



BLOODLINES

SURGE

Mechele
ARMSTRONG

Loose Id

Blood Lines 6:
Surge

Mechele Armstrong



Blood Lines 6: Surge

Copyright © October 2009 by Mechele Armstrong

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

eISBN 978-1-60737-453-4

Editor: Georgia A. Woods

Cover Artist: April Martinez

Printed in the United States of America

Loose Id.

Published by

Loose Id LLC

870 Market St, Suite 1201

San Francisco CA 94102-2907

www.loose-id.com

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id LLC's e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

* * * *

DISCLAIMER: Please do not try any new sexual practice, especially those that might be found in our BDSM/fetish titles without the guidance of an experienced practitioner. Neither Loose Id LLC nor its authors will be responsible for any loss, harm, injury or death resulting from use of the information contained in any of its titles.

About this Title

Genre: Vampire Paranormal

Series: Blood Lines; **Previous Title:** *Bitter Love*

Sexy dreams haunt the vampire Cheyenne as she struggles with her schizophrenia. Her call awakens the man from her dreaming. Only he's not a man. He's Marroc. The first vampire ever made who took to ground a thousand years ago where he's simmered, feeding on souls and dreaming of Cheyenne, dreaming of taking her for his own.

When she releases him with her call, Roc goes to find Cheyenne, sure she is "the one" to help him defeat his enemy. She recognizes him from her dreams, and after a wild bout of sex, he discovers that her orgasms give him a surge of power. Orgasms with Roc also have a benefit for Cheyenne: they make her sane.

When one of her friends is taken by Roc's enemy, both Roc and Cheyenne will stop at nothing to get her back. The surge of sex gives them both what they've longed for. But can they have enough sex to survive the fight, and keep them together in the end?

Publisher's Note: *This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable: Anal play/intercourse, strong violence.*

Chapter One

The human fell to the ground with a mindless *thump*. His blood spread over the dirt in a wave from the wound in his neck.

Orrick took a handkerchief from his pocket and began cleaning his hands. Pesky blood stained everything. Which was why he was ready to move on to bigger and better things. If only he could.

His second in command, Vegas, sidled up to him. "Did you find what you required, my liege?"

Orrick's fangs touched his lips. "No. I didn't." His transformation had begun. Why wouldn't it finish after so many fucking years? What did the bastard know that he hadn't? "You're sure *that* man was psychic?" He turned to face the ratty-looking vampire. "Not a pretender like all the others?"

"I'm sure, my liege."

There had been nothing to suck from him. No satisfying life force to drain. Instead he'd had to rely on the old-fashioned meal as usual. Which had...gotten up his temper. Made him want to tear things apart. Like his food.

If only he could pass the last portal into consuming souls. If only he could be freed from being a blood-driven pussy. If he could find the key to completely taking souls for food instead of blood, then he could rule the world. Take over man and vampire alike. After all, by taking souls he'd have an instant plug-in to humanity to use whenever he needed. Think of the damage he could do.

He had to find the means. He'd been searching for so long with nothing to show for his troubles. "Find me another psychic!" He turned his back on his servant.

"My liege, we've taken so many psychics the last few years. Those with powers. It doesn't..." The man broke off.

Orrick didn't even turn around. "It doesn't what? Seem to be working?" His fists clenched. His voice turned deeper. "It has to work. Marroc achieved what I cannot. I will not let him beat me." Even if he had driven the man to ground, Marroc had still gotten what Orrick couldn't. Ingestion of souls to continue existence. He'd crossed over into some other plane of being a vampire. Which was damned unfair.

"But, my liege, he's been out of...contact for...years."

A thousand years to be exact.

He'd gone under when man was starting to get interesting and develop a backbone. He'd hidden from Orrick. Surely there was comfort in that. But not much. Orrick had expected to evolve by now as Marroc had.

Orrick couldn't find Marroc to learn what he knew that Orrick didn't. Couldn't find out what he'd done to become a fully evolved vampire. Orrick had started the transformation. He could sometimes take power from taking in the souls of humans. But not all the time, and the ability to take in souls never lasted. Not to mention he had to have physical contact with the human. He couldn't do it from afar like Marroc. What had he missed? His hands clenched again.

"I've been consulting the books..." A voice spoke up from the corner. Fort took careful steps into view. He stayed out of arm's reach. There was a reason why the man was the brains of the operation. "You ate psychics four hundred years ago. It didn't work."

Dammit. "Well, of course it didn't work, or I'd be a soul sucker by now!" Orrick picked up a huge stone and tossed it against the ground with a clump. "Why didn't you figure that out days ago? I told you to research what we'd already done." Things like this had gotten his last brainiac eaten. He eyed the distance between them.

Fort swallowed, backing up a step. "The manuscripts. They aren't in good shape. Other languages. Bad handwriting."

The writings of Orrick's failures. Of his follies. The testament to what had gone wrong the last thousand years. It also contained actions he'd already done or tried in the past. He hated repeating himself. "Has there been any luck going through the tome about when Marroc disappeared?" He changed the subject so he wouldn't be tempted to eat the man he'd turned to become his whiz.

Fort hesitated. "I've read the reports. I...don't have any insights as to where he could be. There are no rumors. No...nothing. It's like he vanished."

Exactly what the other brains had told him. Orrick had every new intellect read the papers on Marroc's disappearance in the hopes they'd see something that the ones before them hadn't. They never did. *It's like he'd vanished.* Just as Fort had said. Which was impossible. Unless maybe he'd gone to another plane of existence above this one. Who knew what would follow eating life forces for a vampire.

"One thing I don't understand." Fort pushed his glasses up on his nose. Not that he needed them now that he was a vampire, but he'd worn them as a human for so long, it was his habit. "How did Marroc know you were coming after him?"

"Good question." One that had plagued Orrick from the beginning. How had the vampire known what Orrick was up to? He'd taken great pains to keep Marroc in the dark about his ambitions, his plans, which had included the first vampire's death at Orrick's hand. Also his plans had included Orrick erasing Marroc's entire existence, so that Orrick would be looked up to as the first vampire.

'Course he'd gone ahead with the latter part of that plan.

No one knew of Marroc, first vampire. Unfortunately, because Orrick had never taken out Marroc and spent so much time looking for him, few knew of Orrick either. They seemed to think vampires had just happened. That they had appeared out of nowhere.

"You two were lovers," Fort continued, breaking Orrick's thoughts.

Horny, nonexclusive lovers from the time Marroc had made Orrick into what the Celtic gods had made him. Orrick nodded.

"He trusted you. Yet he...went underground to avoid you. So to speak. Without you knowing where he went. All his 'helpers' committed suicide."

A growl bubbled up inside Orrick's chest. "I know that." His nostrils flared. How dare Marroc do this? Especially on the day that Orrick had been coming to kill him. Even after a thousand years, it still chafed him.

"Have you considered that...well...maybe someone with foresight—a psychic—aided him?"

Orrick pinched his nostrils together. Maybe he should eat the redundant brainiac. "Yes. I was never able to find out who."

"Shame."

Orrick raised his head. Something in Fort's voice made him pause "Why?"

Fort swallowed. "Because if this person had foresight, and they lived...or lived long enough to reproduce, well, their descendants might have the gift too. The knowledge of Marroc might have been psychically passed down. Through the generations. Even if the descendants aren't consciously aware, they might have the knowledge of where Marroc is."

"All his followers committed suicide. No one survived long enough to reproduce after Marroc disappeared."

"Yes, but if they truly had foresight, they might have transmitted that knowledge to their descendant before it even happened. They wouldn't have had to wait until after Marroc disappeared. They could have spawned before and handed down the knowledge of where he was—is."

Well, fuck. Orrick met the man's lowering gaze. "Where were you a thousand years ago?" He growled again, the sound more animal than man.

