first place.

An hour later they had fought halfway down the street before they realized that Pestilence had disappeared.

“How does a monster that size vanish?” Judas asked as he burned a zombie who was still moving.

“It doesn’t make sense,” Lavinia answered.

Synn and the others were further down the street, picking off stragglers.

She heard a scrapping noise in the alley to her right and turned toward a most frightening and heartbreaking scene. The doctor, who had helped to save the stranded mother and her three children, was coming toward her. Only ...he wasn’t human anymore.

Lavinia felt her tears blending with the cold rain as she drew closer to the zombie. His pale eyes seemed to plead with her to end his suffering. He

did not try to attack.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "May you find peace in death."

She split his head down the middle, for destroying the brain was the only way to kill a zombie. The doctor fell to the pavement and Lavinia propped against the wall, crying. She had killed countless enemies before, but she'd never had to put down an ally. Though she hadn't known him well, the poor doctor had not deserved his fate. She wiped the gore from her blade against his shirt and had just placed the weapon back in its sheath when someone tapped on her shoulder.

Light flashed before her eyes. She was unconscious from the impact of the spell before she had time to react.

\* \* \* \*

"Where is Lavinia?" Logan growled.

He and Synn had both sensed something. The wizard's sword ceased to glow and he returned the hilt to the waist of his pants.

"Zorn has her."

Synn was certain of that, just as he was certain that Pestilence was on its way to the next graveyard. If they could destroy Zorn before Pestilence reached its destination, not only would the monster be stopped, but no more zombies would rise.

Without further thought he and Logan headed downtown, seeking out the place where the light had pointed. They had to find Zorn, soon.

\* \* \* \*

The instant his handsome face came into view Lavinia understood the presence she had felt weeks earlier. Her stomach tied in knots and she suddenly felt ill.

"It's you," she hissed, rage evident in her voice.

Zorn made a clicking noise with his tongue, scolding her. "Come now, I thought you'd be glad to see me after all these years."

"Motherfucker! You killed me!"

He ran a hand through his thick brown hair, revealing the cross-shaped scar in the middle of his forehead.

"And you scarred me for life. Bitch. We're even, so shut up."

"Even," she snarled. "There is no even."

Lavinia tried to move, but found that she was chained to the wall. Normally she could just break the chains, but these were different. She struggled against them for a moment before finally deciding they were enchanted. No matter how strong she was, she couldn't break these chains.

"You told me your name was Richard."

"It was," he answered, "a long time ago." He sighed and took a step closer toward her, pausing as if to bask in her beauty. "I should have known I wouldn't be able to stay away from you. The moment Robert started talking about you I felt my heart flutter like it hadn't done in over two hundred years."

He reached for her and Lavinia turned her face away.

"Robert was working for you?"

“Yes. You must have drunk his blood, because I can feel a small part of my magic in you. It’s how I knew where to find you tonight ...and how I know that you’ve been hanging around Synn.” His lip curled in disgust when he mentioned the other wizard’s name. “He is the reason I came. After all these years I finally found him and I had to have revenge.”

“You have revenge?! After what you did to him? You must be mad.”

He took a step back and smiled at her, flashing his fangs.

“Oh, so he told you about that? Not my finest hour, I’ll admit. When I couldn’t obtain the spell for immortality, I sought eternal life in another fashion.” He tapped one of his fangs with his index finger. “It works just as well. Except of course for a few minor setbacks. But I was never much for sunbathing in the first place.”

Lavinia shook her head. “I don’t want to hear anymore. Nothing you have to say matters. Synn will come for me and when he does he will kill you. End of story.”

He laughed, a high pitched evil sound.

“You think it’s that simple, do you?”

“Yeah, I do.”

Zorn reached out again and ran his hand across the soft flesh of her throat. The paint had all washed away now and he had removed her mask while she was unconscious. Only a bit of dark makeup around her eyes remained. She was still the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

“I wasn’t trying to kill you that night,” he said softly.

