



A Total-E-Bound Publication



www.total-e-bound.com

Eternal

ISBN # 978-1-907280-69-6

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Edited by Jess Bimberg

Total-E-Bound Publishing

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Published in 2009 by Total-E-Bound Publishing 1 The Corner, Faldingworth Road, Spidlington, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, LN8 2DE, UK.

Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

ETERNAL

Crissy Smith

Chapter One

Jo Black pulled into the barely lit parking lot of the club Eternal. It was just shy of midnight, and she had already hit two other clubs. She was on a mission that had yet to be fulfilled. She knew she couldn't go home until it was.

She'd spent weeks preparing for tonight – what she would wear, how she would talk, and how she'd get him to leave with her. Her whole life came down to this one night, and she had to be ready. She could not fail in this mission.

Slowly, she walked towards the front door. Her black knee-high boots crunched on the gravel, making more noise than she'd expected. She stopped and took in her surroundings. A cold shiver ran down her spine, and she felt like she was being watched. She turned in a complete circle but saw no one and nothing moved. Shaking her head, she continued to the door.

She wore a short black skirt that didn't come anywhere near her knees and red silk shirt that was cut low and tight, teasing with the flash of flesh when she moved. Her long brown hair was left loose, falling in silky strands down past the middle of her back. She would turn heads when she walked in, as she had when she'd entered the other two clubs earlier. But she knew what she wanted and would wait for him. Only he would do.

Opening the door, she blinked several times to adjust to the low light. The music wasn't as loud as the other clubs she'd visited but it immediately caught her attention with its low tone and soft, inviting feel. It had a jazzy feel to it. She wasn't sure what she was listening to, but she liked it. Someone cleared their throat to her left and she realised she had been staring into the club. The woman behind the stand smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes.

"Invitation please," she said, holding out her hand.

Jo slid her hand down her leg to her boot and took out the black and silver invitation Roger had given her earlier that night. She handed it to the woman without saying a word. She wasn't sure how Roger had gotten the invitation; she just hoped it worked and got her in.

The woman took her time, looking at the invitation, then at her. Nodding her head, she told Jo, "Go ahead."

That was it. She was in.

This was one of the most exclusive clubs in town and Jo Black had just gotten through the door. A quick jolt of thrill went through her. This was it, she could feel it.

She nodded and smiled at the bouncer who stood next to the stand. She hadn't noticed him before. He seemed to have shifted out of the shadows.

As he let her pass, she realised the club was far nicer than she expected. There were no strobe lights like there were in most clubs. This club was dark, very dark, with only a few lamps on the walls around the booths. She could see the outline of bodies sitting at tables or booths close to one another.

As she walked closer into the middle of the club, she watched the dance floor where people swayed slowly against one another. This wasn't what she was used to. She swallowed hard, knowing that, if this was the place, she was way out of her league.

Ignoring the feeling of dread and fear that curled in her stomach, she headed to the bar. She took a seat on one of the empty bar stools and glanced around. There were only five other stools occupied, all men and all looking at her. She didn't smile at them, didn't bat her eyes, or give a flirty look. Roger had told her to sit. Sit and wait, and *he* would find her.

She had asked what to do if no one approached her, but Roger was convinced it would be less than an hour. She was afraid she wouldn't recognise him and an innocent would get hurt, but Roger just waved that off.

"He'll come to you, Jo. He won't be able to resist," Roger had told her.

She wasn't sure what that meant exactly but she had to trust that Roger knew what he was talking about. She had come this far and it was too late to back out now.

Jo jumped when the bartender suddenly appeared in front of her. The people who worked around here kept managing to surprise her as if they appeared from nowhere. Which played into everything she knew about the undead. She wondered if they did it on purpose.

He smiled, showing perfectly white, straight, even teeth, and she relaxed. "So sorry, *chère*, didn't mean to give you a start. Name's Logan and what can I get you?"

It took her a minute to put together everything he said through his thick southern accent, but once she did, it made her smile.

"Hello. May I have a glass of Chardonnay please?"

Smiling down at her, he winked. "Coming right up."

Jo watched as he poured her drink. He was young, probably in his mid-twenties, with blond hair and blue eyes. His southern accent had been thick and sweet, and she liked him almost immediately but decided to be cautious. Roger had told her that the undead could put glamour on themselves and her, making her do their bidding. Somehow she knew deep down that Logan wasn't one of the monsters. It was a feeling she had to trust. Most of her life, she had been able to read others well. Her sister had even joked that it was a gift. Jo shook her head to dissolve any thoughts of her sister. She couldn't dwell on that. She had a job to do.

He set her drink down and leant against the bar. "Anything else?"

She took a drink and glanced around. "No...no, thank you. I'm meeting someone here."

"Hope you don't have to wait too long," Logan told her as he wiped the bar and gave her another stunning smile.

She laughed – she just couldn't help it. The soft sound of her laughter floated through the room and eyes turned towards her. Jo quickly averted her eyes from those around her. She didn't want to draw *too much* attention to herself. Just enough to get this over with. "I'm sure he'll be here soon," she said.

Shaking his head, he started down the bar. "Let's hope so, darling."

Not sure what that meant, she opened her mouth to ask and was interrupted by someone sitting close on the next stool. She glanced to her right and sized up the man. He was older than she was, with brown hair that was slicked back. He could be the one she was waiting on. The only problem was she didn't know how to tell. Roger had told her she would just know, but once again, she worried that she would make a deadly mistake.

"It is a shame to see a woman drinking alone," he said, smiling and leaning close.

She smiled, just in case this *was* the man. "Hmm, you don't say?"

He nodded "Yes, a shame. You are a very beautiful woman and I would like to share a drink with you. Come and sit with me in my booth."

Jo was trying to place his accent, and it took her a moment to answer. Although the way he was holding her arm, his words felt more like a command than a request. Jo shook him off. "Thank you, sir, for asking, but I am quite comfortable here."

His back straightened and his eyes widened in surprise. Logan also stopped and stared at her with a look of disbelief on his face. Not understanding, she smiled at the man. "You may, however, sit and keep me company if you wish."

The man shook his head and took her hand in his. "I think you would be much more comfortable in my booth," he told her, looking deeply into her eyes.

Jo felt the first stirring of uneasiness wash over her. This man was acting strange. The way Roger said he might. She'd done nothing but sit, and he had come right over to her. She couldn't risk going to the booth with him, but she needed to get him to leave with her.

Smiling, she turned towards him and crossed her legs, lifting her skirt even higher. His eyes followed the movement, and Jo knew he approved by the hunger flashing in his eyes. "I appreciate the offer very much but would prefer to wait here. I wouldn't mind at all if you would keep me company." She lowered her voice and went for sexy.

He blinked again then a hand settled on his shoulder. Jo looked up, and all the breath left her body. She looked up into the most beautiful face she'd ever seen.

He was absolutely gorgeous. Black hair curled under his ears and made her want to reach up and see if it was as silky as it looked, and piercing dark eyes fixed intently on hers.

"Thank you, George, for keeping my friend company." He hadn't spoken to her, but his voice caressed her body and her heart sped up.

The man who had sat beside her jumped up as if he had been bitten. "Yes. Well, no problem, Nic. See you around, miss." And with that, he walked away quickly.

Jo still hadn't taken her eyes off the stranger nor had he from her.

He didn't sit but instead stood in front of her, blocking the entire club from view. He was tall—well over six feet—dressed in black slacks and a black dress shirt. When he reached over and picked up her hand, a shiver ran down her entire spine. One very similar to what she'd felt when she was outside. It was as if, by just holding her hand, he knew all her secrets.

That's when it suddenly hit her. This must be him. The man Roger wanted. He overwhelmed the room with his power. He made her feel like it were only the two of them alone. His eyes were sharp and full of knowledge.

Jo sucked in a breath and tried to pull her hand away.

He continued to hold it as if not noticing her yanking. "I am Nicolas Lucian, the owner of this club. You may call me Nic." He bent his head and brought her hand up and kissed it ever so gently. It was an old-fashioned gesture and matched perfectly with the sound of his old world accent.

Jo felt the kiss all the way to her toes. She had no doubt this was a powerful man and she was afraid. Her body trembled, and with her left hand still in his grip, she ran her right hand down her leg. She had weapons in her boots. She could use one and run. They might not kill him like Roger wanted, but it might give her enough time to get away.

Before her hand even made it to her knee, he stepped into her and laid his free hand over hers. "Now, let's not do anything hasty," he told her, still speaking low. His hand was warm and her skin felt like it was on fire where he touched.

"Why don't we take this somewhere more private?" he asked, pulling her up from the stool. She nodded even as her mind screamed no.

He led her gently but firmly towards the back of the club, sidestepping around tables and booths she hadn't seen earlier. The club was a lot larger than she had originally thought.

Every muscle in her body strained and tears of fear filled her eyes. She didn't want to die. Roger had assured her that she was the only one who could accomplish this job. She was different from the rest, he always told her, although she didn't know why.

When Nic wrapped his free arm around her waist and led her up stairs that seemed to come from nowhere, she trembled and fought to get her feet to stop.

Deep down, she knew it was too late to turn back. She was completely powerless to stop him from doing whatever he wanted. Her body was already betraying her with its response.

He laughed softly, walking beside her, and she had a hideous thought that he could read her mind. No, that was impossible. Roger had told her no one could read her, but walking next to this man, she had serious doubts that Roger knew all he said. She was going to die tonight. She just hoped it would be forever.

The stairs led to a small hallway. A lone door stood at the end. It was closed but opened at the wave of the man's hand. She started shaking. She so did not want to go through that doorway, knowing she would never come out.

With him beside her, she stepped into the large room and looked around frantically. It was an office. There was an old oak desk across the room from her and a sitting area to her left with a wet bar, couch, and flat screen TV.

He closed the door almost silently, and in a blink of an eye, she was slammed up against it with his hand on her neck. He wasn't choking her, just holding her firmly in place.

"Who sent you?" His eyes flashed as he asked the question.

Jo didn't move, didn't answer. She wasn't sure she could when his hand tightened around her throat. He leant down until his face was close to hers. His eyes flashed, the rims turning red when he asked her again. "Who sent you?"

Her mind and body finally connected when his eyes glowed crimson, and she finally started struggling. It was useless, of course. He just tightened the hand around her neck.

He smiled and it wasn't a pleasant smile. "I really hate to repeat myself, dear."

She shook her head over and over, her neck straining in his hold. She wouldn't tell him. She wouldn't give him Roger or their plan. She would protect them even if it killed her.

Leaning down, he ran his cheek over hers and laughed softly in her ear. "There are much worse things than death."

Chapter Two

Jo bit her lip in order to keep from telling him what he wanted and closed her eyes. If he was going to bite her, she didn't want to see. She jerked as he cupped her chin.

"Look at me."

She had no choice. She felt her eyes widen as they met his, and her mouth grew dry.

"Who sent you?"

Fear, so cold, threatened to overcome her, and she felt weak. Then, realising she was holding her breath, she let it out. *Fight. Fight him.*

The hand holding her chin moved slowly down. Down her collarbone, down along her breast—making her draw in a sharp breath—and lower. His progress left her skin feeling hot and aching. When she would have screamed from the fire raging in her body, he found her boot. Reaching inside, he found the loop that held the cross.

He lifted it out of her boot carefully and held it out in front of her. "Please tell me this is not the weapon you came to kill me with."

He threw it behind him and reached back into her boot. He took out the glass bottle of holy water and laughed.

"Oh, child," he said sympathetically before resuming his search.

Jo watched in shock and horror as he threw the cross as if it was nothing. And laughed at the holy water. When he pulled the last item from her boot, she cringed.

He lifted an eyebrow. "A stake?"

Again, she did not move, did not speak. And his hand moved to her other boot. He quietly pulled out the two daggers she had there.

He straightened and looked back into her eyes. "That is quite an arsenal." The fingers on her neck started to move up and down like a caress. "You must be very serious in your quest to vanquish me." He laughed then, but it wasn't the low, soft laugh like before. It was hard and bitter. "I don't appreciate a young blood coming into my place and attempting to kill me."

She finally found her voice. "I didn't try to kill you." That much was true since she hadn't had the chance to kill him, yet.

He shook his head. "You were very poorly trained."

She frowned at him. She'd trained for the past few months. Brutal training that had left her with nothing and no one but Roger.

He leant into her once again and she shivered. "Now, are you hiding any more surprises from me?" he asked, his hand going up the outside of her leg.

She sucked in another breath and tears burned in her eyes. "I don't have anything else."

He smiled and his hand stopped moving up her leg, but he didn't stop touching her. "Finally the truth."

She swallowed. She would not beg for her life. Roger had told her never to beg—they just might let her live. And she would rather die than live in hell for eternity.

"Now, I've introduced myself. It would only be proper that you do the same."

She was backed into a door, unable to move, with a strange man holding her by the neck, and he wanted her to be proper? That wasn't including the hand that was moving under her skirt. But if he really wanted to know who she was, she could at least tell him.

"I'm the person who is going to kill you and send your soulless, evil being back to the pits of hell," she told him with as much bravado she could muster.

Again, he laughed with bitterness, and it surrounded her entire body. "Ah, not broken yet, I see. Good. I would hate not to get to play with you a little."

She gasped at the implication and, once again, tried to struggle, only succeeding in pushing the hand under her skirt closer to a very private place. She stopped immediately.

"Well, what a shame. It was just getting interesting." He pressed against her, flattening her body to the door. His breath mixed with hers. "Since you don't want to tell me your name, why don't you tell me Roger's last name?"

She fought with renewed energy then. She hadn't said Roger's name out loud. She knew she hadn't. Maybe this was a test, a trick. Maybe Roger just wanted to see if she was ready.

She managed to dislodge his hand from her thigh, but the one around her neck tightened.

"Stop it," he demanded, but she kept fighting.

She was dizzy from the loss of oxygen his hand around her throat caused, until finally her eyes rolled back and her vision darkened.

* * * *

Kristen wrung her hands nervously as she walked down the hall with Julian. "Did he say what he wanted?"

Julian shook his head. "He just said he had a problem and needed our help, yours especially."

"Why mine?" She stopped in front of Nic's office door. "What could I do?"

"Relax, honey." Julian ran a comforting hand down her arm before opening the door to his brother's office.

Kristen's gasped as she entered the room.

"What the hell are you doing with my sister, Nic?" she cried and ran to the woman passed out on the couch.

"I did nothing," Julian's brother muttered.

"Jo? Jo, wake up, honey." Kristen ran her hand over the woman's face. Emotions ran rapidly through her body as she knelt over the sister she hadn't seen in two years. She looked back to the men.

Julian turned to his brother. "Maybe you better tell us what's going on."

Nic ran a hand through his hair. "Well, I got a call from Amber that this girl had an invitation to the club, but she was mortal. I went down to investigate and ran across her." He nodded to the woman on the couch. "I brought her up here to...talk."

"Talk?" Kristen questioned him.

He nodded. "And found the arsenal she was carrying in hopes to vanquish a vampire. Her words there."

"She came to vanquish you?" Julian asked, amused.

"Stake, holy water, crosses, the works."

Julian chuckled and received a glare from Kristen.

"It's not funny, Julian. She shouldn't be here. She shouldn't know about any of this."

He schooled his face, but his eyes still danced with laughter.

"Why would she come here to you?" Kristen asked, ignoring Julian.

"I'm not sure. She passed out before I could get many answers."

"Passed out?" Kristen asked then looked at her sister's neck where a handprint was still visible. "You choked her?"

"She choked herself."

Kristen stood and placed her hands on her hips. "And just how did she choke herself?"

She gave Nic the dirtiest look she could manage then looked from one man to other before looking back at Jo.

"I think she's waking up." Julian offered, not meeting her stare. Kristen dropped back down in front of the couch. She watched her sister move her head from side to side. Jo blinked slowly then her hazy green eyes narrowed.

"It's not nice to plant suggestions in my head," Jo said quietly, pulling away from Kristen.

"Jo," Kristen cried and reached out for her.

"No!" Jo yelled and jumped up.

She pushed away from Kristen and jumped over the arm of the couch. Kristen started to reach for her again then stopped. What she was feeling would be nothing compared to what Jo must be experiencing at the moment.

Once out of reach, Jo eyed the three of them. "What the hell is going on?"

"Jo," Kristen said as calmly as she could.

"You just stay over there," Jo said backing farther away from her and closer to Nic.

"Jo, it's me. Kristen."

"Stop it! Stop this right now!"

Kristen looked at the men but neither offered any help. "Jo, it's really me."

Her sister shook her head. "No."

"I know you're confused, but I can explain."

"You can't explain," Jo exclaimed. "You're not here. You can't talk. You're dead!"

"Well," Kristen shifted to rest her bottom against her heels, "not really."

"Oh my god! You're one of them!"

The look of disgust on her sister's face hurt more than it should have.

"Calm down, honey. It's okay. I can explain all of this."

"Find out who sent her," Nic demanded.