Fort stepped back and seemed to shrink. "I wasn't born yet." He looked like a squirrel ready to run from the martin.

Smart man. Even if he did answer rhetorical questions. "I want you to research. Find out all you can about the time that Marroc disappeared. Find out all you can about those who were with him. Use human and vampire databases." Maybe he could find an answer in a descendant. If he could find Marroc, Orrick could complete his process. He could eliminate the older vampire and reign supreme over man- and vampirekind.

Fort gulped. "I don't know if I'll be able to find that out. After all, it has been—" He broke off as Orrick launched toward him.

"Search." He grabbed the man by the throat and lifted him in the air. "Or be my next meal." He dropped the groveling man to the ground, opened and closed his hand for a few seconds.

"Yes." The other man babbled. "Yes. Okay. Okay." He scurried away like the mouse from the cat.

Would Fort find anything on this descendant?

Orrick walked on, careful to avoid the bloody path. It was the first new lead that Orrick had had in nine hundred years. It was about fucking time he'd caught a break. It had to be a sign of better things to come.

He would break down this descendant once he found them, to find out where his nemesis had hidden.

"I'm coming for you, Roc." The wind rustled through the trees as if in answer.

* * * *

"Have the dreams been better, Chey?" Sarah sipped on her iced coffee and squinted at the dying sun. She idly scratched her elbow.

Cheyenne resisted the urge to dig her nails into her skin. Felt like little worms crawled all over her. Stupid sunshine. "Not really." She sipped her own chai tea. Doctors always made you come out in the sunshine. Even though you were a vampire. 'Course they didn't know that. Good thing too, because what they knew could kill them, at least about that. She smiled, her fangs grazing her lip.

Sarah didn't like that look. Her nose scrunched up. "None of that."

Had Cheyenne projected? Or did the petite woman know her that well? She put on a calm face she didn't feel.

"The last few weeks you've been restless. The dreams have been worse. None of the human drugs help, do they?" Sarah sat her cup on the wobbly table. "That why you lied to Dr. Martin?"

Sarah had known she lied. The woman did know Cheyenne better than anyone else. Probably a result of sharing the same headspace a while back. "They don't help." Nothing did anymore. Her mother, God rest her soul, had never liked for Cheyenne to take the drugs. They interfered with her abilities to "see." Now that she was a vampire, the drugs were like taking candy. They didn't affect her at all. She'd been mostly lucid since the beginning of her transformation, but in the last few weeks, had seen evidence she was slipping. That the sickness she had was taking her over even with her vampire powers.

A shiver rocked her. What then? *Henri kills you*. No questions asked. She had no illusions about what was to happen if she couldn't get it together.

Sarah patted her arm. Had she noticed the shudder? "We'll find a way to make it through this. I promise. It's probably your settling into your vampire powers that's making you..." She hesitated.

"Crazy."

"No! I wouldn't say that. Restless. Like I said before."

Sarah wouldn't say the C word. But others would. Cheyenne blew out a breath. Sarah was too nice to speak the word aloud in reference to Cheyenne. *Crazy*. It wasn't so bad a word. Five letters. Strong.

Schizophrenia.

Now there was a word with power.

Not that she'd ever been officially diagnosed. Even this psychiatrist they were seeing now was hesitant to put that label on her. But she'd heard it enough from other people. Along with crazy. Nuts. Out of her mind. She'd heard them all.

Sarah tapped her arm. "Chey." She shook her head.

Had she been staring into space again with her mouth open? People didn't like that. It brought attention to her. With her being a vampire, she didn't want or need attention brought to her. Neither did her new family. Because it would bring attention to all of them.

She forced a smile to her lips. "I'm okay. The dreams will get better." Maybe but unlikely.

Sarah didn't look convinced. She'd always been too knowledgeable where Cheyenne was concerned.

Cheyenne had had the most lucid period of her life since she'd become a vampire. Henri had remarked that maybe becoming a vampire had "stabilized the mental illness."

Until a few weeks ago.

The dreams had begun to take shape and change. She'd always had them. These were different.

They were intense. Real. More reality than anything she'd ever experienced. To the point that sometimes she wanted to live in them. Wanted to stay there instead of facing this blunt, dreary reality where she had to fight the demons in her own head. Conversely, the dreams seemed to whip up those demons who had been sleeping quietly since the moment she'd become more than human.

Cheyenne had read about schizophrenia. Knew when delusions became better than life, it wasn't good. Yet she also *knew* she'd been going under the last few weeks. She wasn't supposed to have that awareness of her behaviors, but she did. She hadn't always had this ability to sense her decline into madness. Being a vampire must have given her that. Perhaps her awareness was the only thing that had kept her sane so far.

She turned her head and saw *his* face looming before her.

Strong. Proud. His brown eyes shimmered in the light. His long black hair blew in a breeze that she couldn't feel. His full lips always looked a little on the cruel side. They parted as he spoke to her in a language she didn't understand. His biceps rolled as he beckoned to her, motioning for her to come to him.

It was the current daydream.

With the man who haunted her dreams and imagination. Had since she was a child. She'd thought she'd found him once. That man had been a pretender.

Now, since this had all started a few weeks ago, she'd been seeing his face instead of seeing him in shadows.

He seemed to want her to come to him in some of the visions. He was always crooking his finger or beckoning to her. When she tried to tell him that she didn't know where he was, he said it didn't matter.

Other dreams had a vicious burial of this man and a suicide pact carried out by everyone involved. Not to mention she also had dreams that were of him and her...together. Only these last few weeks, she'd seen his face as he pumped inside of her. As his cock slowly entered her molten depths. His head tossed back in abandon. Bringing her to life...

"Maybe Henri could block the dreams." Sarah's voice brought her back to reality, making the man's face vanish in an instant.

Cheyenne's chair scraped on the floor as she turned to face her. Words bubbled up in her throat. She managed to squelch them. Could Henri block the thoughts? The daydreams? The real dreams? Would she want him to? "I think we should go home. Maybe after we get there, we can work out. There's this new stew—I mean, fishing style—I mean, fighting style I've been wanting to try." She floundered, trying to get the correct words to come from her mouth. "Then we can dance to the moon."

Sarah looked at her strangely.

Cheyenne wasn't making sense again. She bit her lip and took the last sip of her tea. "Let's go home." Sarah was her only ally. If she continued to scare Sarah, Nick and the rest would force Sarah's hand.

"Yes, let's." Sarah patted her again.

Cheyenne relaxed. If Sarah was still acting like a sister, then nothing could be as bad as she thought it was.

Sarah tripped over the threshold, but Cheyenne caught her and pushed her on. Cheyenne moved gracefully through the doorway with one look back.

This time the man's lips mouthed, *Oh, but it can*, before he vanished.

* * * *

Roc's leg twitched. Tingled.

She rose up around him, long dark hair shimmering along his body like she was a flame to his torch.

He exhaled long and deep. Mimosa. He smelled the heady scent of her surrounding him.

Her face looked upon him from high. Her gleaming white teeth shone through her smile. Her fangs caught the light and glinted.

She was a vampire now. She hadn't always been.

He reached up his arms for her and caught only air.

She lowered herself down onto him, penetrating herself with his thick cock. The tip eased inside her warm, moist folds.

He hissed at the feel of her surrounding him. Her skin looked so dark against his. She was the color of a deer.

They began to move together, each thrusting against the other as if they couldn't get close enough. He lifted his body from the ground, pushing himself farther up inside of her. Her fang grazed her lip.

Somehow he managed to flip her over. Get her under him. Where she should have been all along. He didn't go inside of her. Yet.

He laughed at her startled expression. Leaned down to kiss her heavily, his lips locking onto hers to master her. Bend her to his will. His tongue dueled with hers, wrapping around hers to make her submit to him. He pulled back to look at this beauty.