Despite her best efforts, Lavinia felt tears welling in her eyes at his words. She could still remember when his touch had warmed her on cold nights, and the fire in his kiss.

“I never expected to fall in love. I wanted you to be mine ...forever.”

She jerked away as far as the chains would allow her.

“Bullshit. If that’s what you wanted then why did you rip my throat out, why did you run away?”

“I hurt you because you attacked me.” He pulled his hair back again, reminding her of the scar. “As for running away, you can thank Jean Philippe for that.”

Then she understood. “You sensed him nearby, knew that he was more powerful and ran.” When he didn’t respond she knew she was right. “Coward. I will thank him when I see him again.”

Zorn slapped her and Lavinia snapped at him, her fangs just barely missing his flesh.

“Well, I hate to start the party without Synn. But I suppose there’s no help for it, since you don’t want to reminisce.”

He walked off, out of her sight and Lavinia took a look around. The building they were in must be a warehouse. The walls looked to be concrete and the ceilings were some type of metal. There were a few tables and chairs scattered about, but the place was mostly bare.

Zorn returned within a matter of minutes, his long red robe dragging the floor behind him. With his scar covered, and despite her hatred, Lavinia

still thought he was handsome. What a waste.

He was carrying what looked like a big flashlight and he pointed it directly at her.

“Now this will only hurt a little,” he teased.

When he flipped on the light Lavinia flinched. But after a second she realized that she wasn't in any pain.

“What are you playing at, you idiot?”

He frowned at her words.

“This is ultraviolet light. There is no way in hell that you can stand there and not catch on fire.”

Lavinia smiled. No way was she telling him her secret.

## Chapter Twenty Three

For the next thirty minutes he switched the light off and on, questioning her repeatedly, but to no avail. Lavinia would not tell him how she could withstand UV light.

“I have no idea,” she answered for what felt like the hundredth time.

He slapped her again, but she didn't care. Whatever damage he could inflict, she would recover. And Synn was drawing near, she could feel him

“It's Synn, isn't it? Did you take his blood?”

Lavinia schooled her features so as not to give away the answer. She would give him nothing to go on.

“That's it. You must have taken his blood.” He laughed and again the sound made her shiver. “I'll drain him dry,” he hissed. “I will walk in the sun and you, my dear, will walk with me.”

“Fuck you.”

He hit her again. “We'll get to that later.”

“Kill me now then, because I'd rather die than ever touch you again.”

“That can be arranged.”

“Somehow I don't think so.” Synn's voice came from behind them and they both looked in his direction. His face paint had all washed off except for the black around his eyes. It looked like he was wearing heavy mascara and it had started to run. The image was surprisingly sexy and Lavinia couldn't help but smile when she saw him

Her look did not go unnoticed by Zorn.

“You can't be serious about this ...this jester?” he mumbled.

While he was distracted Synn struck. He unleashed a blast of power that knocked the other wizard into the wall beside Lavinia. He had been held down by Zorn's powerful binding magic once before and he would not suffer the same fate twice.

Zorn tried to fight back, but his head had hit the wall hard, cracking the concrete. Even for a vampire wizard, the injury was critical. Wave after wave of power hit him knocking him back into the wall. Synn approached with fire in his eyes, might and menace in every move of his powerful thighs, and vengeance in the lightning which now flew from his fingertips.

Zorn fell to the floor, groaning in pain. Synn looked down at him and felt no mercy.

“I tried to be the better man,” Synn said softly, “to be above revenge. My wife and my grandfather believed in peace. I tried to honor their memories by not tracking you down. But I see now that I was wrong. I should have killed you centuries ago.”

“Come on then,” Zorn growled. “Take your revenge, come on!”

Synn closed his eyes tight for a moment, fighting the urge to torture



and maim the other wizard until he could take no more.

“There is no revenge for what you did to me,” he answered sagely. “But you can die, and that’ll be good enough.”