Kristen sent him a dirty look.

"What?" he asked, but looked at his brother.

Kristen followed his gaze back to Julian who looked as helpless as she felt. She stepped into her sister's line of sight.

"Jo. I was stabbed that night in the alley. I would have died, but Julian saved me." She nodded to Julian who still remained by the door.

"So you gave up your soul for eternal damnation?" Jo asked with no amusement in her voice and horror on her face.

Kristen opened her mouth and closed it, not sure how to respond while Nic laughed from his safe distance.

"Oh, I forgot we're soulless, evil demons," Nic interjected.

"Jo, I'm not a vampire. None of us are if that's what you're thinking."

"I buried you."

"No, actually, you didn't," Julian told her, speaking for the first time.

Kristen scowled at him and he frowned back. He was only trying to help, but Kristen knew her sister. Having the men there was not going to help in any way.

"I didn't sign up for this." Jo muttered before making a break for the door.

Any of them could have caught her, but Nic got there first. Wrapping an arm around her waist, he lifted her off her feet. She kicked out and connected with his shin.

"Ow." He cursed and tightened his hold.

"Let go of me!" Jo screamed.

"I always miss all the good stuff." A new voice added to the mix.

Nic shifted the struggling woman to his side where she wouldn't hurt anything of importance. "Christian," he greeted his older brother.

His brother closed the door that had been left open. "I come in for a drink and hear a disturbance up here and what do I find? You holding a woman trying to maim you."

Julian snorted out a laugh as Christian finished talking.

"I'm glad you both find this funny," Nic said, hardly amused. "But, in case you haven't noticed, I have a problem here."

"We noticed," Julian said, nudging Christian.

Nic growled and had both men smiling wider.

"Can we get back to my sister please?" Kristen said crankily.

"Sister?" Christian asked, and Kristen nodded. "Oh, now I really am intrigued."

Nic explained the situation as he moved to the couch and set Jo—who was still cussing—down, then sat close to her, blocking her from getting up. His body had come alive the moment he'd first touched this woman. He knew what was happening and didn't look forward to sharing it.

"I am sitting right here," Jo complained. "It's rude to talk about someone while they are in the room."

"Well, why don't you tell us who sent you so you can leave?" Christian suggested.

Jo just crossed her arms over her chest.

"Jo, honey, we really do need to know," Kristen said gently.

"I'm not talking to you. You're dead, remember?" Jo said without looking at her sister.

Kristen sighed, and Julian walked over and rubbed her shoulders. Nic hadn't thought about Kristen's feelings when he had called her. He had just needed to get through to the girl.

"I'm not dead," Kristen said quietly.

"Why don't you just read her?" Christian asked Nic.

They all turned and looked at him.

He dropped his gaze for a minute before admitting the truth. "Except when she was panicking, I couldn't."

Kristen gasped while Christian and Julian looked shocked.

"Oh no!" Kristen exclaimed.

Nic nodded. "See my problem now?"

"What? What are you all talking about?" Jo demanded. "What do you mean 'read me'?" No one answered right away. "Hello! Am I talking?"

"She is quite annoying," Christian told the others and received identical glares from Kristen and Jo. Nic almost laughed at the twin looks.

"She's been through a lot," Kristen snapped at his oldest brother.

Everyone remained quiet. Nic tried to work out the next step and hadn't come up with anything good when his younger brother spoke.

"So what now?" Julian asked.

"You could let me go," Jo suggested.

Nic just looked over at her. She frowned at him in return.

"Well, she obviously has to stay with Nic." Christian finally spoke up, saying what no one else wanted to.

"I'm not staying with anyone," Jo cried. "Just let me go."

"You, my dear, don't have much of a choice," Christian told her and she flinched.

She took her time looking all of them over until her eyes finally rested on Nic. He could feel her emotions as they flowed through her body. He might not be able to read her thoughts, but he could sense what she was feeling. Although she was terrified, confused, she still had a solid strength inside.

"You just wait. I'm going to put a stake through all of you!"

Nic felt a touch of pride for her, for her courage.

Christian laughed. "Are you now? Would you like to try with me first?" He flashed his fangs at her, making her scream and jump back.

"Christian," Nic growled out a warning.

Christian's teeth retracted and he smiled at his brother. "Just testing her."

Nic shook his head and turned back to Jo. "Is there anyone with you?"

Jo stared at her hands in silence.

Frustrated, he looked at Kristen, who just shrugged.

"Fine, we'll do this the hard way." His teeth came out and he grabbed her before she could evade. His teeth pierced the soft skin of her neck before she could even scream.

Hot blood coursed into his mouth and through his body, exciting him. She tasted sweet and spicy and his body felt jolted alive as her blood filled his mouth. He closed his eyes to concentrate. He sorted through her memories until he found what he was looking for.

The death of her sister. The turmoil she was in afterward, the feeling of being alone, and the man who entered her life at that point.

Nic followed the path from then to what had brought her to him. His heart broke and he felt the desire to protect rage through him.

When he pulled away, her eyes were closed and she was pale. Nic placed a kiss on her forehead as she opened her eyes, knowing she would be mesmerised for a short time.

* * * *

"I just don't think this is the way to handle this." Kristen said in the car to Julian.

Julian looked over at her. "I'm sorry, love, but she does belong to Nic, and if this is the way he wants to handle things..." He shrugged.

"She's my sister, Julian!" Kristen cried.

"I understand that, but *he* is my brother, and he deserves what I have with you."

She smiled at him.

"Besides I think she handled it better once he took her blood and explained the difference between Hollywood's vampires and real life immortals."

"Yeah. She's affected by his mind, and then he explains things to her."

"I'm sure he thought it would be best. And he did find out about that Roger who sent her."

"We found out some. We still don't know enough, and now that she knows he can get into her thoughts and share his when he takes her blood, I don't see her sharing it willingly. Which means he's going to have to *take* it again."

"I know. We'll figure this out." He ran his hand over her hair. It was silky smooth. He'd never met her sister before this night. He could see the differences and similarities between the two women. Jo's hair was lighter although they both had the same green eyes. Kristen was a little taller while her sister was leaner.

"It's just she's my little sister."

"There's one thing you haven't considered. It broke your heart having to give to give your sister up. Now you have her back."

Kristen looked at her hands. "I thought about that. I just thought it was selfish of me."

He chuckled. "You don't have a selfish bone in your body. It was just meant to be. We'll let Nic get her settled into his house tonight, and tomorrow, we will go by and check on her. I see a lot of visits to my brother's house in our future."

She sent him a dazzling smile he felt to his deepest core. "That's true. If it was meant to be, then I have nothing to be ashamed of."

"You have nothing to be ashamed of anyway." His hand dropped to her lap.

"I'm just not as comfortable with all of this as you are."

"I've had over four hundred years. It'll get easier."

His hand started massaging her thigh. "Umm, especially with a teacher like you."

"That's right." He moved his hand over to brush her centre.

She shifted in her seat, placing his hand where she wanted it. "You're supposed to be driving."

"I am." He found the waistband of her cotton pants. He pulled and slipped his hand lower. "I'm multitasking."

She gave a soft laugh that ended in a low moan as he teased over the silk separating his fingers from her core.

"I love the way you respond to me," he murmured, pushing the silk away and finding her more thoroughly.

"Umm, Julian."

He dipped a finger inside and found her wet. "Oh baby."

She moved her hips again, making his finger go deeper. "Julian."

He circled her clit with his thumb and she moaned again.

"Just relax," he told her.

They were almost home. He recognised the streets that surrounded the home that had become theirs. They had no nearby neighbours. If he pulled the car over, it was unlikely anyone would come upon them. If he kept teasing her this way, there was no way she was going to make it home.

To his delight, Kristen began to rub him over his pants, making him moan, before she unsnapped them and placed her hand on his bare skin. The car drifted to the side suddenly as he stopped thinking about driving and felt only the touch of her. He corrected his error almost immediately, but Kristen still noticed.

"Honey, you're going to kill us," he said breathlessly.

"Oh no, you can multitask, remember?" she teased, drawing her hand down the length of him then back up.

"Kristen," he hissed.

She delighted him with a siren laugh before saying, "Pull over."

"We're almost home," he said, but it was through clenched teeth.

"Mmm, pull over, Julian."

"We can make it," he said, but it was more to himself than to her.

She just laughed again and ran her thumb over the tip of his cock. He shuddered and tightened the one hand he had on the wheel.

He whipped into the driveway, slammed the car into park, and pulled her over to his seat. "Come here."

Still laughing, she went willingly.

Chapter Three

Jo came awake slowly, her head pounding and her throat dry. She moved her head from side to side and swallowed hard. She felt weak and dizzy, and when she tried to move her arms, she couldn't.

Alarmed, she tried to sit up but only managed it halfway. She was in a large room, lying on a big, soft bed. A dark blue comforter had been placed over her but had fallen to her waist when she'd sat up. She adjusted her body to lean against the iron headboard so not to pull at her arms which were tied to it. She inspected her restraint and was overcome with anger.

The son of a bitch had tied her to a bed with a plastic-looking zip tie thing. She tested it by yanking on it a dozen times but only managed to make it dig into her wrists.

Leaning her head back, she closed her eyes and tried to remember what had happened. She remembered sitting on Nic's couch. What kind of vampire name was Nic, anyway? And one of the others was Christian. There was something wrong with that. But not as wrong as what she'd felt when he'd bitten her.

The feelings that had gone through her body as his teeth had sunk into her skin and he'd drunk from her had been amazing. She had never felt that way before. Oh, she had been aroused before, but never like that. Her body had felt alive, tingling and hot. Jo knew he had done something to make her feel that way, but that didn't make her feel any less guilty.

For six months, she'd put her life on hold for this mission. His bite made her want to betray everything she had worked for.

She was disgusted with herself. Nic had been in control the moment she'd seen him. And he bit her! He drank her blood! And didn't even ask permission. That was very bad manners in her book.

Roger was probably looking for her. She needed to get away so she could find him. Bring him back here to help her.

She tried to shake off the little shadow of doubt in her head. The cross obviously hadn't affected Nic. He hadn't seemed too worried about the holy water, or stake, or daggers. She wasn't sure if that was in truth or just a trick to keep her from trying to kill him.

She could admit, even if it was just to herself, she had been shocked and angry at seeing her sister alive...or undead or whatever. If there was a chance, just a small chance, that her sister wasn't evil, Jo had to find out. Kristen hadn't looked evil. She had looked like...like herself.

Jo was confused and angry and scared, so she did what any normal, red-blooded American woman would do.

She screamed.

And screamed and screamed and screamed until her voice was raw.

The door to the room flew open and banged into the wall.

"What in the bloody hell are you screaming about?" a very pissed off vampire asked her from the doorway.

Jo probably should have been afraid at the look of annoyance and anger on Nic's face, but she was too busy staring at his naked chest.

She licked her dry lips, taking in every inch of his chest, his arms, and his shoulders. She'd thought he had the most beautiful face she'd ever seen, but his body topped anything her mind could have come up with.

He wore only a blue pair of lounge pants. No shirt, no shoes, and no socks. He stood in the doorframe, filling it up completely, and she had to press her legs together to keep her arousal in check.

Holy shit, this man was lethal.

"Well?" Nic asked.

"Umm..." Jo dragged her gaze from his body to the bed, but then the mental image of him on the bed made her face flush so she looked at the one small window in the room.

There was a small shiver of light coming from the middle of the big thick curtains.

"Jo," Nic snapped at her. "What do you want? I was sleeping and would like to return to it if you're not hurt."

Jo used every ounce of willpower she had not to look at him. She narrowed her eyes at the slit of sun coming in the room. "Umm, my wrists hurt," she told him lamely.

Cursing under his breath, he walked into the room.

"What are you doing?" she asked him suspiciously while he was still several steps from the bed.

"I'm untying your arms so I can get some sleep," he snapped at her.

"No!"

He stopped and stared at her. "What?"

"Don't come over here. Don't touch me," Jo ordered. She knew she wasn't making any sense, but she was afraid if he got anywhere near her, she might attack him. And it wouldn't be in the way of driving a stake through his heart. It would be jumping him and letting him drive that big...perfect...

Oh god, she was going to hell. She was having sexual images of an evil creature doing things to her just to hear her scream.

Nic just stared at her like she was insane. He took a deep breath as if trying to stay in control, then his eyes narrowed. She could tell the moment he understood. He looked her up and down and her body responded.

Her heart picked up speed and liquid trailed down her thighs.

She was aroused. She was frightened. She was excited. She was ashamed. She wanted him and didn't care what he was.

The bed dipped as he stretched beside her. Reaching over, he yanked on the restraint and it broke off. He then settled down on the bed.

"What are you doing?"

"Going back to sleep," he grumbled, turning on his side away from her.

"You're not sleeping here." Though she wasn't tied anymore, she sat frozen on the mattress.

"Jo. Go back to sleep or I will tie you back up and gag you this time."

"You would not!"

"I would! Trust me."

Pulling the covers up around her shoulders, she laid back down. She made certain no part of her was touching him. She couldn't believe she was in bed with a vampire. Jo contemplated an escape. She didn't know where she was or how far from the club they had travelled the night before. But it didn't matter. As soon as she was sure Nic was truly asleep,

she would make a break for it. She was a smart girl... All she needed to do was get to a phone.

There were no sounds in the room where they were lying. Jo listened closely for any indication that Nic was out. She closed her eyes to concentrate better.

Jo should have been mortified. She could feel every touch, every caress, throughout her entire body. He knew where to touch her, how to touch her. He knew because he could pick things out of her head.

But with him nuzzling her neck using his lips and teeth to tease, she didn't feel embarrassed that this man knew she wanted him, and in every intimate detail. All she could do was close her eyes as she felt the most intense pleasure of her life.

Her body was on fire from the inside out as he nibbled on her throat. "Do you want to know what you taste like?" he whispered to her before taking possession of her mouth.

The kiss was harsh and brutal, and when she didn't open her mouth immediately to him, he bit her lip. Her lips parted on a gasp and he used the opportunity to invade her mouth and all her senses. He ran his tongue over the bite then sucked her lower lip in his mouth. She moaned while pressing her body harder against his. Breaking the kiss, he sat up slowly, sitting on her legs.

He placed her palm in the middle of his chest and covered it with his own. "Feel me." he murmured. "Touch me like you want to."

She didn't pull her hand away when he uncovered it. She traced her fingers over his skin with just the slightest touch. His skin jumped under her touch as if her soft touch teased and tortured.

His body was hard in all the right places. His erection strained against his pants, and she wanted to touch it, to feel it in her hand, or better yet inside her.

Leaning down, he stopped just a breath away from her lips, waiting for her to close the remaining distance. She lifted her head and pressed her lips to his. He opened his mouth and let her take the lead. She massaged his tongue with hers then nibbled his lower lip. She wrapped her arms around his neck as they continued to mate with their tongues.

When she broke the kiss to gulp in a breath, he kissed his way down her neck. She traced his shoulder blades and back as he laid his body over hers.

He had tucked her into bed still wearing her clothes. All except her boots anyway. The idea of only the flimsy materials and a comforter between them was agonising.

He left her neck and took her mouth again as he cupped her breast. She arched into his touch and moaned as he shoved the comforter off her and onto the floor. Her skirt had ridden up to her waist, revealing a black silk patch of cloth which was the only thing in his way.

He settled in between her legs, letting her feel how badly he wanted her. She responded by wrapping her legs around his waist. Supporting himself on one arm, he used his other hand and ripped her shirt down the middle.

The sound of the material ripping was barely heard over their combined moan. Her bra followed and he cupped her bare breast. He gave the mound his full attention. Using his lips, his tongue, and his teeth, he sucked and laved. Jo writhed under him as he went on to give her other breast the same attention.

The sounds coming out of the back of her throat were filled with pleasure and need. With her head tilted back and her eyes closed, he moved down her body and ran his tongue over her skin, leaving a wet trail from her breast to her stomach. He spent a few minutes on her belly button before tracing his tongue along the top of her skirt.

She moved her head side to side, her hands fisted into the sheets. She was almost there. Almost ready to scream his name.

He yanked her skirt down and off as he admired her body before finally removing the last piece of clothing that kept her body from him. She moaned in pleasure as his hand moved slowly up her leg. When he brushed his fingers over her wet hot centre, she thought she would come off the bed. She couldn't take much more of this. She just wanted him to take her, make her body his. When his fingers brushed over again, she moaned and lifted her hips.

He laughed softly as he rubbed his thumb over where she was swollen and in need.

When he lifted her hips in his hands and touched her most private place with his tongue, she cried out. As her first climax rocked her body, he replaced his tongue with a finger. She continued to ride out the spasms as he slid up her body and positioned himself over her.

"Look at me," he told her. "I want to watch you as I take you."

Jo jerked up in bed. Her breath came out in pants and her entire body was on fire. She looked over to Nic and saw he was still asleep on his side, facing her. He looked beautiful in sleep, like some kind of avenging angel. She was still completely dressed. A dream, it had just been a dream. Why did she feel disappointed?