Took one hand and tied her to the bed with ropes that had appeared. Grabbed the other to secure it as well.

He stared down into brown unflinching eyes. She always met his gaze. Gave him tit for tat. And a tit for his mouth when it counted.

He glanced farther down her body to her bared breasts. Perky and rose-tipped, the small, fat mounds called to him. They were breasts that begged for touch and were more than a mouthful.

He lifted up on one hand and let the other explore. Squeezed her.

She let out the soft sigh. The one that made him feel like a king among men. The one that revved his libido.

With a strangled moan, he leaned down to draw her nipple into his mouth. He suckled, tracing his tongue around the center.

She bucked against him, lifting her body up and down against his. She pressed herself against his erection.

He moved slightly, and his tip penetrated her. Slipped in only a little, but it was enough to make his senses flutter.

Her warm wetness clamped down on him like a vise.

He moved up farther and slammed back down against her. He could feel her heat rubbing against him.

She moved up to meet his thrust and drove him all the way inside of her. Like a furnace, she scorched him.

One leg slid up his side.

The other leg crept up the other side.

She tried to apply pressure to keep him down inside of her. Keep him where she wanted him.

"Ahh ahh." He moved the way he wanted to. Slow. Steady. Not harsh and wild. Something to mix it up. Wouldn't let her control his actions.

She moaned. "Marroc."

He loved her throaty voice. The way her body responded to him. The way she said his name in some accent he didn't recognize.

He'd found bliss in her body many times these last few years, especially the last few weeks when it had seemed more real. She was his one pleasure. His one seduction. She took him for what he was, accepted him, and let him inside of her in the most intimate ways possible.

He looked at her closed eyes. "Open your eyes."

Her eyes popped open.

She always obeyed him too. Another reason why she was irresistible. Whatever he asked, she provided.

Her red mouth caught his attention. *She licked her lips, making them shine. One fang peeked through her smile.*

A self-indulgent smile.

His pace sped up. Looking into her loving face, he couldn't help but come a little undone. That look was for him and him alone.

In and out. In and out. He took stock in the rhythm. That would keep him from coming too soon.

He slanted his mouth to kiss her quickly again, even as he pounded into her, taking her along the edge with him.

"Roc!"

It was the second time she'd called his name. Usually she groaned and moaned but never said a name.

Until today.

He didn't know her name. Suddenly, knowing what to call her became important. It would be important later. He wasn't sure how he knew, but he did.

He never ignored senses like that. *"What's your name?" He rocketed down into her, body spasming. Needed to know now before she disappeared.*

"Cheyenne Smith."

The first name suited. The latter name not so much.

"Are you real?"

He laughed, the sound a whisper on the breeze. "Why wouldn't I be?"

Another lick of her lips. "I've been waiting for you for so long." She thrust up against him again, causing his eyes to roll back in his head. "I met a pretender. I thought he was you. It was before I saw your face." She'd told him that before. "I need you. I need you to come to me. Now." She'd never asked him that before. Never asked him for anything. "I'm losing myself."

He looked down into eyes that had captured sorrow. *Heartbreaking eyes. Brimming with tears. He growled. He would hurt those who hurt her. "I'm almost there. Almost free." He wiped her tear away with his thumb.*

She clenched her inner pussy muscles around him.

He shuddered in delight as his orgasm started. Waves of pleasure came through him. Damn her. It was too soon. He hadn't gotten her to climax yet. His fists clenched in frustration. She should have orgasmed first.

Her gaze shot through him again. "I need you. Please come." Her voice rose with desperation and a healthy dose of fear.

He stroked her face. His body twitched. "I'm almost free. Cheyenne. I will find you."

"Chey..." Another voice.

It sounded faraway.

She glanced to her side at something he couldn't see. "I have to go now." She looked miserable. As if she faced the worst torture imaginable.

"No."

"Chey..." The voice grew more insistent.

Any voice that made her look like that was an instant enemy. He gnashed his teeth together, wanting to silence whoever was taking her away from him.

He'd never heard the voice before today. Never wanted to hear it again. He clenched his fists. If only he could smite them. Keep her here with him.

"Roc, I have to go now." Cheyenne began to fade from his arms. One minute she was there, tangible. The next, his fingers were going through her. And the next, she was gone.

"Cheyenne!"

"Bloody fucking son of a bitch." Roc grabbed for her, the mystery woman, but it was too late. She'd already faded from his view. The voice faded too.

"Bloody fucking son of a bitch." Roc grabbed for her, the mystery woman, but it was too late. She'd already faded from his view. The voice faded too.

His hands sank in by his sides. The come began to dry around his cock from where he'd pumped it out in orgasm. Instead of in her.

That voice would have to pay for taking her away from him. They had to have been going to torture her...

He blinked, looking around his surroundings for the first time in a long time.

Blinked some more.

Looked around his surroundings.

For the first time in a thousand years, Roc was awake. He wasn't in the trancelike dream state of healing sleep. The state of rejuvenation.

He'd regained consciousness.

He was in a box.

His hands went to the ceiling, punching on it. Began to rip at the boards above him.

He wouldn't be in a box for long.

Soon he'd be free. Even sooner he'd be tracking down one Cheyenne Smith. For some real, undreamlike fucking.

Was she "the one" he'd been waiting for?

Only one way to find out.

Heaven help anyone who got in his way.

Chapter Two

"Roc, I have to go now." Cheyenne said the words with a soft sigh as she rolled over to face the woman calling her name. Her legs stretched out in tightness around the man on top of her. Crafty devil. She should have seen his domination coming. He always had to be in control.

"Cheyenne!"

Cheyenne stirred from the place between sleeping and waking with a start at her name being yelled at her. She blinked, looking up into eyes that held a spark of irritation at their core.

Crimson glared at her. Crimson's mouth thinned, and she arched a brow. "Rock? Who the hell is Rock?"

Cheyenne licked her lips. "Uh, hi, Crim. When did you get back in?" She sat up, keeping the sheet around her body. Tried to shake off the intense dream. Did the room smell of sex? *Of course not, moron, the sex was in the dream.* She'd have to do better than this if she was to evade Crimson's inevitable questions, or worse yet, Sarah's.

"Just did. Don't change the subject. Who's Rock?" Crimson plopped on the bed next to Cheyenne. Her eyes narrowed as she took in Cheyenne's hand holding up the sheet. "Are you naked under there?"

"Yep."

Crimson quickly got up and headed to the door. She avoided Cheyenne's eyes and didn't look down. "Call me when you're dressed." She sped out of the door as though she couldn't get away fast enough.

Thank God for nakedness. And inhibitions. Crimson had the latter in spades. Especially with naked women. Cheyenne had the impression some woman had messed with Crim once. She had never asked the details, because she didn't need to know.

Cheyenne pushed off the sheet and went to her dresser. She grabbed a pair of bikini underwear and pulled them up her legs.

Her pussy throbbed. Felt full. Needed more filling. She was so wet and tingly.

She hadn't orgasmed in her dream. An oddity. Usually he made her come before he did. Her breathing sped up. Usually multiple times. While in her dream she'd been taken, it was only a dream. Nothing compared with being under a man in real time.

Not that she would know too much about that. She'd only been with the pretender. He hadn't given a damn... Well, that wasn't fair. Titius had cared for her as much as he could care about anyone. That was what made her becoming a vampire at his hand so confusing and disturbing. She never knew whether to hate him or accept him for what he'd been to her and ignore his flaws.

Her eyes closed as the cloth pushed against her parts. It wasn't enough. She waggled her hips back and forth.

Her skin tingled. Pulsed. A current moved across her, making her feel that much more of her juices.

It still wasn't enough.

If only Roc were here.

If only Roc were real.

And if wishes were horses...

She blew out a breath. After the whole mess with Titius, Cheyenne doubted the man she dreamed about even existed.