Without another word almost every nail and bolt in the building came flying through the air, impaling Zorn in more ways than he could have imagined. One long metal rod that Synn had pulled from the ceiling pierced Zorn’s heart and a large bolt went right through his head. Synn took a step back, lightning flowing from his hands once more. He sent enough electricity through the metal to fry what was left of Zorn to a crisp. The man who had permanently altered both their lives was finally dead.

Lavinia’s chains fell to the floor as the last of Zorn’s power was broken. She ran to Synn, her arms encircling his neck.

“It’s over,” she whispered.

As soon as they exited the building it began to collapse. Synn had only left enough bolts in place to hold it temporarily. They turned their faces to the sky, toward a soft cleansing rain which fell heavily over the city. The malevolent storm clouds were gone, the zombies had stopped and Pestilence had disappeared.

“Marry me,” Synn whispered.

Lavinia turned to him, shock evident in her expression.

Synn got down on one knee in the mud and took her by the hand.

“I’m not a prince and the handsome part got screwed up a long time ago ... but I swear to you that as long as I live you will be loved. No one will ever hurt you again, not if I can stop it.”

Lavinia started crying and fell to her knees in front of him. Synn wrapped her in his arms as she cried, “How could I refuse? You’re my hero.”

Synn’s heart leapt at her answer.

“You’re not disappointed by the lack of shining armor?” he teased.

Lavinia pulled him down to kiss her as she answered, “I prefer jingle bells.”

## Epi l o g u e

One month later the city had been restored. All of the zombies had been laid to rest, the death of Zorn was confirmed and the borders of Wicked City were reopened. Just as the council had hoped, public relations had improved much for the vampire community thanks to their help.

The wedding of Synn to the lovely vampire Lavinia was a highly anticipated event by all. However, they had a private ceremony underneath the full moon with only a few close friends in attendance. Jean Philippe gave her away.

They stopped by Synn's home to take a quick shower and change clothes before starting their honeymoon. Now that she could go in the sun, Lavinia decided she wanted to visit Hawaii.

She had just rinsed her hair when she felt Synn step into the shower behind her. His big warm hands ran up and down her arms before settling on her shoulders and turning her to face him. Although he was still insecure about his scars, she thought he was the most gorgeous man she'd ever seen. He looked like he'd stepped off the cover of a romance novel. Lavinia smiled as she admired his physique. Warm water and suds cascaded over the curves and valleys of his long, lean frame and she followed many of those trails with her eyes. She let her gaze caress him as only someone with her powers could and he sighed softly.

She remembered the first night she had called him to her in the rain, the way his body had felt against hers and the loneliness she had sensed in him. The loneliness was gone now. When they had met they were both broken, but together they had been made whole once more.

She closed her eyes, still remembering that first night, only this time his face was not hidden in shadow and he was completely naked. She imagined water running down his hair and beading in his long eye lashes. In her mind she traced a drop of rain as it slid down his forehead, down his face, his collarbone, around one nipple, and down the ridged curves of his abs, only to disappear against the perfect line of his hip bone.

He kissed her softly and she opened her eyes to find that her fantasy was real. Warm water washed between their bodies as he lifted her against the tile. Lavinia wrapped her legs around him eagerly accepting him as he entered her slowly. She had never been married before. A thrill ran through her as she realized that this was the first time they had been together as husband and wife.

He deepened the kiss as she wrapped herself tighter around him pulling him deeper inside of her. He started to move in slow circles, each rotation touching her clit. Lavinia could feel the beginnings of orgasm in her lower back. A wonderful tension began to spread throughout her thighs and down her

legs.

“I’m coming,” she whispered.

She could have sworn her toes curled as she climaxed, crying out his name with a mixture of pleasure and longing.

She clung to him as he found his own release. At last she had found love. Her heart nearly overflowed with emotion.

Richard/Zorn was descended from royalty, a prince in his own right. When she was a child Lavinia had dreamed of a handsome prince. But as she listened to Synn’s heartbeat beneath her ear she realized that she’d much rather have a man who was a fool about her.

“I love you,” he whispered into her hair.

“I love you too.”

He was everything she had ever wanted and just like the first time, he made her heart beat.

THE END