When she shifted on the bed, his arm snaked out and caught her around the waist, tucking her against his body. It might have only been a dream, but the thick, hard evidence of his arousal pressed into her stomach.

"It's not time to get up," he complained.

"I need to go to the bathroom."

He loosened his grip but didn't let go of her completely. "Did you sleep well?"

She eyed him suspiciously. There was no way he could have known what she dreamt. Was there? "Yes."

He smiled. "Good. If you want to take a shower, I'll get you something to wear."

"That would be great," she told him before gingerly getting up from the bed.

Jo didn't look back at him so she missed Nic's amused smile. It had been a great dream. Would have been even better if she hadn't woken up. Nic's body was still unbelievably hard. He needed a cold shower, a *very* cold shower.

He got out of the bed and walked down to his room where he grabbed a pair of sweat pants and T-shirt. He didn't say anything as he entered the bathroom that was connected to the room he'd put Jo in. He placed the clothing on the bathroom counter then left to take care of his own needs.

Forty minutes later, Nic paced outside the bathroom door. What in the hell was she doing in the shower for half an hour?

The problem was that for the last half-hour he'd been picturing her naked body standing under the spray of hot water. Her hands massaging soap down her neck to her shoulders. Then slipping lower to her breasts. There, she would make circles with the soap, and using her other hand, she would gently rub it in. Her nipples would harden under the water and the feel of her own hands. Her fingers would tease the nipple and it would darken. With soap still dripping, she would move her hands slowly down her stomach and ribs. She would rub around her belly button before slipping lower. With her hands still wet and slippery, she would go down one leg, using small circles to lather every patch of skin. Lifting her foot, she would lavish it, then she would do the same again going up the other leg. Then, as her hand went up the inside of her leg, her fingers would gently brush over her folds. Spreading her legs farther, she would take the soap and rub. Her fingers would find

the wet, hot centre and dip inside. Her breath would catch in surprise and pleasure. She would try it again. This time her fingers would first brush over her clitoris before dipping inside. She'd rock first forward on her toes then back on her heels, her hips thrusting against her finger, and she'd add a second one. Her thumb would rub her clit, helping to build the pressure. He could hear the low moan break from the back of her throat as she thrust faster and faster. Then her cry of ecstasy as she climaxed.

Nic groaned and wanted to hit the door with his fist. He hadn't snuck a peek when he'd brought her clothes in. Why torture himself any more? Now he wanted to be in the shower with her. He sighed in relief when he heard the water shut off.

A few minutes later, she exited the bathroom and almost ran into him.

"Oh." She backed away quickly. "Is there something wrong?"

"What the hell took so long?" he snapped.

She blushed and dropped her eyes. "I feel asleep on the seat in there. It's an awesome bathroom," she admitted.

Great, he'd been having erotic daydreams about her, and she'd been asleep.

When her eyes flitted up to his, he saw the same hunger he was feeling. Without another word, he grabbed her arm and pulled her forward.

The kiss was like the one in the dream. Hot, demanding, and brutal. This time, he didn't need to persuade her to open her mouth—she did it willingly.

With one hand in her wet hair, he pulled her head back to deepen the kiss. She moaned and pressed closer to him. When her arms went around his neck, he ran his hands down her back to cup her behind. He was able to press her most intimate part into his.

She moaned low again and rubbed herself against him. He lifted her up, and she wrapped her legs around him. He started walking towards the bed when his doorbell rang.

He quickly scanned the area on the outside of his house and cursed under his breath.

"What? Who is it?" Jo asked with her head on his chest.

"My family."

"Your family?" Her voice was faint, but he still heard her fear.

Tightening his hold on her, he kissed her forehead before letting her body slide down his. She immediately put several steps between them.

"It's just Christian, Julian, and your sister."

"Oh." She looked towards the door. Nic took her hand and squeezed it in reassurance.

The doorbell rang again, and he walked out of the room and down the stairs with her hand in his. He walked down a long hallway and took her into the study. It was one of his favourite rooms. When they walked in, he heard her catch her breath.

"It's beautiful."

Nic was immensely proud that she would like this room as he did. When the doorbell rang for the third time, he gently pushed her down on the couch. "Stay here. I'll be right back."

Nic quickly walked to the front door, cursing his brothers the entire way before yanking it open. "What?"

Christian stood with hands in his pockets, an amused look on his face. Kristen was next to Julian, looking worried.

"Going to invite us in?" Christian asked smugly.

"No."

Kristen gasped, and Nic sighed. "Fine, but you're not staying long."

Julian nodded. "Kristen was worried about her sister so we just came over to see if you need anything. Let her check on her sister and then we'll leave." Julian led the way inside.

"That is unless you do need anything."

Nic heard Christian cover a laugh with a cough.

"Of course I don't need anything," Nic told them, annoyed.

His brothers both nodded as they all walked to the den. He heard Kristen's sharp cry as they walked in and saw her rush to her.

"What?" Nic asked, concerned something happened while he was out of the room.

Kristen simply held Jo's face in her hands.

Nic looked at his brothers to see if they knew what was wrong with Kristen and noticed they were both staring at him. "What?"

"Nic." Kristen stared at him accusingly. "What happened?"

Nic looked at Jo, who was staring at the woman holding her face.

Julian walked over to stand by his bond-mate, and Christian stood beside Nic.

"She is awfully pale, brother," Julian commented.

Nic looked more closely at Jo. He hadn't noticed how pale she was. He hadn't thought about food for her. It was just past three in the afternoon, and she was probably hungry. He should have gone out and gotten her something while she showered, but he hadn't thought about it. Plus, he hadn't wanted to leave her alone. He could ward the house and keep her inside, but he just hadn't wanted to leave her. Then he remembered what his brother said.

Nic smiled at Julian. "She needs food and some juice."

Kristen frowned. "She hasn't had anything? How much blood have you taken since last night?"

Chapter Four

"Could you let go of my face please?" Jo complained.

Kristen immediately dropped her hands but remained next to her sister. "How are you feeling?"

Jo shrugged and shifted uncomfortably. Nic could once again feel her emotions and was glad to have that connection with her. As glad as she was deep down that her sister was alive, it was still a shock to the system to have Kristen fawning over her.

"She really should eat something," Nic told Kristen as he walked around the couch and stood behind Jo.

"Yes, that probably would be best. What do you have? I can make something for her." When Nic didn't answer right away, Kristen narrowed her eyes. "You don't have anything, do you?"

He shook his head, annoyed. "It has been a couple of centuries since I've had any guests."

Kristen sighed as Jo squeaked, "Centuries?"

"We'd better go get something," Kristen told Julian. "I don't want my sister fainting or anything."

Nic smiled at Julian. "You did ask if I needed anything."

Julian sent his brother a dirty look. It was a well-known fact in the family that Kristen loved to shop. Julian, never one to like being around people, went with her only because he never left her side.

"Can we get back to the centuries thing?" Jo said from her place on the couch.

Nic looked down at her. Her green eyes were wide, and she looked around the room at all of them.

"You think we're evil, soulless creatures but have a problem with us being centuries old?" Nic said in disbelief. Talk about messed up priorities.

"Well, it's different when you say it out loud," she snapped at him.

Kristen jumped up, interrupting further comment. "Julian and I will go shopping." She pointed a finger at Nic. "You and Christian can explain the facts and fiction about our...unique qualities."

Jo laid her head back on the couch and closed her eyes. "Unique qualities, my ass." she mumbled.

Everyone heard her clearly anyway.

Nic smiled down at her before winking at Julian. "Make sure to get plenty of food."

Kristen grabbed Julian's arm and started pulling him towards the door. "I know what to get."

Christian waited until Julian and Kristen closed the front door before slapping Nic on the back. "Nicely played."

Nic just shrugged and walked over to Jo. She was curled up on the couch, but she had one eye open and a smile playing on her lips.

"Did you just trick my sister into shopping for you?" she asked quietly.

Sitting next to her feet, he just smiled. They shared a moment as if they both knew a secret. Nic's heart swelled at the intimacy of it.

Christian walked over to the balcony doors in the study. He needed to speak with Nic, to see if he had found anything out about who sent Jo to him, but he doubted Nic was going to be helpful when Jo was so weak.

Damn bonding emotions. They had totally screwed up Julian when Kristen turned out to be his chosen, and now he was going to lose Nic to the same thing.

Christian was the oldest and had never given it much thought. Julian had been searching for his bond-mate. Nic's seemed to drop in his lap.

Bonding brought all kinds of trouble. Having to watch what you say all the time, always having to do what they wanted, and never having a moment's peace. No, Christian didn't want that.

But he couldn't suppress the feeling of jealousy as he watched Nic stroke Jo's back as she laid with her eyes closed.

"Did you find out anything?" Christian asked him quietly.

Nic shook his head and motioned his brother into the hallway.

Once in the hall, Nic leant against the wall and closed his eyes. Christian waited for his brother to start talking.

"She doesn't want to betray the one who sent her here. All I know is his name is Roger. She doesn't know what to think about all of this."

"If she was sent to you, then someone knows what you are," Christian reminded him.

Nic nodded. "Yes, but why send her in so unprepared?" He laughed. "Crosses, holy water, stakes? It just doesn't make sense."

Christian agreed. "I'll look into it."

Grateful, Nic met his brother's eyes. "Appreciate it."

Christian just shook that off. "We need to know if someone is after the family."

Nic didn't say anything.

"Of course, there is another way."

Nic only lifted an eyebrow.

"Send her home."

Nic pushed away from the wall and stalked towards his brother. *Damn bonding emotions*, Christian thought to himself one more time. He held his hands up. "Listen."

Nic stopped then nodded slowly.

"Whoever sent her will want to know what happened. She goes missing for a few days and then shows back up. Hell, she may even go to him," Christian told him.

"So what? You want me to follow her to another man?" Nic asked in outrage.

Christian sighed. Yes, emotions were getting in the way. "If she is your true mate, she wouldn't be able to be with another now."

Nic turned and stared back into the room where Jo was. Christian knew he was asking for a lot. It wasn't in their nature to let their mates be separated from them. And he was asking his brother watch her go to another man. He also knew his brother and knew Nic would worry that if she walked away, she might not come back.

"Think about it, Nic. It would lead us to whoever sent her."

"I won't let her leave me," Nic said quietly, not taking his eyes away from the girl.

"We'll let her go home and grab some clothes or something. See if he contacts her there. We can send Julian and Kristen with her," Christian suggested.

"I'll take her."

"If she was sent to kill you, it would be better if you weren't with her in case he does try to contact her."

Nic sighed, and Christian knew he would give in. "Okay."

Christian gripped Nic shoulder in support. "You'll need to share blood to make sure the bond does not break."

Nic ran a hand through his hair. "I know."

"Okay, so here's the plan."

* * * *

Kristen had been true to her word, buying everything from groceries to pots, pans, dishes, silverware—the works. She even had dish soap in the bag.

She made Jo a huge sandwich and a glass of orange juice before taking it to her in the study where she'd fallen asleep.

Jo opened her eyes when Kristen sat next to her. She eyed the sandwich before taking it and sitting up.

"So how far did you get in explaining what's going on?" Kristen asked Nic and Christian.

The two men exchanged a look. Christian's lips curved into a smile.

"You did start to explain our life to her?"

Nic just shrugged. "She fell asleep."

Kristen narrowed her eyes.

Nic looked over at Julian. "Is she always this demanding?"

Julian just shook his head a smirk clearly on his face. "You just wait, brother."

Jo watched the play between brothers as she ate her sandwich. It was weird watching them tease and play. These were supposed to be evil demons, yet they weren't acting the way she'd imagined.

The scene from upstairs was still bothering her. She'd never been the kind of woman to just jump in bed with a man, but since she'd first seen Nic, that was exactly what she wanted. Even more confusing was, when she was in his arms, she felt a weird sense of calm, like that was where she belonged.

She needed to get more information. If not for Roger, then for herself. She knew deep down she had entered a whole new world. One she would never be able to leave. So why didn't that scare her like it should have?

When Kristen turned to her, Jo was ready to listen. No matter how strange she felt, this was her sister sitting next to her. Her best friend and only family.

"We're not vampires. Or not what you think a vampire would be." Jo opened her mouth, but Kristen held up a hand. "Let me get the facts out first, then we'll go from there. We told you some last night, but now that you have been around Nic some, maybe you will understand more."

Jo nodded. She was ready to hear more. Last night's shock hadn't left her completely, but she was starting to feel more comfortable.

"Okay, we're not vampires. We are immortal."

Jo nodded again, letting her know to continue.

"We do drink blood, but we don't drink from humans and take over their minds."

Jo raised an eyebrow and glanced at Nic. He had taken her blood.

Kristen sighed. "Well, not normally."

Jo shrugged, trying to show indifference, though her mind was racing, and Kristen took that as permission to go on.

"Like I was saying, we don't have to drink from humans, but..."

She glanced at Julian for help. Jo didn't miss the look the man sent her sister. It was a look of deep love. One she had never experienced. Was that why her sister had allowed herself to be turned? Was it because of her love for Julian?

"Some prefer it," he answered for Kristen.

"Prefer it? Prefer drinking from somebody. Who the hell would do that?" Jo asked, disgusted. The look on her sister's face told her who. "Oh."

Julian immediately came to Kristen's defence. "It's hard at first. Blood from the living is warm and fresh. In a bag, it's cold."

"In a bag." She laughed. No one laughed with her. "Tough crowd," she murmured. Only Nic smiled at her.

"Anyway," Kristen continued, "we are immortal and we still have our souls. Holy water, crosses, all that Hollywood stuff does not hurt us."

"What about the sun?"

Kristen shook her head. "No problem."

"Oh." No wonder Nic had been able to wake during the day and walk in front of the curtain that had sun shining through. For that matter, it had been the middle of the day when they had arrived at Nic's home. The more she heard the less she found out she knew. Everything that had ever been told to her was a lie.

"You see, it's not as bad as you think," Nic assured her.

Jo wasn't so sure about that. "But you have super speed, hearing, sight, all of that," she mused.

It was Christian who answered. "Our bodies are made up mostly of blood like yours is mostly water. That is the reason we must replenish the blood. A human can't live without water; we can't live without blood. It also gives us superior reflexes."

"Well, Kristen *was* normal. Were all of you?"

Again, Christian spoke. "No, we were born with these special...genes."

"Genes?"

"Yes, the same as some people are born with the gene that allows them to contort their body and shift shape."

"Shift shape? Are you talking about werewolves?" Jo jumped off the couch, her empty plate falling onto the thick carpet.

"Now why would they only be wolves?" he asked in an annoyed voice. "There are thousands of other animals."

"Are you telling me there are werewolves...uh...were-animals out there?"

"Shifters." Julian helped her with the correct word.

"Shifters?"

Jo was pretty sure she was close to having a panic attack until Nic took her hand. His touch seemed to slow her heart and she began to breathe normally again. They stood together in silence, away from the others, for a few moments before he spoke.

"Maybe we can concentrate on us right now," he suggested.

Jo nodded. Much more of this and she was going to lose her mind.

"Okay, so why am I here? If what you say is true, why did you bring me here instead of letting me go home last night?"

Nic rubbed his thumb over the pulse in her wrist. "Because we live so long, we are given a partner. Someone to spend eternity with. Kristen is Julian's. We call it bonding and the bonding is strong."

"Strong how?"

"The feelings we have are unlike any we have had for another person. Mortal or immortal."

"Uh huh," she replied, looking at him suspiciously. She had a feeling she wasn't going to like this. There was no way he could think she was his...partner.

"It's unmistakable."

Jo shook her head, finally understanding. "I'm not your partner."

"Bond-mate," Christian corrected and received a glare from her.

"Whatever." She pulled her hand away from Nic. "It's not me, so choose someone else."

"There is no one other than you. It was meant to be. You are my bond-mate."

"But I'm not," she told him sternly, trying to hold back the panic she felt. She would not allow them to make her think she was meant to be with Nic. She didn't even know him, on top of the fact that he was the very thing she was sent to destroy.

Nic turned and stared at her head on. "You are. I know how you feel about me. I know this without reading your mind. I know how you will respond to my touch."

He did touch her then, running a finger lightly over her cheek.

"You can read my mind?" she asked, trying to fight the warming of her body to his touch.

"No. That's the thing about the bond. It blocks me from reading you."

Jo looked nervously around at the others.

"They can't either since you are my chosen, and it usually blocks others from doing it as well."

Well, that was a relief. She didn't want anyone digging in her mind. Then again, if they could read her...she wasn't meant to be here. "Maybe you should try harder," she suggested.

Nic shook his head and her shoulders dropped.

"The only times I can read you are when you are in extreme stress, during the sharing of blood, or when you let me."

"Let you?"

"I will have to teach you to control your thoughts. You will be able to talk to me when you want and keep others out."

"Talk to you?"