After Titius, her dreams had gained more clarity. They'd become so clear, especially lately. He was not a man she knew or had known before. He wasn't Titius.

Now she even had a name for her mystery man.

Roc. Marroc.

She didn't even know how she'd figured out his name, but the man hadn't corrected her, so it must have been his true identity.

Roc.

His rough hands on her skin had made her feel electrified. Like she was about to go off any second into spirals of pleasure. His hands were large and tough, as though he'd toiled at some point in his life. They swiveled across her senses like steel wool.

Only she'd been left wanting.

If she hadn't been awakened by Crimson, he probably would have brought her to an orgasm. They'd been interrupted, leaving her unfinished. Maybe she should rectify that.

She glanced at her closed door.

How long would Crimson give her before she came back? The only door her friends had let Cheyenne lock was the bathroom. That lock was flimsy. They could break it down if she gave them reason, which was why they let her lock it.

She strode to the door of her room, opened it, and called in Crimson's direction. "Going to take a shower, Crim."

A noncommittal noise sounded down by the end of the hall.

Crimson probably thought she was trying to get out of answering the question. Instead of going into the shower for a little masturbation.

With a grin, Cheyenne closed the door. She pressed on the cold doorknob, enjoying the solid feel of it underneath her hands.

Maybe by the time Cheyenne exited the shower, Crimson would have forgotten about the slip of a name.

Unlikely.

Crimson remembered way too much. All Crim had to do was mention it to Sarah, and they'd both be on her like a dog with a bone. They both worried about these dreams that neither of them could touch. Sarah had tried to get into the dreams before. It hadn't worked. Sarah had one of the strongest vampire minds around. Ever. If she couldn't do it, no one could. Which wasn't supposed to be possible. After all, they were merely dreams.

She shook off those thoughts. Time to go enjoy herself for a little bit.

She gathered the rest of her clothes and tiptoed into the bathroom, locking the door behind her. She hesitated again at this doorknob, liking the cold feel under her fingertips. It was shiny. She looked at her reflection for several seconds.

Then she placed her clothes on the counter, slipped off her underwear, and started the shower. As she waited for the right temperature, one hand slid down and touched her pussy. The outside.

Her whole body jerked in reaction.

So good.

She was on alert and jazzed from the dream. It wouldn't take much to send her over the edge.

She swallowed around her dry throat. Her breathing sped up. Heart rate skyrocketed. Even her fingers on the outside of her pussy made her insides go gooey.

Her finger slipped into her folds to find wetness. Wanting. Hot. As her finger played, her hips splayed out.

Too good.

Roc's hard cock had felt even better as he'd darn near split her in half when he'd taken her.

He was so large, and he knew how to grind down on her in the right position. Made her feel everything that he had to offer. He knew to get rough with her. He accentuated nerve endings she'd never known she had.

Her head went back. Time to get in the shower.

She removed her hand to check the spray again and found the temperature just right, then stepped into the bathtub.

The warm water sprayed over her body and ran down her in rivulets. She watched the water drip from her elbow as she tilted her head down.

Roc's cock pulsed as jets of come sprang from his tip in splashes.

She'd seen that cock enough times to know what it looked like. Even if only in dreams. She swallowed. Knew what it would taste like. Salty.

She thrust her hips forward and stood under the water, letting it roll around her. The water couldn't take away the ache.

For a man she'd only met in dreams.

Talk about crazy.

She reached for the body wash and poured a small amount on a body pouf. She ran the pouf over her sensitized breasts. Her nipples pebbled. The scent of flowers combined with the steam.

She continued to run the soap over her slick body, then hung the pouf back up and leaned into the water to rinse.

She reached up with a hand to touch the shower spray nozzle.

It was hard and smooth under her fingertips. Didn't feel like Roc. No warmth. No softness. Only cold metal, but it was all she had.

She'd begged him to come to her. For the first time ever. But he wouldn't come. No matter how many times she asked.

Because he only lived in her dreams. So she was starting to think.

She leaned her head on the shower wall. "Roc. If you're real, I could use you. Now." Before she went any crazier. Her eyes closed. A tear pricked from them.

He wouldn't come. He never would come to her.

Best to leave him in dreams anyway. Last time she'd thought he was real, people had died. Her mother. Others. All at the hands of Titius.

She opened her eyes and rubbed her face again.

Move on, Cheyenne. You've more important things to keep a handle on. Sanity for one thing.

And coming.

Her hand tightened on the sprayer. She grabbed it and pulled it down. Adjusted the flow so that it came out as a pulsing jet. Of warm water.

She slipped the sprayer down her body, pausing over her chest and letting it spray her breasts. The water throbbed against her skin, tickled her nipples. They tingled and swelled.

The sprayer dropped down over her belly. She swished it around and worked it even lower to her thighs. Widened her legs and lifted one to a shelf in the shower surround.

The water washed up over her pussy, bouncing off in a waterfall.

She moaned, moving the handle around and back and forth, up close and then back away. In and out.

Like Roc had moved with her earlier.

Her hips thrust in wild abandon as she remembered the dream. She anticipated more. Another round with Roc. His cock inside of her from behind as she held on to the headboard. His balls slapping against her. All she had to do was find the dream again. She would. Later. She was starting to live for these dreams.

The water pulsed and sprayed in constant motion. It never tired or stopped. It took her to the brink.

With roaring blood echoing through her ears, she came. She threw her head back as the waves of pleasure descended over her again and again.

Her thighs shook as she replaced the shower nozzle. Spent another minute under the spray and used a handful of soap on her thighs and outer pussy.

Finally she switched off the water. Blew out a breath.

It had taken the edge off. Now maybe she could face the family she'd acquired with some degree of sanity.

She dressed quickly and moved down the hall toward the kitchen.

Voices were heard, and she hesitated rounding the bend.

"Yesterday she told me that 'the moon was full of cheese and would run away from me' when I asked her what she wanted for breakfast. She's not handling this crack-up well. What are you going to do about it, Sarah?"

Or maybe today wasn't the day for sanity.

* * * *

Roc sighed as he stalked down the lonely street. Grime covered all the cracks. A lone blade of grass rallied through the concrete to grow in a blast of green. Car after car puffed out gray smoke with deafening engines drowning out the birds.

Things sure had changed in a thousand years. So much technology and machinery dominated society. Considering humans had just climbed out the Dark Ages into the High Middle Ages when he'd been buried, it was nothing short of amazing.

To see it in dreams was one thing. In reality, it was something else. He'd only woken up a few days ago and was already enjoying discovering all the things he'd seen while in the grave.

A big-busted woman with red hair leered at him as she leaned up against a wall. Took her finger and dribbled it down her front to her large breasts with a come-hither smile shot toward him as he passed by her on the sidewalk.

Or maybe some things hadn't changed all that much.

He grinned but continued walking on.

There was only one woman he wanted. Whom he craved. One woman he needed to feel under him, over him, any which way he could get her. He had

fucked her so many times, but he needed that to become reality. Not to mention she'd asked him to come to her.

Cheyenne.

Even her name made a shudder pass through him.

She was the only reason he refrained from teaching the buxom redhead how her bed was supposed to sound.

Lately his dreams of Cheyenne had been exquisite. She had helped to rouse him from his slumber. The dreams of her were the most real thing he had experienced since being placed in the grave.

Why had he slept so long anyway?

The psychic who'd helped to bury him and put him into a healing sleep said he'd be there until "*the one' comes into being,*" along with a lot of other information.

"*Whatever the hell that meant,*" had been Roc's reaction all those years ago.

No one had told him he'd not gain consciousness for a thousand years. He'd had no idea it would take this long to get free again.

Orrick must be shitting bricks, as the phrase went.

Roc could feel the minds of the people in tandem around him. A few vampires slumbered nearby.

No Orrick.

Too bad. Roc had been looking forward to Orrick's ass kicking for all these years. He'd had enough time to plan how he'd win against Orrick. With or without "the one."

Once outside of town, he walked for several more miles before he reached a house and, without knocking, came through the wooden door, pushing the heavy lumber aside.

A man's head swiveled around, but he didn't look surprised. "Roc. I was wondering where ya went to." The man's Irish accented English rolled from him like the hills Roc had seen since waking up. R's in particular rolled from him. "I've yar plane ticket. To the United States."

Roc's eyes narrowed. "The United States. The new country. Where she lives." No one had even been aware of North America's existence when Roc had gone to earth so many years ago. Now the United States was one of the biggest countries in the world. Roc hadn't seen that coming. Like so many other things. Machines that drove humans around, that flew. Vampires still being an underground race. Vampires having forgotten their origins. He hadn't predicted any of that, but he'd viewed it all from his slumber. Now he was seeing it all in color.

The man shook his head. "How do ya know these things? I expected ya to be more...uh..."

"Shocked at the world today?" Roc's smile was grim as he took a seat. He peeked into the envelope. Plane tickets. "An airplane." He'd get to fly. Looked as though he'd fly into a place called Washington DC. "Is the woman in DC?"

"Cheyenne Smith?"

"Yes." Roc had had Thomas researching her as soon as he'd come out of the grave. Trying to locate the woman from his dreams.

"Not in DC. Maybe in Richmond. I dunno if she's nearby or not. Still checking." The man shrugged. "That's the last place she was."

"Richmond?" Roc looked back at the plane tickets. "How far from DC is it?"

"I've rented ya a car in DC. We'll have...someone to drive ya down to Richmond from there."

Roc shook his head. "I can manage. Get me to the States. I'll do the rest." He'd longed to drive one of those things and had done pretty well yesterday with Thomas at the helm teaching him.

Thomas gave him a strange look.

"Do they not call them 'the States'?" Lingo here would be the hardest to learn, even with all his lessons over the years from the humans he'd fed from.

"They do. I keep wondering how ya stayed on top of it all." Thomas's lip pulled up. "Ya were in the grave a long time."

Roc looked at the lonely man in front of him. The man whose family had been set up covertly to manage the graveyard where Roc had been buried. The family who'd looked after him for all these years without knowing exactly why.

After Roc had clawed his way from the grave, he'd gone for one of the buildings near the gravesite. This one. He'd found the old man drinking tea at a table. Unflappable Thomas hadn't batted an eye at a naked, dirty Roc showing up at his doorstep. Apparently texts passed down for ages hadn't said exactly what would happen but that one day, "A grave would rise." Thomas had helped him get acclimated these past few days to the new world he found himself in.

That in and of itself deserved an answer.

"What do vampires feed from?" He leaned his chair back as he gazed at Thomas, who looked perplexed.

"Blood."

Roc nodded. "Correct. I was in the ground for a thousand years. How do you think I fed?"

Thomas seemed to consider it for a few seconds. "I dunno."

"I feed from life forces. Souls, if you will. By feeding from them, it allowed me inside the human psyche." Before Maroc had been put to ground, he'd learned how to do it large scale instead of from single individuals. He'd gotten even better at it while he'd slumbered in the earth. "By feeding that way, human thoughts have come at me over the years. So I've kept current with what's going on in the world."

As his mind had roamed and fed, he'd learned languages. Learned about cultures. Especially after Cheyenne had come to his attention. He'd planned once he awakened to go find her. To fit in, he'd needed to know about her culture. So he'd focused on the United States.

After all, he needed to know everything about her. To be with her without barriers.

Thomas nodded. "I see. Makes a spot of sense."

"I guess I need to head for my plane."

Thomas nodded again and handed him a packet of some kind. "It's identification. Ya're now Marroc Smith."

Roc's head swung around to look at the man, who chuckled.

"Ya needed a last name for an ID. I thought her name would suit ya. Should be enough in there to get ya going. Along with some money accounts that were created for ya back in the 1920s. My ancestors been preparing for this a long time." Thomas's family had been keeping the graveyard safe almost since the beginning. They'd descended from a cousin to a family who had helped to entomb Roc. Only the last names had changed as the pact moved through the family one by one. Thomas wasn't even the last. He had a sister with a son who'd been expected to take over once Thomas was gone. Now the son wouldn't need to.

"Obviously." Roc tucked the papers into the bag that Thomas had already packed for him. The man had done well and would be rewarded.

Thomas's eyes turned sad. "I guess ya'll be okay in that new world. Don't let them mug ya or nothing."

"I won't."

Roc started packing up stuff that Thomas had acquired for him. Not a lot, but essential things that he'd need on this journey.

A bottle of pills rested on the table. Alone. Roc needed no medicine. "Are those for me?"

"Those are not for ya." Thomas said nothing more. His reticence was something new. He'd talked Roc's ear off these past few days.

Roc's head came up. He didn't like the conclusion that he drew. "Those are for you."

Thomas nodded. "They are for me."

Roc stared at him. "For what I think they're for?"

"The pact my family made was that once the grave keeper helped ya, we were to end it. Before anyone could come looking for us."

"You could come with me." Roc folded his arms across his chest. He didn't like innocent victims in this game. There had been too many already.

Thomas shook his head. "I'm happy here in Ireland."

"I could stay." *Until the enemy comes* was unspoken. He could wait with Thomas for Orrick and have the confrontation. Now. End it all.

"Ya need to find the girl. That's why ya been resting all these years."

It always came down to "the one." Dammit it all to hell. He'd made a promise a long time ago that he'd seek out this one. That he'd find her before he confronted Orrick. The man he'd promised this to was long gone, but he'd given his life serving Roc. He couldn't let him down.

Cheyenne must be "the one." Why else would he have dreamed of her for so many years? It was the only thing that made sense.

Roc glanced at the bottle. If Orrick was still around, the relatively painless overdose would spare Thomas pain. What if Orrick weren't around? Then Thomas wouldn't have to die. After all, a lot could happen to a vampire in a thousand years. Perhaps he should check on his errant second.

Why hasn't he tried contacting you?

He and Orrick were linked. He'd made the bastard into a vampire, after all. So why hadn't Orrick tried to open a link between the two of them? He must have tried in the beginning, and Roc's slumber had blocked him. But what about now? Maybe Orrick was dead.

"Hold on." Roc held up a hand to quiet any questions that Thomas might have. "Give me a minute."

Thomas paused, looking at him with confusion.

Roc sent out his feelers over ground and through air. Across waters. Sought out the vampire he'd made who'd then betrayed him.

Click.

His mind slid in with Orrick's. The bastard was still alive. Still well.

Sleeping.

Bastard.

Roc could see him, lying on a bed. Rich. Luxuriant silks and vivid colors. A woman lay at his feet, bound and with wounds on her neck from his feed.

He wasn't dead, which meant he'd still be looking for Roc. To gain his power. That meant that Roc needed to find "the one" before Orrick came looking. Because of a promise made long before.

Orrick's eyes flung open. "Roc." The voice was in his mind as well as aloud. He'd sensed Roc's presence.

Roc didn't answer. Simply floated his mind away and back into himself even as Orrick yelled for Vegas. He could block Orrick's attempts to contact him, despite Orrick's innate mind strength, or at least most of them anyway. Orrick would now be looking for him and be able to sense him.

This didn't bode well for anyone who knew where he was going.

His eyes centered on Thomas. The man wasn't old and frail but wasn't young and vibrant either.

Orrick would crush him. Painfully.

"Come with me." Roc's eyes narrowed on Thomas.

Thomas shook his head. "I won't come with ya."

"I could make you."

Thomas snorted. "Not unless ya have mind control."

A talent that would come in handy for vampire and human alike. A power that Roc didn't possess.