Nic led her back to the couch. She plopped down, feeling dazed and confused. "You're talking about changing me into one of you."

Nic knelt down in front of her as Kristen scooted closer.

"Honey," her sister placed a hand on her arm, "it will need to be done eventually. Eternity is a long time, but it should be done soon to prevent you from getting hurt or sick."

Nic looked thankfully at Kristen. "We can talk more about that later, after you've had time to adjust to it, but you do need to think about it."

Jo nodded. "Is there any more?"

Nic placed his hands over hers on her knees. "You're tired and you need time to adjust to this, but I must insist you stay here with me while you do."

"Stay here?" She didn't even know him. Besides, there was no way she could stay here and not give in to temptation.

He nodded.

She looked over at her sister, and the look on Kristen's face was so hopeful. But what if they were wrong and she didn't belong with them?

"Absolutely not," she told him in her strongest voice.

He just remained as he was — waiting.

"No," she tried again.

He stared back at her.

"It's not an option." She tried one last time.

He didn't even blink.

"What if you're wrong?" she asked, just above a whisper, knowing he was going to win this argument.

Nic gently cupped her chin. She jerked her face away.

"You know I'm not wrong," he said. "You can feel it, Jo, I know you can. You want to hate us, to fear us, yet you have feelings for me."

"So you're good looking. That doesn't mean I'm supposed to bond with you."

His smile was radiant. "You think I'm good looking?"

She rolled her eyes. "Can we get back to my nervous breakdown?"

He laughed softly. "Sure."

Jo looked at each one in the room. Nic was right. She didn't hate them. She did fear them, but not like she had. They could have done something to her to make her feel this way, but why bother? She studied her sister last.

Jo had been so heartbroken when Kristen had died. She had prayed every night to have her back. Now she was sitting next to her. Jo could feel the warmth from her body, and the caring and love in her eyes actually made Jo's heart hurt.

But what about Roger? All the things he had told her about what she was hunting. He'd made them sound like monsters. Not brothers and people. Though he had been wrong about the crosses, weapons, and sun...

Then there was their wanting to change her. Did she really want to live forever?

"Can you die?"

"We can," Nic told her gently. "Our bodies can repair most injuries. We would have to consume more blood to repair the damage."

"So a stake in the heart?"

"If we removed it right away, our body would heal it."

"Does it hurt?" she asked. Her mind kept going back on being turned. It had to hurt, right? Dying couldn't feel good.

Before she could clarify what she meant, Christian spoke. "None of us have had a stake through the heart, but I would bet it's pretty painful."

She didn't even look at him but kept her gaze locked with Nic's.

"No, it won't hurt. I'd have to drink from you. Drain your blood out and replace it with mine. The blood will start to take over and change your genes," Nic said softly, knowing what she had meant the entire time.

She nodded as her stomach rebelled and her head pounded. "I have a headache. I want to lie down."

Wrapping an arm around her, Nic helped her stand. "Come on. I'll take you upstairs."

Chapter Five

Jo woke up with Nic's arm wrapped around her middle. He'd walked her upstairs earlier but had gone back down to let his guests out. He must have climbed in bed after she'd fallen asleep.

She should have minded, but being tucked next to his body and held tightly felt good. She wanted to bury her head deeper into the pillow and go back to sleep. She was still confused, not understanding what she was feeling. How she could feel safe and cherished in his arms? He was a stranger and she had never had such feelings before. Not even for Roger whom she'd spent half of a year with. If Nic was the monster she'd thought, would she feel this way?

Part of her still thought it was wrong. She started to shift away when his arm tightened.

"Nic," she whispered.

"Are you always an early riser?" he asked, his mouth muffled by the pillow.

She laughed at the gruff voice. "Yes."

He groaned. "Don't you want to go back to sleep?"

"No." She shifted her legs restlessly, her body wanting.

He threw a leg over hers. "Please?"

She laughed again. "I'm not tired."

He sighed, then nuzzled the back of her neck.

She stiffened. "What are you doing?"

The arm that had been around her waist shifted and he cupped her breast. "Trying to make you tired."

"Oh." When his thumb brushed over one nipple, she gasped. "That's not making me tired."

He chuckled. His other hand moved down to her hip. When he pushed a hand under her shirt, she pressed into his touch.

"Nic, we shouldn't be doing this."

"Uh huh," he murmured, kissing her ear, his hand still caressing her breast.

He leant over, pushing her onto her back, and took possession of her mouth. She opened for him, and he groaned in approval when her tongue touched his.

She brushed her hands across his bare shoulders, and he pulled away only to lift the shirt she wore over her head.

Her body was on fire. It had to be the bonding thing he had mentioned, but the fuzz around her mind didn't want to be logical. She only wanted this man.

As he retook her mouth, she shuddered. He bent his head lower and laved her breasts. She moaned at the sensation of his wet tongue on her hot skin. As he sucked on one nipple, he played with the other, rolling it between his thumb and finger. She arched her back, giving him better access. He didn't disappoint. By the time he moved down her stomach, she was scratching at his shoulders. He slowly paid the same attention to her stomach, ribs, and belly button before lowering his hands to her pants. She lifted her hips to help him. He pulled the pants down, taking in every inch of her body. When he settled between her legs, she tried to close them around him.

"Nic," she demanded.

He ignored her and kissed her leg, starting at her knee then up to her inner thigh. She shifted restlessly against him.

When his mouth brushed over her centre, she had to bite her lip to keep from screaming in frustration when he only teased it. With his hands, he spread her wider for him.

"Nic." Her voice was breathless to her own ears.

He placed his tongue on her and had her arching into him and crying out. He lavished her core with caresses as he had done the rest of her body. She could feel the sweet, precious release building. She bucked her hips in rhythm with his tongue. He thrust a finger inside her. She almost came off the bed.

"Please," she begged.

He continued to ruthlessly pleasure her, keeping her on the edge. He added a second finger, and finally, she yelled out in triumph as he sent her over the edge in a violent release.

She rode the wave of ecstasy as he continued to pleasure her.

As he travelled up her body, his thumb circled her clitoris. She continued to move her hips into his touch.

“Open your eyes,” he demanded when his face was inches from hers. Jo hadn’t even realised they had closed and complied. He leant down and gently kissed her mouth.

With one hand, he started to remove his pants. She used both her hands to help him before grabbing his hips.

Jo demanded where he would have gone slowly. Nic smiled, never taking his eyes from her. With his hands under her, he lifted her body and plunged inside.

They both moaned at the sensation of him deep inside her.

He thrust slowly at first. In and out. She raised her hips to meet each one of his strokes, her nails digging into his lower back as she held onto him.

As he plunged faster, he could feel her inner muscles clamping around him. She locked her legs around him and arched, taking him deeper.

He placed kisses against her neck, preparing her for what was next.

Right before he felt the second explosion of her body, he pierced her neck with his teeth. Pleasure swamped him as her blood flowed into his mouth. He drank deeply as he rode her almost feverishly, and she completely gave herself to him.

Her eyes were closed, but she felt drops on her lips. She licked her lips and tasted blood. Her eyes flew open and she found his wrist bleeding in front of her mouth.

He was still moving his body inside hers.

“Take it, Jo,” he commanded.

She opened her mouth to respond and got a mouthful of blood. She tried to spit it out, but he pressed his wrist harder on her mouth.

She tried shaking her head, but her body didn’t seem to want to cooperate. Her hips were still matching his rhythm. He pulled all the way out and slammed into her again.

She cried out and got a mouthful of blood again. Tears built in her eyes as he continued to press his wrist against her.

Grabbing his wrist with both hands, she tried to force it away. But even as she fought, she positioned herself so he went in deeper. It seemed her body wanted the blood even while her mind fought it. She tried to resist only because she thought she should. His blood tasted

good, exciting, erotic. She cried out again and felt his responding shudder and his hoarse cry of release.

She laid there for several minutes, his body blanketing hers. He removed his hand from her mouth and licked his wrist. The skin started to close in seconds.

"I can't believe you did that," she complained, finally finding her voice.

"It was necessary, Jo. The bond only strengthens with the exchange of blood," he said, nuzzling her neck.

"You can't force me to take your blood. That should have been my choice." Her voice cracked, betraying the fact she was crying.

He lifted his head, catching one tear with his tongue. "Don't cry. I'm sorry. That's not how I wanted it to happen. I was going to talk to you first."

She pressed her hands against his chest, trying to move him. He rolled off of her, she jumped out of bed before he was even settled.

"Where are you going?"

Jo glared at him walking from the bed. "To shower." She slammed the bathroom door just for good measure.

Nic cursed himself as he lay in the bed. Damn it. He hadn't meant for it to happen that way. He got up and followed her to the bathroom.

She was just getting into the shower when he opened the door. "What are you doing?" she asked as she spun around.

"Trying to talk to you. You can't run away from this."

"I'm not running away from anything," she snapped. "I'm washing this damn blood off of me." She did have his blood on her mouth, chin and neck. Some had even trailed to her hair.

"I'm sorry. That should have been planned better," Nic told her as he moved closer. He wanted her to understand, to realise that he would never purposely hurt her.

She screamed in frustration and stepped into the shower. "Get out!"

"Just listen to me."

"I don't want to."

He walked over and pulled the stall door open. She had her hands in her hair, shampooing it. He stepped inside, causing her to back away from him.

He grabbed her arm and spun her around she was under the main showerhead. There, he washed her hair before grabbing a bar of soap.

"Am I going to crave blood now?" she asked quietly as he soaped up her body. He could hear the rage on the tip of her voice.

He laughed softly. So it wasn't so much about the sharing of his blood but her fears of what he was. That he could handle.

"It's not funny," she snapped, looking at him.

"I apologise. No, you will not crave blood."

"So I'm not one of you?"

He frowned at the hopefulness in her voice. "No. I'd have to drain your body and replace it with mine."

She let him turn her again, and he started washing her neck, shoulders, down to her full breasts.

"You still shouldn't have done that."

He met her eyes. He'd meant it when he told her he should have planned better. He should have talked with her before about the need to share blood with his bond-mate. It was never going to go away and would only increase in time. However, he also knew she didn't want to hear any more right then either. "I know."

Chapter Six

Julian and Kristen showed up to take Jo home. Nic walked her out and stood in the driveway as she drove away. Jo tried not to look back, but when she did, he was still standing there watching her.

Jo almost cried out at the pain on his face. He didn't want her leaving, not even for a couple of hours for her to get clothes. He had finally given in to Kristen's suggestion, and Jo had the feeling it was out of guilt because of the exchange of blood.

Thinking about that still made her angry. He was demanding and didn't ask her what she thought or wanted. He did what he wanted and dealt with the consequences after.

She didn't know if it was the sharing of blood or what he called the bonding thing, but her heart hurt at leaving him. And that pissed her off. She should be able to stay angry with him. He had violated her.

She had made herself into a hard, uncaring woman who wouldn't have her heart broken again. She'd lost everyone who mattered to her and had vowed never to care that much again. But here she was in the same car as her sister once again, and her heart had been taken against her will.

She tried to pay attention as Kristen and Julian kept the conversation light, but her thoughts kept going back to the gorgeous house she just left and the man who was there.

She hadn't seen the outside of the house until she left, and it was as breathtaking as it was inside. It stood strong in the middle of a luscious, green yard. She could see rows of trees to the west and the iron gates that parted to let them out had an old artistic look to them. She also found out she was miles from town.

She laid her head against the backseat and listened as Julian and Kristen talk about how they met.

When they finally reached her neighbourhood and her apartment, Kristen sucked in a breath. "You live here?"

Jo rolled her eyes. "It may not be as big and beautiful and big as Nic's house, but it's home," Jo told her, opening her door. She'd moved after her sister had died, not being able to

afford the condo they had shared. After Roger had found her, she'd stopped working all together to train.

Julian was around and helping Jo out of the car in a blink. He then turned and helped Kristen out.

It still made Jo wary when they moved that fast. "I wish you wouldn't do that," she muttered.

He just smiled.

Kristen and Julian walked her up to her apartment then she just stood there.

"Well?" Julian asked with his hands in his pocket.

"Um, I left my keys in my car," she told them.

They just looked at her.

"My car that is in the parking lot of Eternal. I'll just go down and get the key from my super," she said, sighing.

They nodded, but when she started down the hall, they followed her.

"Are you going to follow me everywhere?"

Neither answered.

"Unbelievable. It's not like I'm going to make a run for it," she mumbled under her breath, knowing they would still hear her.

After getting the key and returning to her door, Jo unlocked it and stood at the threshold. "So if I don't invite you in, do you have to stay out here?"

Julian smiled, reached and turned the handle before stepping inside.

"Figures," Jo said, following him in. Kristen closed the door behind her as she entered last.

Jo looked around her small apartment. "What should I get?"

Julian walked around while Kristen stared at the coffee table the sisters had shared in the condo. They had inherited it from their grandmother. It was the only thing they had left of their family. Jo hadn't been able to part with it and now she was glad. Having her sister again filled a hole she had felt for so long now.

Julian answered, "Whatever you want or think you'll need."

"Fine. I'll be in my bedroom. Just give me a little minute. I want to shower and change into my own clothes too."

Kristen finally looked up from the coffee table. "Need help? I can pack while you're showering," she offered.

Jo shook her head. "I need some time alone."

Once inside, she closed and locked the door. Picking up the cordless phone, she took it in the bathroom with her. She needed to get a hold of Roger. She was mildly surprised he hadn't been at her apartment waiting on her. He must know she hadn't accomplished what he'd sent her to do. He would be pissed. But he would be worried too. They'd become more than lovers the last couple of months. Now, with everything she had learnt, she didn't trust him completely, but he was all she had left of her old world. She turned on the shower, then punched in Roger's phone number. She would just tell him she was okay. She needed time to figure out what to do about Nic, but no matter what, she would protect her sister.

He answered on the first ring. "Who's with you?" he asked with no hello.

"Um." She didn't know what to say. She didn't want to put her sister in danger. "Some people I met."

"You were caught?" He said it like he already knew.

"Roger..."

"You need to get out of there and away from them."

"How?" Jo asked, then caught herself smelling Nic's shirt. She yanked it over her head, fumbling to keep the phone to her ear.

"Tell them you want to go out to dinner."

She slipped off Nic's sweat pants and kicked them into the corner with his shirt. "Where?"

"Doesn't matter. I'll find you."

"Where are you?"

"Focus, Jo. This is serious. You let yourself get caught, and now I've got to get you out of this mess," he snapped at her.

"Hey! I didn't want—"

He cut her off. "Jo. Do as you're told."

Her back went straight and she saw herself scowl in the mirror. "Roger I...I—"

"Thirty minutes, Jo." And he hung up on her.

Jo stepped in the shower and thought about her options.

Twenty-five minutes later, Jo, Kristen, and Julian walked into a Mexican food restaurant five blocks from her apartment. It had taken some doing, but she'd finally convinced them to take her out to eat. They had just wanted to order in or have Kristen go pick something up, but they caved when Jo told them she had been locked up for two days and she wanted out.

Jo sat at the table between Julian and Kristen and tried not to look around for Roger. He said he'd be there, so she knew he would. After ordering, they sat eating chips and salsa. Well, Jo ate chips and salsa while Julian and Kristen picked at the appetizers.

"Jo? Have you thought about what you're going to do?" Kristen asked softly.

"How about go home?"

Kristen shook her head. "I just got you back. I'm not letting you go again."

Jo felt the same way. Wasn't that what was important? Not losing her sister again. She was just so confused about everything that had happened the last few days. Jo shrugged. "I don't know."

Julian and Kristen exchanged a look.

"What?"

"He'll take good care of you," Kristen told her, still speaking quietly.

"Hmm, really?" Jo leant back and brought her glass of water to her lips.

"What Kristen is trying to say without saying is that if you were meant to bond with Nic being away from him could be uncomfortable," Julian told her bluntly.

"I'll live."

"Jo, the connection you have to Nic won't be severed. The...attraction you feel towards him will only intensify now that you've exchanged blood."

Jo narrowed her eyes at her sister. "How'd you know about that?"

Kristen reached over and laid a hand on Jo's arm. "He'd have to exchange blood with you to chance letting you go. Otherwise, he'd go insane with jealousy."

"Jealousy?"

Kristen nodded. "The bond..."

"Stop," Jo demanded. "I don't want to hear that damn word one more time." She slammed her water down.

Kristen jumped and pulled her hand back. "I'm just trying to make you understand that it could be painful being away from Nic."

“Painful?”

“Yes. When...”

Jo stood, not wanting to hear more. “I’m going to the restroom.” She stomped away but could feel Julian and Kristen watching her.

Once inside the bathroom, Jo bent over the sink and washed her face with cold water. Everything was such a mess. Straightening, she grabbed a handful of paper towels and blotted her face. When she looked up into the mirror, she yelped at the man standing behind her.

“Roger,” Jo whispered, spinning around.

He didn’t say anything right away. He just wrapped his hand around her neck and lifted her chin with his thumb. He stared into her eyes, but she wasn’t sure what he was looking for.