"Ya're not staying around here either. I done my job. My time is over now." His eyes twinkled even as his hands shook. "Time for me to go. Let me go."

Roc didn't like it, but to continue on, he had no choice but to accept that Thomas wouldn't rest until the deed was done. He nodded at the shorter man. "Thank you, Thomas. For all your help." He bowed his hands to Thomas in a show of respect. Everything Thomas had done for him had helped.

Thomas beamed. "Ya're welcome, Roc." He picked up the bottle, and his hands gripped it tightly. "It's the only way. Ya'll make sure I die?"

Roc nodded again. He'd stay with him until the last breath. Which was what Thomas was asking. To not die alone. "You're not going to ask me to do it, are you?"

Thomas's laugh was rough. Brittle. "Were I younger...maybe. Now I'm old. Got no desire to live forever."

Roc grabbed his hand. "Wait." He couldn't stand by and let the human kill himself. There had to be another answer. There had to be a different outcome than there'd been before.

"Roc, this is the only way..."

His grip tightened on the old man's hand. "No. It's not." He dropped Thomas's hand and went to the packet of information. Took out a check and wrote. "Here."

Thomas looked at it without taking it. "What are ya doing?"

"Getting you a new life. Haven't you always wanted to see more of Ireland? More of the world? You don't have to come with me. You just can't stay here."

Thomas's lips pursed. "My family pact..."

"You've honored it, my friend." He folded the check to place it in Thomas's hand. "I'm not asking you to die for me." He'd never wanted the humans who'd helped him before to die. They'd not told him their plans. He hadn't been able to stop them from below the earth. But he could stop this. "Take your sister and nephew with you."

Thomas's gnarled fingers closed around the check, accepting it.

"You can make a new identity. New identity like you did for me. We'll burn this house. By the time they sort it out, you'll be long gone. They'll wonder if you died here." Roc grabbed the bottle before Thomas could stop him. Pocketed it. "Instead you could find a warm place. With pretty women. A new life."

Thomas's eyes sparkled. "I have always wanted to go to Barbados. They did a show on it on one of them travel channels on cable at the bar..."

"Now you're free to do it." Roc clapped his shoulder with one hand. "Go. I'll take care of the house."

Afterward Roc would find the woman of his dreams.

* * * *

Orrick gnashed his teeth as he bounded from the bed. Ripped off sheets and pillows and tossed them on the floor. "Hell. Fuck. Dammit. Fuck."

Vegas slithered into the room. "My liege. What's wrong?"

"What's wrong? What's wrong?" Orrick tossed the woman across the room. The dead one he'd had to feed from because he couldn't get his fucking body to suck down a soul. "I'll tell you what's wrong."

Vegas shrunk back toward the door. Seemed ready to run at an instant. "My liege..."

"My fucking bones. He was *here*. He was fucking here." Orrick stopped. Took a breath.

"Who was here?"

"Fucking Marroc. He was fucking here. I—" He broke off as something occurred to him. "Shit." All these years, Marroc had never come to him, which could only lead to one conclusion.

"What?"

Of course his minion wouldn't make that leap. "*He's awake*. He drifted in here while I was asleep. I woke up to his fucking presence." Orrick paced the length of the room. After all this time... "He's awake. He came in and then left when I woke up."

"Are you sure?"

Orrick's head nearly spun around. "Of course I'm fucking sure. I know Marroc." It had been years. But he knew the man who had made him. Intimately.

"If he's awake, what does that mean?"

"It means I can kill him." A grin carved up Orrick's face. "I can find him and finally get my due."

"How do we find him?" Vegas began to breathe a little easier.

Probably because he figured Marroc wasn't going to kill him. Yet. Vegas asked a good question. Orrick opened up his mind and launched out of himself. Not anything he'd done in a long time.

Vegas waited patiently for an answer. He might be waiting a long time as Orrick geared up to do a mind link with the man he sought.

Orrick hadn't used his psychic powers properly in ages. With Marroc not answering, he'd not had a need to. He'd not wanted to contact any of the

vampires he'd made in decades. Over the past fifty years communication had improved so much, it was easier to pick up a phone or send an e-mail.

He let his feelers drift out of himself. Flutter around the room like moths after a ball of wool.

Vegas frowned as they beat at him, trying to get inside his mind. He put one hand up to hold his head.

Orrick yanked them back from the vampire in front of him. They didn't travel far enough. Had to go much farther than that if they were to ever reach Roc.

He concentrated. Pushed feelers out of himself as far as they could reach. Pressed them along the flat planes of the level of consciousness. They hovered along, climbing hill and dale, searching for their destination until they petered out.

Nothing.

Nothing flung at back at him. He couldn't find Roc's mind. Not even the smallest psychic glimmer.

Roc was blocking him. He knew that Orrick had been coming to kill him. He would not let Orrick in now without a fight. Orrick could fight him, but over this distance it wasn't worth trying. When they were closer, maybe he'd find a way in. He'd have to get close enough to try. An incentive to find where Marroc had gone.

"Fuck."

Roc was an expert at this psychic shit too. He knew how to use his mind and use it well. Hell, he'd launched himself into the next plane of existence for a vampire—soul feeding. This hadn't helped Orrick find him, though. His own powers hadn't helped him achieve what Marroc had.

"No luck?" Vegas backed away again. The vampire knew when it was time to retreat. He'd lasted longer than most of Orrick's seconds.

"If I'd had luck, I'd be gone and after him." He rubbed his face with his hands. "So obviously I didn't."

"What will Marroc do now that he's awake?" Vegas frowned. Seemed puzzled. Yet maybe there was faint hope that something vital had occurred to him.

"I don't know what he'll do." Would he come after Orrick? He should be able to track Orrick at will. Not anything that Orrick could do. "What's on your mind?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me fucking now."

Vegas took a step back but looked more purposeful. "Why did he wake up?" His lips pursed again before he showed his fangs.

"Because it's Monday? I don't fucking know." Orrick slammed his hand against the wall. The slight pain roused his anger even more.

Vegas pushed forward. "There had to be a reason. I mean, why now? Why would he wake up at this moment? Why not years from now? Or fifty years ago?"

Orrick stopped pacing. The man had a point. "Something caused him to rouse." He nodded. What would bring an ancient vampire from slumber to consciousness?

"If we could figure out the reason, we might be able to find out where he's going." Vegas shrugged. "Only a thought."

A good one. Sounded like more a thought Fort would have had. "It's more of a lead than we've had." If they could isolate the reason, they could better predict Roc's whereabouts. Finally nail the bastard.

Now Orrick had no illusions. He'd wanted Roc to awaken for centuries. Nothing had ever roused him. Whatever had happened, it had nothing to do with Orrick.

Vegas looked pleased with Orrick's reaction to his supposition.

Orrick approached him in a breath of a second and grabbed him by the collar. "Don't get cocky. You help me find him."

Vegas nodded frantically. "I will, my liege. I promise." He bowed his head to release the pressure. "I will do my best."

Orrick released the fool. He'd keep trying to contact Roc, even as they worked on the problem of why he'd surfaced. "Contact all my vampire legions. Tell them to keep their eyes open. Especially those in Ireland." The last place Roc had been sighted all those years ago. Orrick would have dug up the whole damn country before now if he'd thought it would help him find Roc.

His spies would sight Roc. Then it was only a matter of time before Orrick found him.

You never should have awakened, Roc. Don't worry. I'll make it painful. You'll tell me how to get souls. Then lose your own.

Chapter Three

Cheyenne's leg tapped a rhythm as she sat at the table at a local sandwich shop. She occasionally reached over and grabbed a chip or two. She snapped the salty crisp in two, enjoying the sound it made in her mouth. *Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.*

Sarah glanced over at her from where she sat in an easy chair reading a novel. "Could you make more noise with those?"

Cheyenne winced. "Sorry." She'd been so into the feel of them in her mouth, she hadn't realized how loud they were. She licked the salt from her lips. Enjoyed the bitter taste on the tip of her tongue.

Sarah closed her book and pulled her legs up under her body.

"You can read. I won't make any more noise." Cheyenne slowly rolled up the bag of chips but put the top back down to snag one more. "The pistol's gone for good."

Sarah frowned but didn't ask her what she'd meant by it, because she knew Cheyenne wouldn't have an answer. "Chey, I know you heard the comments made the other day. I know you were listening."

Cheyenne swallowed. The bulk refused at first to slide down her throat; then she finally made it move. "What?" It was difficult even getting out the word. She would pretend not to know what Sarah was talking about. Play it out that way.

"The day that Crim got back. You took that long shower." Sarah's face heated in a fine blush.

Cheyenne closed her eyes. Did only Sarah know what she'd done in the shower? Were there any secrets in this house? "Crikey. Not good. Going down. Mayday, Captain!"

"Chey." One word in that commanding tone Sarah could get.

Cheyenne had said the previous words aloud instead of in her own head. She did snap the bag of chips closed this time.

When had she started saying aloud whatever was in her head? She wasn't sure. The awareness of her actions was almost as bad as speaking nonsense. Even though she was now aware of her crazy words, she had to think too hard to stop them from springing out. She couldn't always catch them before they exited her mouth, and could never take them back.

"I know you heard what was said."

"I don't want to talk about this, Sar." She closed her eyes, trying to block out a discussion that would hurt her heart.

"So you did hear what was said."

Cheyenne's eyes flew open to gaze at Sarah's knowing look. She'd almost admitted that by her comment. "I didn't say I did." Not outright.

"You don't have to." Sarah leaned forward, legs still underneath her. "I heard you on the steps. I smelled you. I know you were there."

What had she smelled? Heat moved up Cheyenne's neck. Probably hadn't been the flowery body wash. "Did anyone else...?" Yes, it was an admission. That she'd been there. Sarah was already sure, or she wouldn't have brought the subject up. Sarah knew she'd heard them plotting her death.

"I don't think so. If they did, they didn't say anything to me. They were focused on other things."

"Yeah." Cheyenne tried to keep her tone ambivalent, but she couldn't help a little bitterness. "It didn't stop them from talking."

"Chey." Sarah put her legs down and moved closer. The book fell to the floor, but Sarah didn't pick it up. As much as Sarah loved books, that was telling.

"I know. The crocuses are growing." Cheyenne's head shook rapidly. That wasn't right. She bit her tongue. "The crows are flying." The pain did nothing to bring her fragmented brain back under control. Cheyenne tasted blood. It was rusty and primeval...

"Chey." Sarah grabbed her chin and made Cheyenne look into her eyes. "Focus. On me. On what you need to be." Sarah's hand didn't quiver at all.

Cheyenne shook enough for both of them. Even as she knew the words coming out were gibberish, she couldn't control their spread. Their twirling. "They're going to kill me." Her eyes sought out the sanity in Sarah's. Sarah had been a lifeline once upon a time. A security rope that had tethered Cheyenne to sanity. If only Sarah could have been her maker. Maybe she'd be in a better place right now.

Sarah kept a firm grip on her chin. "They won't. I won't let them." Her eyes blazed with fury and diligence.

Sarah could only hold them off for so long. "You can only do so much. I bring too much attention to us."

"I don't think so."

Sarah'd been in the minority from what Cheyenne had heard. The only two other voices she hadn't heard chime in had been Henri's and Nathan's. Others had spoken. Copper and her lover, Bastian. Crimson. Rojo's low baritone. Rojo had his own crazy one to deal with in Crimson. "They think I'm dangerous."

She couldn't blame Nick, though. He'd gone through so much when Sarah and Cheyenne had been connected. He didn't want to lose Sarah again to the

link that had existed between the two, especially if Cheyenne went fully into madness. He operated from a position of protecting his woman. Cheyenne couldn't fault that.

His woman.

Cheyenne's eyes closed again. Would she ever find a man to be that protective of her? Titius had left her to die at Nick's and others' hands before, while he'd tried to escape. It was when she'd known for sure that he wasn't the man from her dreams.

Marroc would never let you die.

Unproven.

Because in dreams no one ever truly died. In real life, Titius had abandoned her to his enemies. That, and all his threats to Sarah, had left Cheyenne with no choice but to end her maker's life. And offer up her own to his enemies. They hadn't taken her up on it then. Maybe they should have.

Sarah's hand tightened. "Open your eyes."

Cheyenne did as Sarah commanded. Her eyes popped open and stared Sarah down. Met her gaze levelly, though that was the last thing she felt like doing.

Sarah's gaze never wavered. "I will not let them kill you. You're not too far gone. But you have to work with me so you don't go that far down. Do we understand each other?" Her hand squeezed Cheyenne's.

Cheyenne nodded. Sarah would protect her as much as she could. But she had no illusions that eventually, she was going to meet the other side of Henri's dagger.

"To do that, you have to be honest with me."

Cheyenne nodded.

"Which means telling me all of it. You've been keeping something inside. From all of us. What is it, Chey?"

* * * *

Orrick stared out the window over the big city. Windy City, his ass. Cold and brooding city was more like it. He'd be glad to get away from here. To wherever he went next. No other place could be this horrid. A knock sounded on the door. "What?"

Vegas ducked inside. He looked as though he didn't want to be there. "I thought I should update you."

Orrick turned. "Have you found him?" That was the only thing he was interested in right now. Finding fucking Marroc.

"Not exactly..."

Orrick turned back toward the window. "Then I don't want your fucking update. When you have a lead on him, then come talk to me." He wiped a dirt smudge from the window. Twisted his fingers getting it off. Someone needed to

dust in here. Maybe he'd make Marroc clean for him. Before he sliced him up into little pieces. Marroc cleaning. Now that was poetic justice.

Vegas stammered. "But...well, I..."

Orrick turned to face the stick minion. Vegas needed to eat more blood before he blew away. "What?" He took a step toward Vegas while flexing his bicep. "What do you need to tell me? What's so fucking important?" It better be good. Orrick was hungry and losing patience. He didn't want to eat blood. He wanted a fucking soul.

"AhousewasburnedinIreland." Vegas said it so quickly that the words all ran together like one.

Took Orrick a moment to translate. "And?" Houses burned down daily everywhere. Didn't matter to him.

"The owner, Thomas Watts. He... Well, I checked...and a distant relative of his was a cousin of someone who died at...when Marroc went underground." Vegas moved a little closer, getting more confident. "There was a newly opened grave near this house."

Now that could be interesting. "Where in Ireland was this house?" Roc might have been buried. 'Course he might have been floating in midair, for all Orrick knew. He had been sighted in Ireland, but there had been misleading information.

"I don't know the...town... It's near the middle of the country." Vegas jerked as though he might have St. Vitus's dance. Such a nervous soul. "In between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Is that where you looked for Marroc back then?" His head ducked down with the question.

"No." Orrick's fists clenched. Their searches had been centered near what was now Belfast. They'd been far and away if that was where Marroc had indeed hidden himself. "That's not where we looked."

"Huh." Vegas wisely said no more. Good thing too. If he'd insinuated they'd been wrong, he'd find himself being used as a piñata.

"What does this house burning have to do with anything concerning finding Marroc? Did Watts die in the fire?" Orrick resumed looking out of the window. *Where are you, Roc? Wait until I find you.*

His flashes had had no luck in contacting Marroc mentally. No connection had been built. Marroc had shields in place, blocking Orrick. Over distances, psychic signals usually lost strength. Not knowing where Marroc was, it was hard to probe or project. Granted, Marroc had done it. Given some closeness and time, Orrick would crack open Marroc's mind like a nutcracker to a nut.