She watched him and took in the cold expression on his face that she had never seen before. Alarm bells started to go off in her head. In one moment of clarity, she knew she didn’t want to be with him any longer. With or without vampires – Roger was not the one for her.

“Are you okay?” he asked her quietly. When she nodded and relaxed against his hold, he smiled. “Well, let’s go.”

Then the lights went out in her mind and she felt herself falling forward.

* * * *

For the second time in as many days, Jo awoke tied down in a strange place. She lay naked on a cold cement floor, but when she tried to move, she realised her hands were chained to a cement wall. She yanked at the chains but only managed to tire herself out.

Leaning her back against the wall, she pulled her legs up to her chest and looked around. She was being held in a large window-less, concrete room with bars on the door. It reminded her of the cages they held prisoners in.

Jo didn’t scream or cry. She remembered Roger coming up behind her in the bathroom. She didn’t know what happened after he told her they’d go. She hadn’t had the chance to tell him no.

Either he had locked her up or someone else had. But she was damn tired of it. So she'd wait until someone came to find out what was going on.

Jo dozed off but was shocked awake by the sound of the barred door slamming closed. She opened her eyes and looked warily at Roger.

"What's going on, Roger?"

He shook his head from where he stood by the door. "Just precautions, Jo."

"Precautions? You have me chained to a wall naked."

He laughed bitterly. "Don't like the accommodations?"

She looked up at him, confused. "What is wrong with you?"

"Me?" He laughed again. "You disappear for two days, come back with company, and try to contact me? Sure, I should have just strolled into your apartment and introduced myself. Maybe took a trip with your new friends."

"Roger, you sent me there to them."

He nodded. "And you obviously failed."

She pulled at the chains. "Unchain me, please."

"Why'd you call me, Jo? Was it to set me up? Am I your prize?"

"Unchain me, Roger!" she ordered through clenched teeth. "You know damn well I didn't betray you."

He shook his head. "I don't know anything. I can only imagine what you've been doing with your new friends." He nodded to the chains. "Why don't you break them? Superhuman strength comes as part of the package, doesn't it?"

"Come on!" she yelled.

He gave her the coldest look. "So what have you been up to, Jo?"

"Look at me. I am not a vampire."

"And if you were, you'd tell me?" he asked calmly.

She pulled at the chains. "Unchain me *now*!"

"No."

"What, you're going to keep me chained here until I go crazy and try to take your blood?" she asked sarcastically.

"I could stake you in the heart and see if you burst into flames if you prefer."

She yelled every obscenity she could think at him.

He just crossed his arms over his chest and leant against the bars. "Why don't you tell me what happened once you left my apartment."

"Why don't you go to hell?" she threw back at him. This was unbelievable. First, Roger sent her to Nic, then he kidnapped and chained her, and now he had decided she betrayed him! If anyone had been betrayed, it had been her. She had enough. Once she was out of there, she was going on a long extended vacation – without men!

"You first, honey." he said, smiling.

* * * *

"What do you mean you lost her?" Nic yelled into the phone.

"She went to the bathroom, and when she didn't come back, Kristen went in there. She was gone," Julian explained.

"Where the hell is she?" Nic shouted. They couldn't have lost Jo! His heart ached, and he was very close to losing control. She was his bond-mate, what he had waited his entire life for. She couldn't be gone!

"We're not sure. I can smell someone else in there mixed with her scent. A male."

Nic growled. "Who is it?"

"I don't know. No one who's here now."

"Did you look to see if anyone saw anything?"

"I went though everyone's mind. No one saw a thing."

Nic could feel his teeth come out and knew his eyes were glowing as his anger grew. "Stay there. I'm on my way."

* * * *

"Unchain me, Roger," Jo repeated more than two hours later.

"Tell me what happened," he demanded.

"Then you'll untie me?"

"Sure."

"Liar."

"I'll tell you this, Jo. You don't have a chance in hell of being unchained until you tell me what happened."

"I can't believe you're doing this," she complained. She never expected Roger to treat her like a common criminal. Especially when this was all his fault anyway.

"Don't whine, Jo. You must have known I would be suspicious when you disappeared for two days then suddenly called me."

She blew the hair out of her eyes. "At least give me my clothes or a blanket. It's cold."

He seemed to think about it. "Tell me something that deserves a blanket."

She sighed.

"Come on. If you're not one of them, tell me something."

She thought about what she could tell him. She wouldn't give up her sister, she knew that for sure. And Nic could lead Roger to her sister, so that was out.

She needed to convince Roger they weren't vampires. Which according to Nic, they weren't.

She had something! "Well, when they took me upstairs, I can tell you that they weren't afraid of stakes, crosses, or holy water."

"Hmm," he said but didn't look surprised.

"You already knew that," she accused.

His answer was a shrug.

"What haven't you told me?" She had to ask. Could everything Nic and her sister told her be true? Had Roger just used her for his own purposes not caring what happened to her? Like some kind of experiment?

"If there was something I didn't tell you before, do you really think I'd tell you now?" he responded in a nasty tone.

"Roger!"

"Where were you? Where did they take you?"

She laid her head on her knees, not answering.

"I can sit here all night, Jo. It's no hardship on me to sit and stare at you."

She didn't lift her head. Guess that answered her questions. She didn't mean anything to Roger. And worse, she had gotten herself caught by calling him.

* * * *

"I never should have let her leave. I never should have let her out of my sight," Nic grumbled as he paced the floor in his study.

Julian sat on the couch with his arm around Kristen and Christian leant against the wall.

"Most likely it was whoever sent her in the first place who took her," Christian advised.

Nic whirled on his older brother. "I know that."

Christian didn't let Nic's anger faze him. "Then she's probably safe."

"Unless he thinks I changed her and puts a stake through her heart!" Nic regretted the moment the panicked words were out of his mouth.

Kristen sucked in a startled breath. Julian glared at his brother, but Nic just ran an agitated hand through his hair.

"Have you tried to contact her?" Christian asked from his position on the wall.

"Of course. She's still blocking me."

"We've got to do something," Kristen cried.

"We will, honey." Julian tried to sooth his bond-mate.

Chapter Six

Jo stopped pulling on the chains as she heard an overhead door open and the sound of footsteps on stairs. She felt an almost desperate need to get free and find Nic. It had to be the bond, she told herself, but it didn't matter. All she knew was she needed Nic.

Roger had sat with her silently for what felt like hours before finally leaving without a word. It seemed like forever since he had left, but she was dreading his coming back. Her wrists, head, and back hurt, and she was freezing. She watched as he approached her with a thin blue blanket. He took a key out of his front pocket and unlocked the door. Her gaze followed as he put the key back in his front pocket.

"A blanket," he said, standing by the door.

"I'd get up to get it, but..." She lifted her chained wrist.

He eyed her without moving closer. "How do you feel?"

"Cold," she snapped.

He walked slowly towards her but didn't step within reach of her.

"My God, Roger, I'm not going to attack you."

"Yes, but what will you do for this blanket?" he asked as he moved closer, one step at a time. When he reached her, he bent down and wrapped the blanket around her shoulders. She leant forward to let it fall to the floor so she could sit on it. She held the ends with her trapped hands.

He surprised her by not moving back right away. Instead, his gaze tracked down her body.

"What are you looking for? Bite marks?"

He continued to run his gaze over her. "Still beautiful," he murmured.

She snorted. "I bet."

He ran one finger down her cheek. "So what do you owe me now?"

She jerked away. "I don't owe you anything."

He thumb caressed her mouth as he touched her again. While she had always enjoyed his gentleness, his touching her now made her stomach hurt.

"You got a taste of it, didn't you, Jo? Of the power they hold." He was still right up against her.

"How would you know?"

"Tell me what happened."

"How do you know I won't lie?"

He laughed softly. This was the man she had come to know. The man who she had shared her heartbreak over her sister's death with. The man who had held her close at night. Now, the scent of him and his presence so close was making her nauseated. She had a feeling it was partially because of something Nic did to her.

"Jo, you've always been a terrible liar. That is one reason I chose you."

"Chose me?" She asked.

"You're the only one who could have gotten in. You are so innocent looking. I knew you wouldn't let me down. I knew he wouldn't be able to resist you."

"How do you know about them? What do you want?"

He leant his upper body closer to her and she pressed back into the wall.

He just smiled at her. "Tell me what it was like for you. When you felt your skin pierced. Did he take your body as he took your blood?" he asked her with his mouth inches from her face.

"You're sick," she murmured softly. The way he was carrying on made him sound like he wished it had been him. Every evil and vile thing he had ever called them didn't match the way he was speaking now.

"What? You didn't like it?" He ran a finger gently over her lips. "I think you did like it, Jo," he whispered.

"Don't touch me!"

She jerked when he ran his lips over her cheek. "I had you first, Jo. Don't forget that. You belong to me."

Still fighting nausea, she tried to pull away. "You're crazy."

"No, I'm not." His fingers trailed down her neck.

Pressing her mouth into her knees, she tried to control her shaking. "I don't feel well."

"It will pass. The longer you're away from him, the harder it will be." His hands were on the blanket now and he dipped one inside. "How did he take your blood?"

God, her stomach hurt so badly. She wished he would stop touching her. "Stop."

His hand cupped her breast under the blanket. "Tell me."

She moaned. "Stop. I'm going to be sick."

He continued to caress and feel. Her head fell back in pain. It felt like sharp needles were digging into skull.

Her vision started to blacken around the edges. "Roger, don't," she was able to mumble before the darkness took her once again.

She could smell him. Could feel him inside her head, comforting her as she shook. "Nic," she whispered.

"Jo." The sound of Nic's voice was the sweetest thing she'd ever heard. Even apart he had the ability to demand a response from her body.

"Where are you?"

"I'm looking for you. Where are you?"

"I don't know."

"Who has you?"

"Roger."

His anger hit her hard.

"Nic, it hurts."

"I'm sorry, Jo." She felt his anger lessen. "Are you injured?"

"I don't know."

"What hurts, Jo?"

"My stomach. My head. Everything. Oh God, it hurts."

"Is he touching you?"

She could tell he was still angry, even though he was trying to hide it from her. "Yes."

"Listen to me Jo, he must not touch you. The bond will not allow it."

"I can't make him stop. My hands. My hands are chained."

"Chained? Where are you, Jo?" He sounded even more worried.

"I don't know, Nic, I swear. I was in the bathroom then I woke up here. Lying on the floor chained. It's cold, Nic."

"Okay, baby, listen to me – "

"I'm sorry, Nic. So sorry. It's my fault. I called him and...and...I'm so cold."

"Baby, it's okay. What does he want?"

"He wants me to tell him about you. About what happened that night. He keeps asking how you took my blood. Not if but how. He's crazy, Nic."

"Okay. You must not tell him anything."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know there was something wrong with him."

Then she cried out as Roger's hands pushed her back on the ground and his body covered hers.

"What's going on, Jo?"

"He's...He's...No..." Jo whimpered.

* * * *

Nic couldn't feel her anymore. He opened his eyes, still sitting in the study chair he'd fallen asleep in. Christian watched him from another chair.

"You contacted her?"

"I think she contacted me. She was in pain and let her guard down. I haven't told her how to open herself to me yet." Nic stood and started pacing.

"Did she know where she was?"

Nic just shook his head. "The son of a bitch was touching her. Touching her!" he yelled.

Christian stood slowly, no doubt able to feel how close his brother was to the edge. "We'll get her back."

Nic turned to him, his eyes fully red. "I'm going to destroy him." His words came out slurred as his teeth came out.

Christian nodded. "And I'll watch."

* * * *

Jo came back around with Roger over her. She lay on the blanket on her back, and Roger knelt between her legs. He ran his hands over her chest and stomach and smiled when she opened her eyes and blinked up at him.

"There you are," he said to her.

Her hands were over her head, still chained, so she tried to move her feet to push him away. He just laid his legs over hers to hold her still.

"Hate for you to miss this," he said, lowering her mouth to her stomach.

"Stop," she demanded.

"Only a couple days ago, you were screaming 'don't stop'," he reminded her. She bucked and jerked, but his smile only widened. "Now, Jo. Where do you think you're going to go?"

"Get off of me!"

He ran a hand up the inside of her thigh. "I have to say I missed your body."

"Roger, stop," she pleaded with him.

He kissed her hipbone. "I will be so much more powerful than him, Jo. I promise you that."

She tried to jerk her leg again. "I don't care. Get off me." She was almost begging now.

He stopped touching her for a moment, staring at her. Then he reached up and grasped her hair, and he pulled her up painfully against him. "He is nothing. Nothing compared to what I'll be," he said, anger burning in his eyes.

Tears threatened to fall and she tried to hold them back.

"You're mine! I did not work all this time to have you abandon me for him!" he yelled.

"Roger," she pleaded, her neck straining from the angle he was holding it.

His fist flashed out and contacted with her jaw. Her head snapped back and she cried out.

"Mine," he yelled again.

He dropped her head, and it slammed into the concrete.

Jo didn't know how long she was out this time. All she knew was that her head was killing her and she was tired of being thrown around. She kept her eyes closed as she moved her feet, her legs, then tried to roll over. Her shoulder screamed in protest as she tried to pull away from the chain.

A soft whimper escaped before she could help it.

That was when she heard the soft voice. "Are you okay?"

Jo's eyes flew open, and she jerked her head to the side. There, not more than five feet away, a young woman stared at her with frightened eyes.

Jo did her best to sit up and position herself comfortably. She was still sitting on the blanket. Which was more than the other woman had.

She, like Jo, had been chained to the wall and was naked. If Jo had to guess, she'd say the woman was a couple years younger than she was.

Jo smiled at her. "When did you check into Hotel This Sucks?"

Jo watched the girl's lips twitch, but she didn't smile. She darted a nervous look towards the door.

"He said he was coming back," she whispered.

Jo looked at the door as well. She had no doubt he'd be back. "What day is it?"

"What?" she asked, confused.

"What day is today?"

"Wednesday."

"Crap," Jo muttered.

"How long have you been here?"

"Since Sunday."

"Oh." The woman shifted uncomfortably.

"You okay?" Jo asked then immediately regretted it. Of course, she wasn't okay.

"I'm not injured if that's what you mean." She darted her eyes quickly over to Jo then away. "Are you?"

Jo started to shrug then hissed in pain.

"That's a nasty bruise on your face."

Jo frowned. She was going to kill Roger for that. That is if Nic didn't get to him first.

"And there's blood in your hair and on your blanket."

Jo glanced down at it and sighed. "So what are you in for?"

"What?"

"How'd you meet Roger?"

The other woman shook her head. "I was just coming out of the library when I was grabbed. I never met that man before."

Jo bit her lower lip. That couldn't be good.

Jo heard the door above open. As footsteps started down the stairs, she saw the other woman press back into the wall.

When Roger reached the barred door, he smiled at Jo. "Oh, I see you're awake."

He unlocked their prison and stepped inside. He was carrying a blanket and dropped it on the other woman. Then he crouched in front of Jo.

"Are you being nice to our new guest, Jo?"

She only glared at him.

"I sure hope so. It looks like the two of you could be locked in here for a long time." He reached out and ran a hand over her cheek.

She immediately jerked away.

He looked over at the other woman. "You two have lots in common. I think you'll get along just fine."

Jo still didn't answer him.

"What, you don't like her, Jo? Maybe you'd prefer your sister instead?"

She blinked slowly, trying not to give a reaction. It could just be a guess. He might not know her sister was still alive.

"Yeah, maybe I should bring Kristen down here and we'll have a little party," he taunted, and she knew then that Roger had always known Kristen hadn't died.

She spit on him. She didn't know why she did it, but she couldn't slam her fist in his face.

His hand shot out fast and he slapped her across her face. "That's not nice, Jo."

He left without another word.

After the door closed again, the woman turned to her. "Probably wasn't a good idea to piss him off."

Jo shrugged her good shoulder.

"Bet it felt good though."

Jo smiled, running her tongue over her bloody lip. "What's your name?"

"Oh, I'm McKayla."

Chapter Eight

Jo slept on and off. She tried to talk to Nic again but didn't know how to open her mind to him. He could have at least told her that. McKayla must have been trying to sleep, too, because she remained quiet.

Roger didn't come back down so Jo figured it was night and he was asleep. Finally letting herself relax, thinking he wouldn't be back down soon, she fell into a deep sleep.

It was almost as if someone was caressing her face. Like light touches on her cheek.

"Jo. Open your mind to me."

"Nic?"

"There you are. How are you?"

"Just peachy," she answered sarcastically.

"Jo, you must keep your mind open to me."

"I don't know how," she told him truthfully. She wanted to. She wanted to stay locked inside her head with Nic.

"You have to trust me. Completely – you can't have any doubts."

"Yeah, sure, no problem," she griped. If anyone didn't have doubts after all that she'd been through, it was because they'd lost their mind already.

"It's not easy. You have to allow me to break through your barriers."

"Fine. I don't care, Nic. Just get me out of here."

"I'm trying. But until you open yourself to me, I can't sense you. And I need to know where to start looking."

"I don't know where I am!" she cried. It didn't sound like Nic was any closer to rescuing her. She couldn't handle much more time there.

"I know. You have to remain calm."

"Calm! I'm chained naked to a concrete wall!"

"Naked?" Anger surrounded her head.

"Ow! Stop it!"

"I apologise."

There was silence for a split second.

"Is Kristen okay?" she asked.

"She's very worried about you."

"He said maybe I'd like Kristen down here with me."

"He knows she's alive?"

"Well, obviously, and I didn't tell him," she snapped. She would never put her sister in harm's way. He would know that, right?

"I know you didn't. You'd never hurt her or put her in danger. I can feel the love you have for her."

"I really am sorry. I don't understand any of this. He knows so much more than I thought."

"Not your fault. We should have been more careful. I just thought he was a silly mortal out to kill vampires."

"Silly mortal?" she responded, insulted. Is that what he thought about her too?

"You know what I mean."

"Oh, I know what you mean, all right. You're an immortal snob," she accused.

"I am not! I accepted you and you're mortal."

"Oh yeah. Hard to get a man to think with his penis."

"Could we have this conversation another time?"

Well damn. He was right, now wasn't the time. "Alright. So, if I open myself to you, will you be able to sense me?"

"If I'm close enough, yes."

"Well, I have no idea where I am."

"Are you at his apartment?"

"No. Not unless he had a basement installed in his fourth floor apartment."

Nic didn't respond to her sarcasm. "Did he ever take you anywhere else?"

"Noooo..."God, didn't he think she wanted to be rescue?! If she knew where she was or might be, she would tell him. Damn, that much should be obvious. Roger had never really taken her anywhere... but she had followed him once after he left her apartment.

"What is it?"

"I followed him one time."

"You followed him?"

"Just to see where he was going."

"You're not a very trusting soul," he told her.

She could hear the amusement in his voice. "Gee, wonder why." she answered dryly.

"Where did he go?" he asked changing the subject.

"He took I-20 east to about fifteen miles out of town. Then he took a dirt road to what looked like an abandoned building."

"What was in the building?"

"How the hell should I know?"

"You didn't go inside."

"No. I turned around and left."

She could feel his irritation. "Would have been helpful if you'd have looked inside."

"Well, sorry. I didn't know I was going to be kidnapped."

"Okay. I'm sorry. I'm just tired and frustrated."

"Ah, poor baby. Maybe you should take a nap."

"Jo," he scolded gently.

"Or better yet, stop looking for me. I'm sure you can find someone else to jump in your bed and force blood down." She didn't mean it. She was just so scared, and obviously, she didn't react well to fear.

"Is that still bothering you?"

"Go away. I'm tired now." She was being unfair to him and she knew it. She needed to get her thoughts together before she really said something she would regret.

"Jo. If that's bothering you, it won't help when you try to open yourself to me."

"I mean it, Nic, go away so I can sleep," she demanded. He might not be able to find her, she realised. She might have signed her own death warrant and that was depressing as hell.

"Jo, I will find you."

She jerked awake when the metal door of her cell, as she'd come to think about it, slammed closed.

Roger smiled down at her. "Sleep well?" he taunted.

She scowled up at him. She looked over at the other woman who was curled in a foetal position. Nic was still in the back of Jo's mind. He'd told her that he would find her. She had to hope that he would.

Roger tossed a grey pair of sweats at her then another at McKayla. He reached out and uncuffed Jo's wrists from the chain.

Her arms fell heavily onto the floor. He walked over and did the same to McKayla.

"You're letting us go?" Jo asked suspiciously.

"No. We have company. Someone wants to meet you," he told them. "Now get dressed."

"What? You want to be special and be the only one to see us naked!" she taunted him.

"I've seen you naked many times, Jo." he reminded her. "Besides, I removed both of your clothing to make sure neither of you carried a tracker. Your being naked had more purpose than to just delight me."

"Wow! Aren't you high tech?" she sneered.

He yanked her up by her hair. "I know what you're trying to do, Jo. I'm not going to get mad enough to be distracted so you can run. Now get dressed, or I will take you upstairs naked."

Her eyes burnt with hate at him. He watched her dress, and she hated that, but she wasn't going to turn her back on him. Her arms felt heavy and hurt as she pulled the clothes on.

"I'm getting tired of sweats." she complained under her breath.

Roger put one hand around her upper arm and motioned for McKayla to join him. She did and he started out the door he hadn't locked.

Damn. Jo hadn't noticed that earlier.

He let McKayla walk up the steps first then pulled Jo up right behind him. There was a metal door above their heads and Roger pushed it open. She let him drag her up the rest of the way.

They stood in a large room with no furnishings. The windows had been boarded up from the inside, so she couldn't see what was outside.

On the floor, under a boarded up window, was another woman. She was lying on her back with her eyes closed. Jo couldn't tell if she was alive or not.

"Don't worry about her," Roger said, seeing where her eyes had landed. McKayla stood to her right and was looking at the woman also.

"So these are the girls." A man's voice surprised Jo. She looked over at the only door in the room. He wore all black and stood in the shadows where the light didn't reach. Jo could still see him, even though it looked like to her he was hiding.

"Yes, this one is Jo," Roger said, pulling on her arm. "The other is McKayla."

The man stepped closer to them and Jo could see him more clearly. His face was too pretty, and she immediately knew he wasn't like them. He was like Nic.

"Yes, I am," he told her. He was reading her thoughts! How was that possible?

She gasped and tried to move away from him, but Roger still held her arm.

The other man only smiled. "How well do you know Nic?" he asked.

Shit! She looked around in a panic. There was no way out other than the door and it looked heavy. Thick metal with two men between her and it.

"That one's a fighter," he told Roger then focused on McKayla.

Roger laughed bitterly. "I don't need to read her mind to know that."

The man didn't look away from McKayla or acknowledge Roger's words. "Very interesting," he finally said before moving back in the shadows.

Jo got a cold chill down her spine. Oh, this couldn't be good.

The woman on the floor moaned softly, and Jo moved her gaze back down to her. She had taken a pretty good beating. Roger pushed both women onto the floor as the other man walked to the opposite side of the room.

"I'm sure she's talking to him. She knew about this place so they'll come eventually," Roger informed.

Jo's stomach dropped realising she'd baited a trap for Nic. Closing her eyes, she tried to connect with him, but she didn't know how. How could she have been so stupid? If Nic came to rescue her, he could be killed and Jo would bet he wouldn't come alone.

"Stop that," Roger told her, kicking her leg.

Jo opened her eyes and glared at him, but it was the laughter from the other man that made her wary.

"Let her talk to him. It won't matter. If he knows where she is, he will come. The bond will ensure it."

Jo dropped her head and closed her eyes. She had to try to warn Nic.

"You promised I'd get to keep her," Roger said while running his hand over Jo's head.

Without opening her eyes, Jo tried to pull away, but his hand tightened in her hair.

"You'll get your prize. Just keep to the plan."

"I'll keep my part," Roger promised then pulled Jo's arm until she was standing. "I'll take them back down."

"Don't forget the other one."

Roger dragged Jo away. Once her feet hit the steps, she tried to kick out and knock him away. He slipped, but before she could blink, the other man was there with his hand wrapped tightly around her throat.

"He doesn't deserve you," he whispered in her ear. His stale breath caused her already nauseous stomach to roll. "Maybe I'll just keep you for myself."

"We had a deal. She's mine," Roger exclaimed, grabbing her from him.

Jo felt like a rag doll as Roger literally dragged her into her cell.

"Don't make me hurt you again, Jo," he told her as he rechained her wrists.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked, keeping her voice low.

"Let's just say he offered me a deal I couldn't pass up," Roger explained with a broad smile.

"What do I have to do with any of this?"

"You were just the bait," he said before laughing and going up the stairs to get the other women.

Anger radiated with anger for some time as she sat quietly in the cell with the two other prisoners. She was pissed at Roger for using her, she was pissed at Kristen for dying on her, she was pissed at Nic for letting her leave unprepared, but most of all, she was pissed at herself for getting into this mess.

She tried to fall asleep since that was the only time she seemed to be able to talk to Nic, but sleep wouldn't come to her. Concentrating, she brought up his face, body, and smell. She replayed the way his mouth had moved over her body and what he'd felt like inside her.

Then suddenly she could feel him. Could feel him moving closer to her. She still couldn't talk to him, but she knew he was close. Then, as fast as he came to her, he was gone.

Chapter Nine

Nic stopped when he could no longer feel Jo's presence. Christian looked over at him, but he shook his head. "I lost her."

"Damn," Julian said from somewhere behind them.

"Do you think she's close?" Christian asked, his eyes tracking.

"Yes. It was getting stronger."

"Let's split up. We'll search for any structure that could have a basement, garage, anything that could have the inside surrounded by concrete," Christian suggested.

"Be careful. This may be a trick. They could be using her to bring us in," Nic added.

The three men exchanged a quick look then went on tracking. Nic headed south the way they had been headed. Christian took west while Julian took east. They'd been looking for several hours and the sun would be up soon, which would have them losing a lot of their cover.

They were the outside of town. The opposite direction from Nic's property. It had taken them forty-five minutes to drive to the edge before getting out and walking once Nic had a good hold on her.

While walking, he would sense pain then nothing. It was as if she'd been with him. He could feel her body against his for just a moment. He picked up his pace, using the speed he had inherited with his power. He had to find her. To get to her and make sure she knew she was safe. Then he was going to take her home, to their home, and never let her out of his sight again.

He knew it wasn't going to be possible to keep her with him at all times, but the reassurance it suggested was what kept him going.

When he heard a vehicle on a dirt road, he sped up to get a look. It passed him as he ducked into the shadows, and he paused to sense inside it. Jo wasn't there. Of course, that would have been too easy.

He started back south before stopping again to sense around.

A vehicle out here? He couldn't see any houses or buildings around, so who would be out here? He turned and followed the road instead, going the way the vehicle had come from.

After picking up his speed, it only took him another fifteen minutes to come to the old, abandoned building.

Taking out his phone, he called Christian. "I think I've got something."

"Can you sense her?"

"No, I can't sense anything. I'm going in."

"No," Christian ordered. "If it's a trap, the three of us should go in together. I'll call Julian."

Nic frowned at the building.

"Wait on us." Christian hung up the phone.

Nic sensed around the building but couldn't get anything. It was probably not where she was being kept, he told himself. Old building. Looked liked no one had been there in years, and the outside was wood not concrete.

But if there was a chance... He headed for the door.

There was a new padlock on the door. That was strange. Why would a building like this need a padlock? Nic wrapped his hand around the lock and crushed it. He opened the old door and found a steel door.

Damn.

He kicked. If anyone were inside, they would know he was there, but he didn't care. Now, he was sure Jo was inside. The need to get to his mate drove him on. Jo was his.

It took half a dozen kicks before he was able to get the door open. He stepped carefully inside and listened. He didn't hear anything or sense anyone. He didn't need lights so he didn't even look for a switch. He doubted his enemies could see better than he could. It was just an empty room. No furniture anywhere that he could see, but he could smell. A man had been here recently, and Nic picked up a hint of Jo's scent.

"Jo, can you hear me?" He tried to send the message to her mind.

She was still closed off.

"Jo." He tried again.

He started at one end and walked to the other of the room. Nothing.

"Jo. I know you're here. Speak to me."

But all he heard, all he felt, was silence.

Angry, he slammed his fist into the wall. Then paced. His brothers would be there soon. As he made his way to the other side of the room, his foot hit something.

He looked down and saw a metal handle.

"Yes," he said out loud.

He pried it open with his fingers. He still couldn't feel Christian or Julian coming, but this was taking too much time. With one last yank, he got it open.

Concrete.

The walls were grey concrete and he could see steps. He went slowly. If someone was with Jo, he didn't want him or her to hurt her. He was less than halfway down the stairs when he smelt her. She was scared.

"Jo?" He called out loud to her.

"Nic?" Her voice came out hoarse.

"I'm coming, baby." He was at the bottom of the stairs in an instant. Standing outside her prison, he drank in the sight of her. Two other women shared the small space with her, but all he cared about in that minute was Jo.

She looked pale, and he could see blood on her mouth and under her nose. It was a sight he would never forget. Injured, afraid, and happy to see him — her bond-mate.

"Are you okay?"

"Get us out of here please, Nic," she cried.

It only took one yank at the door to get inside. He dropped down beside her and wrapped his arms around her.

"You came," she mumbled into his chest.

"Of course. I said I would." He gently cupped her face. Yes, there was blood on it. She also had a bruise. "He hit you," he said, not hiding his anger.

"Not now, please," she pleaded with him.

He put his hands on the chains against the wall and pulled. She cried out and landed in his lap. Then lifting the cuffs with the chains still attached to her wrists, she shook them at him. "Get these off."

After disposing of the cuffs, he picked up the blanket that had fallen off and wrapped it around her. "Let's get you out of here." He picked her up.

"We have to save these other girls too."

"Who are they?"

"Others Roger took."

Nic nodded. "Christian and Julian will help them."

Both women watched him with wide, scared eyes.

As he exited, stepping around the door he'd yanked off, she asked. "Where's Roger?"

Nic only grunted.

"Did you kill him?"

Growling, he stared down at her. "Not yet."

"Nic, you can't kill him."

"Yes, I can," he said grimly.

"Nic."

"Not to worry, baby, your boyfriend wasn't here when I got in. I have to find him first."

She relaxed in his arms. He smiled when she said bitterly, "Oh, he's not my boyfriend. We are so over now."

No, he sure as hell wasn't, and Nic was glad he wouldn't have to fight her on that fact. Jo was his.

"He didn't wait," Nic heard Julian say as he reached the top of the stairs.

"Did you really think he would?" was Christian's response.

Nic grinned at the two men as he exited the building. "Look what I found just lying around."

Christian's lips twitched, but Julian laughed out right.

Pulling her face from Nic's neck, she looked at them. "There're other girls down there."

"We'll take care of them." Christian assured her.

"Don't hurt them. They're innocent," Jo cried.

Christian frowned but didn't comment as Nic walked away with her still in his arms.

* * * *

The bed was warm, the covers soft, and the body she was tucked against was heavenly. Jo watched the rise and fall of Nic's naked chest. The night before he had taken her back to his house where Kristen had been waiting. Jo had fallen into her sister's arms. She had decided while being chained to the wall that she didn't care if her sister was an evil, soulless monster. She wouldn't give her up. She didn't think her sister was any of those bad things, but it didn't matter. Nic hadn't wanted to let her out of his sight when they returned. So when Kristen said she would help Jo shower and get into clothes, Nic hadn't looked too fond of the idea.

Christian had helped by telling Nic they needed to talk about what to do next, so Jo had gone up the stairs with Kristen.

Nic had been waiting in the room when she'd emerged clean and dressed. After tucking her into bed, he walked Kristen downstairs. Julian, Kristen, and Christian were all staying in the house. So were the other two girls so they could keep an eye on them.

Jo figured she should have felt uncomfortable with all of them so close, but she didn't. She knew as she stared at Nic's handsome face that everything they'd told her was true. She knew in her heart that she belonged with Nic, but her head wasn't as easily convinced.

"Why are you staring at me?" Nic asked without opening his eyes.

She jumped and ducked her head in embarrassment at being caught.

He laughed and rolled on top of her.

She could feel his naked body against her, and even though she was fully clothed, she started to warm.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, kissing the side of her neck.

Jo tried to take inventory of her body, but the feel of his tongue against her skin was distracting.

"Hmm, goooooooooood," she murmured.

He laughed again. "Good?" He followed the question with a slight nip at her skin.

"When you're doing that, yes," she answered breathlessly as his hand crept up under her shirt.

He smiled against her soft flesh. "Well, in that case, I must ensure you feel very good." He trailed his tongue down her neck while he cupped her breast.

She shivered as his thumb teased one nipple.

"Mmm." She fisted her hands into his hair.

"We shouldn't be doing this," he told her as he pushed up her shirt and teased the other nipple with his tongue. "You're still recovering."

She arched into his mouth. "Uh huh."

He laved one breast, drawing out a low moan, before moving to the other. "You have bruises on your face and wrists."

"Uh huh."

His mouth travelled lower and she shifted restlessly. She opened her legs wider to adjust for his body. When he circled her belly button with his tongue, she laughed softly. "Then what are you doing?"

One hand brushed against her wet pussy, and she bucked.

"Making sure you don't have any more bruises," he said and ran his tongue along the waistband of her sweats.

"Ohhh, maybe you should check lower."

"Maybe I should." He pulled the sweats down slowly and she lifted her hips to help. Once he had her naked, he settled back in and took his time, running one hand up her leg and kissing above her pelvis.

She grabbed to his hair again. "Nic."

"Still looking for bruises," he said as he continued lower.

When the tip of his tongue ran over her hot core, she moaned again.

"Find any?" She breathed out heavily.

"Mmm, might be one right here," he told her before stabbing his tongue inside.

She cried out and her hands tightened in his hair.

He continued to tease her most sensitive area. And when he circled her clitoris with his thumb, she pushed her hips into him.

"Ohhhhhhhh." She could feel the pressure building. "Nic, please," she cried as her hands tightened almost painfully.

He grunted in approval and added a finger.

Her hips bucked faster, and he opened her farther, adding a second finger.

"Nic. Oh my..."

The climax was strong, and she rode it out, her hips jerking a rhythm that was theirs alone.

With his fingers still thrusting inside her, he covered her body. Her eyes were open when he leant in and kissed her. Pleasure swamped her body when he replaced his fingers with his cock.

He thrust into her and she tightened her legs around him. They watched each other, neither one wanting to break eye contact. She met each thrust with just as much enthusiasm.

"More," she cried and he pushed her legs up under his arms. She was trying to get as close to him as possible. She had such a desperate need, and only Nic could fill it.

Her fingers dug into his shoulders and she held on as he plunged in and out.

"Ohhhhhhhhhh. Yes." She exploded again and, this time, took him with her.

Jo waited for the embarrassment and guilt to come once her heart rate returned to a normal pace. She was surprised when it didn't. Nic lay on his side, running a feather-light finger over her shoulder and arm.

His body shined with sweat from their love making and she wanted to lick off every drop. Tease him the way he had her. She could take his beautiful cock in her mouth and suck and swallow until he came.

"Was I too rough?" he asked with obvious concern.

She smiled and shook her head. Her stomach growled, and he laughed, leaning over to kiss her shoulder.

"I should feed you."

Her mouth gasped open. There was no way he should be able to read her thoughts.

"Look who has a dirty mind." His smile was amused when he sat up. "I was talking about food."

"Oh yeah, I am kind of hungry."

"Let's go downstairs." He pulled on his pants as he watched her pull her clothes back on. "Then we can come back up here."

She felt herself blush. "What about Kristen and the others?"

Nic frowned. "I don't think it would be proper to bring them up here with us," he finally said.

He startled a laugh out of her. "That's not what I meant."

He laughed with her.

"What are you going to do to Roger?"

The smile immediately dropped from his face. "That's not your concern," he told her sternly and led her out of the room and down the hall.

"It *is* my concern," she protested.

"Jo, he took you, tied you up, and put his hands on you. That is unacceptable," Nic told her in a hard voice that screamed for her to drop the subject.

She poked him in the back as she followed. "You know, you did all that too.

"I never hit you."

"No, but you grabbed me, almost choked me, tied me up here, and took my blood."

He spun around to face her as soon as they stepped off the stairs. "That is completely different."

"That's beside the point." She just shrugged and headed into the kitchen. He was right, but he was also wrong. She had once trusted Roger and had never done anything to hurt him. She had gone after Nic with the intention of killing him. But still both had used their strength against her.

She sighed, then remembered something she hadn't told him the night before. "There was another man there. He was like you."

"What do you mean like me?"

"You know, dead or undead or whatever."

"Jo, I already told you we are not dead. We are not vampires."

"Whatever," she said as she entered the kitchen. "But he could read my mind. You said no one would be able to."

"He read you?" Nic asked in disbelief. "That's impossible."

"Well, I certainly didn't tell him about you and he knew anyway. He knew what I was thinking, Nic."

Nic followed a few steps behind, not saying anything. There should be no one with the ability to read his bond-mate. If Jo thought the man had, Nic needed to look into it. He'd ask Christian about it later. He didn't want to worry Jo any more than she already was.

Jo took eggs out of the fridge and looked around. "Where're the pans?"

He blinked at her before looking around too. "I don't know."

"You don't know where your pans are?"

He shook his head. She blew out a sigh and bent to look in the lower cabinets. He leant back and enjoyed the view in front of him. She fit perfectly in his kitchen. In every aspect of his life, actually. He would destroy anyone who even attempted to take her away again. He licked his lips and was rewarded with her sweet taste that lingered on them from earlier. He wondered how long it would take to get her back upstairs.

"What?" she asked once she had a skillet in her hand and looked at him.

"Are you sure you're hungry?" he asked, running his heated gaze over her body.

She pressed her lips together. "Stop it," she demanded, but her mouth twitched with amusement.

As she gathered all her ingredients, he studied her. "What are you making?"

"An omelette. You want one?"

He shook her head.

"Um, Nic, don't you have to eat...feed, too?" she asked nervously.

"I will. Don't worry about me." He chuckled at her expression. "Not from you, baby."

"Oh, okay, good. Um, Nic?"

He suppressed a smile that every time she started to ask a question that made her nervous, she always started it the same way. He doubted she even realised it.

"Yes?"

"Am I going to want to drink blood?"

Running a hand over his forehead, he took a breath before answering. "You're not an immortal, Jo."

"I know. But since you made me drink from you, am I going to have...you know, urges?" She had moved towards the stove so he couldn't see her face.

"No, you're not. And you already asked me this."

He watched her shoulders relax just a little. "Just making sure your answer wasn't different. When I was trapped, I felt strange. Sick and bad."

He came up behind her and wrapped an arm around her waist. He pressed up close to her. "The sharing of our blood did nothing more than strengthen our bond. The bond is what will not allow another man to touch you."

"That's why I felt sick when Roger touched me."

She didn't sound angry, so Nic continued to press into her. "Yes."

"Nic, you have to stop doing things to me without my permission."

He ran his lips at the nape of her neck. "You weren't complaining this morning."

"That's not what I'm talking about," she insisted breathlessly as his hand moved up under her shirt.

"I know. But until you understand..." He cupped one perfect mound and she leant back against him.

"I won't understand until you explain it to me, Nic."

His other hand had started moving down her side to her hip. She rubbed her bottom against his erection and his hand tightened on her hip.

"Your breakfast is going to burn." A voice came from behind them.

Jo jumped and squeaked while Nic silently cursed. He took his hands from Jo's warm body and turned to face his brother.

"Julian just got back, and it doesn't look good," Christian told him.

Chapter Ten

Jo moved her food to a plate she'd found in an overhead cabinet. "What doesn't look good?" she asked, taking a seat on one of the stools in front of the island in the middle of the kitchen.

No one answered as Kristen came in, looking concerned. A few minutes later, Julian came in through the opposite door. He was carrying two bags, which he dropped in the doorway.

"I thought you'd like some of your things. This is what I could salvage," he said as he walked towards Kristen.

"My things? Salvage?" Jo asked, confused.

"Your apartment was trashed."

"What?" She jumped off the stool, but Nic was still behind her and, with a hand on her shoulder, sat her back down.

"How bad?" he asked his brother.

"Most everything in the apartment was broken or torn up."

Jo gasped. "What happened?"

"Most likely your friend once he found you missing," Christian told her.

She scowled at him.

"What about the building?" Nic asked.

"I went back this morning, he'd already been there. Hasn't been back since."

"He's not going to, we know where it is," Nic said.

Christian nodded. "I agree."

"We still need to find him." Kristen spoke for the first time.

Christian glanced towards Jo then nodded towards the next room. Nic started to walk in that direction, but Jo shot out a hand and grabbed his wrist. "You are not going into the other room to talk about me," she told him.

Nic looked from Jo to his brother and back to Jo. He nodded and took his position back behind her.

"Not you too," Christian moaned. "What is it with the bond-mate bond that makes you lose..."

"Don't finish that," Julian warned.

Kristen smiled before walking around the island and taking the stool next to Jo. "You have to excuse Christian. He's still stuck in the eighteen hundreds," she whispered to Jo. She knew he would still hear.

He snorted. "Woman should be kept out of harm's way and protected."

"Barefoot and pregnant," Kristen teased.

Christian eyed the two women as if sensing a trap. "If we could get back to the matter at hand?"

Julian and Nic both chuckled.

"Okay, so my apartment was trashed, Roger's not at the building anymore. Guess you can't find him," Jo said, taking a bite of her food. Everyone's eyes turned to her. "What?"

"You do know where he lives," Julian reminded her.

"Nope. Not getting that from me."

"Jo," Nic growled.

"No." She shook her head. "I'm not helping you kill a man. Besides he wouldn't be there anyway. He expects me to tell you."

"He kidnapped you, chained you up, abused you and you don't want him caught?" Julian asked, dismayed.

She sent Nic a look that had him shaking his head and saying, "You don't want to go there."

"There's another option," Christian interrupted.

They all looked at her again. Jo was just putting the fork to her mouth.

"Would you all stop looking at me? I'm trying to eat here. It's bad enough eating in front of four people who don't.

Christian smiled, showing his teeth. "Want company?"

She shook her fork at him. "Don't even think about it."

He smiled.

"Christian," Nic warned.

Christian just crossed his arms over his chest. "As I was saying, this man will probably still be looking for her." He nodded towards Jo. "Once he's out of options, he's most likely to go back to where you'll be." This time, he nodded at Nic.

"Eternal," Nic said.

Jo dropped her fork, losing her appetite. "You can't think he would go there."

"He might." Nic's hand brushed the hair from her neck and rested on her shoulder. "If he wants you bad enough."

"What about the other man?" Jo asked.

"We don't know who he is. But if we find Roger, we will probably find him." Nic told her.

"And the other girls?"

She noticed Christian looked away quickly.

"What?"

"McKayla is okay, but the other woman, Amy, is in very bad shape," Kristen told her.

Jo turned to face her sister. "Is she going to be okay?"

"We don't know yet. She wasn't just bitten, she was also fed from."

Jo looked over her shoulder at Nic. "And that's bad?"

"It wasn't the same as when I took from you. She was abused. Probably by the man that was there at the building."

Jo felt sick again. This wasn't just about her and her family. This had so many lives involved.

"How did this get so out of control?" Jo asked no one in particular.

"Jo," Kristen laid her hand over hers, "the night that I was killed, I was coming out of a club. I had been meeting Julian there for months. Some people found out about him and stabbed me to get at him. He had no choice but to change me then. I would have died if he hadn't."

Jo spoke her feelings for the first time out loud. "I'm glad he did."

Kristen's eyes filled with tears. "Thank you, but what I am trying to tell you is that this isn't your fault. Julian and I have been talking and we think Roger might have had something to do with my attack."

Jo gasped. "You think? No way!"

Nic's hand tightened on her shoulder. "It is possible."

"Then I was set up from the beginning," Jo voiced. That meant that everything for the past six months was a lie. Instead of comforting her, Roger may have put her in that position. Possibly have known that her sister wasn't dead.

"I'm sorry, Jo." Nic said quietly.

"It doesn't matter." Jo took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Roger won't be in his apartment. If you think that he will go to Eternal, then we shouldn't disappoint."

Christian opened his mouth, but the door opened.

McKayla walked in but stopped abruptly. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt anything."

Christian motioned her in farther and Jo didn't miss the blush McKayla tried to hide. Jo looked over at Christian, but he was watching McKayla. When she looked back at Nic, Jo saw him studying the two also. Well, at least she wasn't the only one getting a feeling about the pair.

"I haven't had a chance to tell them yet," Christian told the other women as she walked to him.

"Tell us what?" Julian asked, moving to Kristen's side. "Maybe about a bonding?"

Jo didn't think so until she saw McKayla's face. "You have to be kidding me!"

McKayla shrugged. "I knew the moment he came down and rescued me."

"You knew?" Jo asked, unbelieving.

"My grandfather is immortal. My grandmother was killed before she could be changed. She was pregnant and they had to wait. My mother was born, and four hours later, my grandmother was stabbed at the hospital."

"Oh no!" Jo cringed.

"She died, but my grandfather took my mother and raised her."

Jo reached back and grasped Nic's hand still on her shoulder. "I'm so sorry."

McKayla smiled and Jo saw that she was very pretty. "I've lived with immortals my whole life. From what Christian's told me, you have only known for days."

Jo nodded.

"Then if you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them."

Christian groaned and both his brothers laughed. "They don't need to know everything," he whispered to McKayla. "You know too much as it is."

McKayla just looked over at him until he shrugged.

Nic laughed behind Jo. She found herself smiling, but something was just not right. "Does anyone think that it was strange that Roger knew about Kristen, and both McKayla and I were trapped together?"

Christian leant against one of the cabinets and she saw how naturally McKayla moved into him. "They are after our family. Somehow they found out who our mates are and knew that to get to us all they had to do was take you."

Roger and the other man had pretty much said that no matter what, the men would go to their mates, would try to rescue them—the bond ensured it. "How did they know we were your mates?"

Nic's arms came around her, embracing her and teasing her with his scent. "We don't know."

"I like the idea of returning to Eternal. Even if they are just watching the place, we'll be able to sense them. Let's draw them to us," Christian announced, trying to get back on topic.

"I'm going," McKayla said.

"I don't think—" Christian started.

"Me too," Kristen cut him off.

"If Roger wants me, then I should be there as added incentive. I am his prize, after all." Jo nodded. That was what the other man had promised Roger. That he would get his prize.

She felt Nic stiffen. "Jo—"

"It makes the most sense. Besides you, Julian, and Christian will be there. Do you really want to leave me here alone?" she asked, knowing he wouldn't. She didn't just want to go because everyone else was either. Whatever was happening had too much to do with Nic and his brothers. She was just the bait—they wanted the men.

"No...but damn it, I don't want you there either," he told her almost desperately.

"What about Amy?" Kristen asked as if it had already been decided.

Nic answered when no one else did. "I'll call a friend and have him come over. Jonas is a good man and someone we know we can trust. He will protect her while we are out. He

only lives a couple miles away anyhow.” He kissed the top of Jo’s head. “I’m going to be pissed if you let yourself be taken again.”

She met his eyes and tried to smile. “Yeah, maybe before we leave you could show me that nifty thing of talking to you in my head?”

This time, he kissed her lips. “You got it.”

Chapter Eleven

"Why do I have to stay up here?" Jo asked for the sixth time in an hour.

Christian looked at her from where he paced on the other side of Nic's office. "We're waiting."

"I'm bored," she complained.

"Watch more of that monstrosity," he told her pointing at the flat screen TV on the wall.

"Not big on television?"

He snorted. "As if I'd own one."

"You don't have a TV?"

"I read books. You do know what books are?"

She stuck her tongue out at him. She was starting to like him. She was starting to like them all, especially Nic.

"Why can't I go downstairs to the club?"

"Your purpose here was to be seen entering."

"Then can I go home."

He just stared at her.

"McKayla and Kristen are downstairs."

"McKayla knows about immortals and how to spot one. She can tell us if she sees the man from the building. Kristen is one of us."

"That's not fair! I'm supposed to be Nic's bond-mate!" she argued. She could still feel Nic, but she wanted to see him or actually be touching him.

"And your mate wants you up here out of danger."

"Fine." She pouted.

Nic walked in then, and both she and Christian gave a sigh of relief.

"Why don't you go down and grab a drink? No one's tried to get in so far that's not a regular."

Christian nodded and left quickly.

"Why are you torturing my brother?" He looked amused.

"He needs to loosen up. He's too uptight. And I'm bored!"

Nic laughed as he sat next to her. "I kept hoping his bond-mate would be very modern. I am even happier to find out that he found someone who knows just as much as he does. He won't be able to get anything past her."

"What if you don't like your bond-mate?"

He smiled at her as she stretched her legs over his lap. She was laid out on the couch, using the arm as a pillow.

"I don't think that's possible."

She pressed her lips together in thought. "Hmm."

He ran his hand lightly over her knee. "If you have one person chosen for you, that person would match you perfectly."

"Do you think it's weird that you and your brother are mated to sisters?"

"I've thought about what that could mean, but I don't see any significance," he murmured as he continued to pet her.

"It's kind of weird though."

"Well, Kristen assures me that you don't have another sister, so I don't think it matters in the way of Christian. McKayla can't be your sister."

"How did you know I was Kristen's sister when I first came?" Jo had never thought to ask before.

"I just knew who you were."

"What do you mean?" Jo asked as sensations from his touch teased her.

"Pictures Kristen has. And she talked about you all the time. You look similar and even share a base smell."

"Base smell?"

"A smell you share. Your DNA." His hand moved to the inside of her thigh.

"What are you doing?" she asked, giggling. Not that she was complaining.

"You said you were bored." His thumb feathered over the zipper of her jeans.

"Oh yeah."

Running a finger down the zipper then back up, he teased her. "I figure as your mate, I should keep you from boredom." He unsnapped her jeans.

"Well, who am I to argue?" She pushed against his hand as he palmed her.

“Good answer.” He leant down and sucked through the silk under the jeans.

“Mmm.”

He didn’t lift his head immediately when the phone on his desk started to ring.

“Nic.”

“Don’t move.”

She smiled sexily at him as he headed for the phone.

“Yes,” he snapped into the receiver. He listened for a minute. “Let them in. I’ll be down.”

She sat up on the couch. “What’s going on?”

“We have new guests who have an invitation much like yours.” He walked over to her.

“Let’s go take a look.”

“I get to go downstairs?” Jo jumped up and fixed her pants.

“I liked them better the other way,” Nic complained.

“Want me to keep them like that and show everyone?” she asked sweetly.

Nic growled and grabbed her. He kissed her deeply, jamming his tongue inside and possessing her. “When we get home, I have something for that mouth of yours.”

Jo hummed approvingly. “Promises. Promises.”

Nic walked down the stairs to his club with his arm around Jo’s waist. He took a deep breath, trying to sense any disturbance.

At the bottom of the staircase, he looked to the table where his brothers sat with their mates in the back corner.

Christian nodded at him then towards the bar.

“Stay with me the entire time,” Nic warned Jo.

She rolled her eyes but nodded.

Nic could tell the two men at the bar were mortal.

“Do you recognise them?” he asked Jo when they were still a few feet from the men.

She shook her head. Nic approached them, pulling Jo behind him. As he moved closer, one of the men eyed him. Nic stopped by their stools.

“Nic Lucian?” the taller of the men asked. They both appeared to be in their late thirties. Attractive in their own right and nervous. Nic could smell their fear.

"I'm Nic."

They tried to look behind him at Jo, but he kept her blocked.

"We were told to give this to you." The other man held out an envelope, which Nic accepted.

He glanced to their drinks. "I believe it would be best if you left."

They both nodded and headed for the door without another word. Nic turned to Jo whose eyes were narrowed with suspicion.

"Let's go back upstairs," he told her.

Nic jerked his head towards Christian, signalling for them to come up behind him. Jo followed him into the office without a word. Nic left the door open. He walked over to his desk and placed the envelope on it.

"Come here," he ordered as she waited near the door.

She walked to him slowly. Once she was close enough, he grabbed her and yanked her to him.

"It will be okay," he whispered in her ear. "We'll get this over with and take time to get to know each other. I know I haven't done things right with you, but I promise I will spend the rest of my life making it up to you."

Jo kissed his chin and hugged him. "I think I might be falling in love with you and that scares me," she admitted, her voice soft.

"I've already fallen for you." Nic cupped her face and made her meet his eyes. "I'll make you happy, Jo."

She lifted to her tiptoes and kissed him. Nic held her tightly, putting everything into the kiss he wanted to show her. A throat clearing had them slowly breaking apart.

"What did they give you?" Christian asked, closing the door.

Nic let go of Jo, who moved to his side. He calmly opened the envelope and shook out two pictures. They were both of Amy and Jonas at Nic's house.

"Oh God!" Jo exclaimed. "They have her again."

Christian walked over to the desk and picked up one of the pictures.

"Even if they knew where you lived, there is no way they could have gotten in with Jonas inside," Christian stated suspiciously and turned the picture over in his hand

"That's my study with Jonas and Amy tied up in it, so they got in some way," Nic argued.

"Then we go," Julian stated matter-of-factly.

"The women stay," Christian added.

Nic felt Jo grab his shirt and replied, "No. That could be what they want. While we are on the way to the house, they could come in and try to take them. They are better with us."

"We're walking into a trap," Kristen stated. "And we go in together. Better chance in numbers and they won't be able to use us against you if we're with you."

"I agree," Nic said, turning to Jo.

She gave him a shaky smile. "Then let's get it over with. You promised me a treat later."

Nic kissed her, unable to resist. "I wish I'd already changed you."

She didn't back away from him. "Well, it's too late for that now."

Chapter Twelve

By the time they were back at Nic's house, the men had already come up with a plan. Nic and Jo would enter using the front door, Julian and Kristen the back, and Christian and McKayla the study doors.

Jo kept her hand in Nic's as he opened the front door. The house was quiet as they entered. Nic led her to the study, as was the plan. The door was already open, and Amy and Jonas were tied to chairs, gagged.

Nic stepped inside, keeping her behind him. No one else was in the room. Julian and her sister came in through the kitchen door.

"Where are they?" Jo asked.

"Right here." The man stepped from the shadows, and Jo recognised him from the building.

Nic laughed, surprising her. "I never would have guessed."

Jo looked over at Kristen, who shook her head. She didn't know who it was either. Julian was shielding her sister with his body as well.

"Where's Christian?" the man asked.

The balcony doors opened, and Christian stepped through with McKayla behind him as Roger held a gun to her head.

"Right here, Father," Christian said as he stopped by the couch.

"Father?" Now Jo was totally confused.

"Yes, this is our father, Micha Lucian," Nic told her.

Jo looked the man over, pressing her lips tightly together. This couldn't be a good thing.

"Well now, that we are all introduced, why don't we get to the point of this all?" the man said.

He waved at Roger, who stepped away from McKayla to the two captives.

He untied Amy and she rubbed her wrists. "Finally! Did you have to tie them so tightly?"

Jo's mouth fell open as the once fragile women stood and walked towards Nic's father. "What the..."

The women smiled at her as she ran a hand over Micha Lucian's shoulder. "It was so nice of you to bring me back with you. It made it so simple to get them inside."

"Maybe I'm the only one out of the loop, but could someone please tell me what the fuck is going on?" Jo snapped. "I thought you could tell other immortals!"

Micha laughed. "I do like your bond-mate, Nic. Lively little thing."

Nic shifted, placing his body more directly in front of her.

"Fine, have it your way. Amy, dear, please pour me a drink." He sat on the couch.

Amy moved to the bar as Roger remained behind Jonas, gun pointed at his temple.

"Get her away from him," Roger demanded, pointing at Jo with his free hand.

Micha shook his head. "Mortals. They have such limited perceptions of things." He looked over at Nic, and Jo could feel Nic's body throbbing in anger. "I don't suppose you'll allow your mate to come over here," he asked Nic.

Nic only shook his head as Jo tightened her grip on the back of his shirt.

"I didn't think so." He accepted the drink Amy handed him and she sat next to him.

"Enough of your games, old man," Christian spat out. "What is it you want?"

Jo noticed McKayla standing next to Christian instead of behind. He tried to move in front of her, but she stepped to the side, showing she wasn't afraid. That was all great for her, but Jo *was* scared and Nic's body was a comfort to her.

"Never one for patience," Micha said without emotion. "It's very simple, actually. You give up your power. To me. And I won't kill your mates."

Jo yanked on the back of Nic's shirt. "Give up your power?"

He half-turned. "Let him drain us almost to death. He would gain our power. We would heal very slowly and be weaker once we did heal."

"That's crazy!" Jo exclaimed.

Micha laughed. "Not if you're me. My sons are very powerful, but they also have a weakness. Their mates."

Jo looked over at them. "What makes you think we're their weakness?"

"Because, right now, Nic is thinking about my offer."

Jo looked up at her bond-mate and saw the truth in his eyes. "No. You can't."

"He can," Micha spoke for Nic, "because he knows I will kill you. There is only one bond-mate, and if they lost you, they would end their existence."

Jo didn't take her eyes from Nic's as the other man spoke. "No," she told him.

Nic blinked and dropped his gaze.

She used the only thing she could think of. Herself. "Nic, if you are weak, how are you going to protect me?"

"He doesn't need to protect you. I will assure him that no harm will come to you," Micha answered.

"Says the father that is threatening to kill his sons' mates," Jo reminded him.

Micha looked amused. "Of course I could just take you, my dear, and let you live. I have a wonderful dungeon in my home."

"Don't you threaten me!" Jo yelled. "How could any father do this?"

All laughter left the man's face. Nic once again shifted to keep her out of harm's way.

"I am over three thousand years old. My power is diminishing. I will do whatever I have to."

Jo snorted in response.

Nic looked over to Christian and could see his brother was close to losing control. Jo was doing a great job distracting their father. The longer she kept him talking, the more time they had to work out a plan. They would have no choice but to kill him. He had once been a good man but the years of losing his power had taken their toll and he had eventually reached out to evil to fight his aging.

"Shut up, Jo," Nic said, then spoke directly to her mind. *"Keep him talking. Concentrating on you."*

"This really pisses me off, Nic. You are so going to pay for this."

"Whatever you want, baby."

"You are taking me shopping...in Paris."

It was all he could do not to smile. "You won't win an argument with him," he said.

Jo sent his father a disgusted look. "You should be ashamed of yourself."

Micha was obviously enjoying Jo, and Christian nodded to Nic and Julian.

"Keep talking," Nic told her.

"Your sons finally find mates who make them happy and you try to take that away from them."

Christian acted then, jumping and going after his father. Micha moved just in time and Christian landed on Amy. Nic had gone after Micha's legs while Julian had leapt at his shoulders. Their father managed to avoid them all.

Jo found herself with her back to Micha's front and his arm around her neck.

"I would have been disappointed if you hadn't tried something," he taunted them.

The three men stood and made a wall in front of Jo.

"And we would have hated to disappoint you," Christian agreed.

Jo watched Nic as his hands flexed. She knew this was his worst nightmare—her being in danger again—and she wasn't sure how he would react.

"So what's the plan now?" she asked through their connection.

His gaze shifted around the room. *"Got any ideas?"*

"Yeah, you could kill your father and get him off of me."

"If only it were that simple. He is still powerful."

Jo gave her attention to the man holding her. "So what now?" she asked.

Kristen and McKayla both looked ready to attack. They were braced on the balls of their feet, bodies taut, with looks of extreme concentration.

"Could we stop playing around? You promised me that I would have Jo tonight." Roger's voice cut through the silence. He moved the gun from Jonas to aim at Micha. "We have a deal. Drain them and give me what I deserve."

"Yes. It is time to give you what you deserve," Micha agreed.

Jo watched as Amy moved from behind Jonas. She pulled a gun from under her skirt, aimed, and fired.

Jo screamed as Roger fell where he stood, blood running from the wound in the back of his head.

"Mortals can be so annoying," Micha said, laughing. "He wasn't worth draining. He left a bitter taste in my mouth."

Jo looked back at Nic. His face was as hard as stone.

"Nic." Even in her head, her voice trembled.

"I know, baby. I'm working on it."

"So, who wants to go first?" Micha asked. He tightened his hold on Jo's neck. "You, Nic?"

"Don't do it," Jo pleaded.

"I can't. I don't trust him to leave you alone. He would kill me just so he could have you."

"Kill you? I thought he just wanted to drain you."

"The only way the bonding wouldn't get in the way is if I was dead," Nic explained.

"Oh, you left that handy piece of information out, didn't you?" she complained.

"Well, you did want me dead at the time."

"Oh, we are so going to have a long talk after this," Jo promised.

"How about you, Julian?" Micha asked, and Jo looked over at her sister.

Amy was now beside Kristen with the gun to her head.

"A gun shot to the head would be very slow to heal. Especially if she had no blood," the woman said, laughing.

"No!" Jo struggled against Micha's hold.

"Well, we know who she would save," Micha commented. When he leant down and licked her cheek, Jo almost threw up.

"Stop!" Jo ordered. *"He's trying to force you,"* she told Nic.

"I love you, Jo."

"No!" Jo cried out.

"I'll do it," Nic offered, taking a step forward.

Chapter Thirteen

Jo tried once again to break away, but it wasn't any use. Nic watched as she frantically struggled.

"I thought Julian would break first," his father mused out loud.

"I want your hands off of her," Nic told him.

His father nodded. "Christian and Julian, sit on the couch. The women behind them."

Christian caught Nic's eye. Nic had to trust in his brothers now. They had been in many battles over the years together. They knew how the others fought. He was counting on the trust and love he felt from them to keep Jo safe.

Once everyone was in position, Amy moved to stand behind the women. The gun still aimed at Kristen's head.

Micha let go of Jo, but she didn't move.

"Don't do this, Nic, please. There has to be another way. He'll kill you, you said it yourself," she pleaded.

"Do you trust me, Jo?" he asked. He hated having to make her go through this. He vowed that she would never have to face anything like this again.

"What?"

"Do you trust me?" he repeated.

"Yessss," she hissed.

"Then trust me not to die."

He reached her then, leant down and kissed her cheek. "There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you," he whispered in her ear.

Tears filled her eyes. He knew she didn't understand, but he had faith that she would do what needed to be done.

If things went wrong, he knew she was strong enough to survive.

"Sit on the rug," his father instructed her.

Jo sat in front of them on her knees. Nic sent her a smile before he bared his neck to his father. Micha wrapped an arm around him and pulled him closer.

"Wait!" Jo called out before his father pierced his skin.

Micha paused and they both looked at her. Tears had begun to fall down her face.

"I don't think anymore. I know," she told him.

"Know what?" Nic asked her.

"That I do love you," she told him softly.

Nic closed his eyes and let her words sink in. He hadn't known how much those words would mean to him. He felt his heart swell.

"Isn't that sweet?" Micha spoke with disinterest. "It took you sacrificing yourself to get her to tell you that she loves you."

"More than you ever got," Nic told him with his eyes still closed.

His father roughly pulled him closer again. "We'll see if she feels the same when you're weak."

Nic felt the pain as Micha bit into his neck. Jo gasped, and he sent his mind to hers.

"Wait," he ordered. *"When I tell you, make a move for his legs."*

He waited until his father took several long pulls of his blood.

"Now!" Nic yelled at her, opening his eyes.

Jo lunged for their legs. McKayla turned and knocked the gun from Amy's hand, and she and Kristen jumped the woman.

Jo barely managed to knock into Micha's legs when Christian and Julian reached Nic. Christian ripped their father's teeth from Nic's throat, and Julian helped him take their father down. Blood gushed from the wound as Nic fell. Jo was beside him on her knees. She pressed her hand against his neck, trying to stop the flow of blood.

"Get something to put over it," he told her.

Jo looked around but obviously didn't want to leave him. He could hear his brothers struggling to keep their father down. Jo grabbed the bottom of her shirt and ripped it over her head.

He smiled as she pressed it against his bloody body. "Not what I meant."

"Shut up," she said but leant over and kissed him.

"Help me sit up?" he asked after she pulled away.

"Maybe you shouldn't..."

"Jo, it's already starting to heal. Help me sit up."

She did, and he looked over at the man who had once been good. His father had stopped fighting as Christian and Julian held him down.

"You know what you have to do," Nic said to his older brother.

Christian met his eyes for a few seconds before he nodded. Nic knew this wasn't easy for him. Christian had always been the closest to their father. When Micha had turned away from them years ago, it had hurt Christian the most.

But he let his teeth lengthen and bent down to his father's neck.

"Do it," Julian told him, still holding the man down. Julian was giving his blessing in what needed to be done. All three brothers were in agreement. Nic looked at his father and saw the realisation in the older man's eyes.

His father closed his eyes and didn't fight when his son's teeth pierced, and Christian began to drain him.

Nic looked away and pulled Jo to him.

* * * *

Jo stood in what was now her backyard. She had moved in officially with Nic two weeks ago. She had also moved into his bedroom where he was currently preparing for her change. Nic wanted her to go ahead with it, afraid that someone else might find out about them, and he wanted her protected.

Jo had agreed without too much pressure. After what had happened with his father, Kristen's attack and McKayla's grandmother's murder, Jo didn't want to take the chance any more than he did.

"Everything's ready," Nic said from behind her.

Jo didn't turn around. "Will it all be different afterwards?" she asked softly. Even though she wanted the change, she still felt a loss, thinking about her old life. It hadn't been much the last few years, but it had been hers – what she had made of it.

He stepped up behind her then wrapped his arms around her.

"It will be even better. You will be able to see better, farther, clearer. You can hear the birds sing out here in the morning," he told her before kissing the side of her throat.

"What if I can't drink blood?" she asked, revealing her greatest fear.

“Kristen is able to. It wasn’t easy for her at first, but she does. Your body will crave the blood, which will also help make it easier.” His clever fingers found the way under her shirt.

“Are you trying to distract me?” she asked but arched into him.

“After last night with that talented mouth of yours, I’m only trying to repay the favour,” he said as he cupped both breasts.

She wasn’t wearing a bra and the feel of his hands against her soft skin sent fire down her body.

Jo shifted, rubbing her ass against him. “Oh yeah, you definitely owe me,” she teased.

Nic latched on to her sensitive throat and sucked. Jo moaned and covered his hands with hers.

“Take me to our bed,” she ordered breathlessly.

“Your wish is my command,” he said, lifting her into his arms.

About the Author

Crissy Smith lives in Texas with her husband, daughter, and three Labrador retrievers. When not writing or reading, she enjoys hunting, camping and shooting. But she has a girly side too and is addicted to pedicures and coffee.

She has been writing since she was a teenager and still loves everything to do with the paranormal. Her stories and characters all have a place in her heart. She loves the alpha male, the dominant werewolf, or the Master vampire which find their way in most of her books.

Crissy is currently working on her first series for Total-E-Bound called Were Chronicles. She will introduce her readers to a hidden world of wolf shifters and their unpredictable mates. The first book Pack Alpha will be released in May 2009.

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Crissy loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>.

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