"In recent days, a local vampire who I used to know reported seeing another man with Watts."

"Maybe his gay lover?" Orrick snorted, turning back to face Vegas. This wasn't going anywhere. He eyed Vegas's neck before turning back to the window.

"The other man and Watts are both now missing—after the fire—but..." Vegas swallowed. A deep trailing swallow. "A Marroc Smith flew out of Ireland the same day the house burned."

Orrick's eyes widened. "*Marroc Smith? Marroc Smith?*" He swung around to advance on Vegas. "You didn't mention this first? Why didn't you mention this fucking thing first? Marroc Smith?"

Vegas backed to the wall. "I don't know if it's him." His eyes grew wide as fear flew out his pores like water.

"You don't know if it's him. How many other fucking Marrocs do you think there are in the world?" His hands clenched open and closed as he resisted the urge to pummel to shit his second in command. Marroc Smith. What a dopey last name.

Vegas ignored the question. "His records look legit. Birth certificate. Library card. Hell, a work history." He shook his head. "I don't have a picture of him yet. I'm having one sent over e-mail to print out."

"If someone good did his records, of course it wouldn't say, 'Marroc, born several thousand years ago.'" Orrick quit advancing on Vegas. While satisfying, he'd have to find a new second in command if he killed the hapless vampire. Too much trouble right now. "Airport. Where was he going?"

"He was flying into DC. Washington DC. Should have arrived by now. Soon as I get that picture, I'll have..."

Orrick didn't listen as Vegas babbled again. Marroc was coming to the United States. Why? He had to have a reason for waking and for coming here. He had no doubt this was the man he'd sought all these centuries. Marroc being closer to him usually would help the mind link.

Orrick sent out fresh feelers in every direction, searching for Marroc's mind. Nothing. He growled in frustration.

Vegas stopped talking and stood nearby. Silently. Yes, this was why he'd lived so long. He scanned Orrick carefully and looked ready to run.

Another rap on the door. What was this, Come Bug Orrick Day? He answered, "Come." The door swung open slowly.

It was some little mealymouthed vampire who Orrick had made a fortnight ago. "What?" Orrick thought about how his neck would feel popping under his hands. Because he didn't want to kill Vegas didn't mean he couldn't kill anyone.

"The picture is here." He glanced at Vegas. "You said to bring it to you as soon as it came in."

Vegas tried to snatch the picture, but Orrick got it first. Glared at his second in command. The mealymouthed, lowly vampire ran from the room. He must have seen the murder in Orrick's eyes. "This is his driver's-license picture?"

Vegas nodded.

Orrick took a long look. His fingers tightened at the edge of the paper. "Dammit." His heart thundered in his chest.

Orrick hadn't seen Marroc in a thousand years, but he'd not forgotten what he looked like. Or felt like. He blew out a breath. Didn't want to go there. Marroc had been a dominating, at-times cruel lover, who'd left a mark on Orrick for all time. That part of his life was over. Had ended the instant Marroc began sucking down souls and refused to share the information on how he'd been able to take them.

Vegas snagged the picture and looked curiously at it. His eyes widened. "Uh, Orrick." He blinked, looking a few times at the grainy photo.

"Yeah?"

"What does Marroc look like?"

Orrick sneered. "Like that, you imbecile. That's him."

"It's sort of blurry..."

The picture didn't do Marroc justice. Nothing but an in-person view would.

The piercing brown eyes. Brown skin. Long, dark hair that Orrick could still envision. Dammit. He'd forgotten so much that this picture slammed home, even as nondescript as it was. Orrick had betrayed his lover, but the betrayal had come from Marroc first. "Yes, that's him."

Vegas stared at the picture. "So he is back." His eyes darted as though he was committing the picture to memory.

Orrick shook his head. What fools. "I told you he was back. I felt him before." The hair stood up on his arms as he remembered the feeling. More evidence that Marroc was back. "He was in the room with me. His spirit."

"Have you been able to contact him since then? Again? I mean if he visited this room in his mind—" Vegas broke off.

If only Orrick could. It would make things easier. "I haven't..." Wait a minute. Was the pissant questioning him? He'd better not be. Orrick's eyes narrowed as he surveyed the distance between them. "Don't you dare question me."

Vegas gulped. Took a step back. "Never, my liege."

Orrick stared him full in the face. Didn't believe him one iota. "He hasn't come here. Since before." Marroc probably wouldn't come again. Why had he before? Fuck, what had trigged Marroc to go into hiding so many years ago? If only Orrick could find out and make sure it didn't happen this time. Somehow he'd find a way to keep Marroc from disappearing again.

"Have you gotten him...? Have you gone out to find him?" Vegas continued to look down as though his feet had gotten interesting.

"No." Orrick said the words through clenched teeth. He didn't even try again. Nor did he explain that Marroc could block him. The pissant didn't need to know that much detail. Orrick never trained his vampires in their psychic ability as Marroc had trained him. It was a given that some of his minions

would have psychic powers stronger than him. They would be able to exceed his own powers, so he didn't want those abilities cultivated. Right now, Orrick had the strongest mind of his bunch. He preferred to keep it that way.

"Ah."

Vegas didn't say any more as Orrick moved to the windows again to look at the dank outside. "Washington DC, huh?" The capital of the United States. A thriving vampire population. Not many politicians were vampires, though. Fewer than you'd think. A real pity.

"Yes, my liege." Vegas's voice went higher. "Perhaps we can use other methods to find him. Find out his destination. Trap him."

"Yes, I believe we can. And, Vegas?" They would have to. Orrick would find him. Extract what he needed to know. Then dispose of the first vampire for all time. Orrick would be king then. With soul-feeding abilities, he'd be able to do more. Maybe manage his own country. Or even take over the world.

"Yes, my liege?"

"Book us on a red-eye flight." He wouldn't deal with the fucking sunshine. He scratched his arms thinking about the warmth on his skin.

Vegas hesitated, not moving.

"Now." Orrick waved his hand behind him, indicating that Vegas should leave. Waited to hear sounds of his footsteps but didn't.

"To DC?" Vegas sounded as if he was making sure of Orrick's intentions. His voice came a little unsure. A little shaky.

Orrick rolled his eyes. Did he have to tell him everything? "Yes. Of course DC. Why wouldn't I want DC?" Fucking imbeciles.

"Suppose... Oh never mind." Vegas took two steps toward the door. He clucked his tongue behind the words.

"Suppose?" Orrick stopped him with the question. Now the man was having a brainstorm? Since when?

"Suppose Marroc isn't in DC anymore? Maybe we should find out where he was going after DC?" Vegas took two more steps toward the door. "It'd be a shame to travel all that way and then find out he's come to Chicago, and we'd have to backtrack."

"You'd rather be farther behind him than we already are by your fuckups?" Orrick folded his hands behind his back. His fingers gripped each other, shoving nails into skin. "There has to be a reason that he picked Washington. Something is close by there." He lowered his voice much like he had earlier. "And, Vegas?"

"Yes, my liege?"

His lips spread in a grin of satisfaction. "Question me again, and I'll toss you from the red-eye."

Vegas scampered away while Orrick continued making plans on what to do with Marroc when he found him.

* * * *

Cheyenne hesitated, looking into Sarah's concerned green eyes. "What?" She pretended not to understand the question that Sarah had asked.

Sarah rolled her eyes. "Your hearing is perfectly fine. Hello, vampire hearing. I know you heard me." She sobered. "Now answer the question. You've been keeping something from me for months. What is it?"

Cheyenne pulled her own feet up under her. Sat much like Sarah was. Leave it to Sarah to figure that out and ask about it. Cheyenne tried to keep her mind from racing. Keep her words from spilling out unbidden. "I've told you..." She blew out a breath. She could do this. This was Sarah, after all. Sarah knew her better than anyone else, and she was the only one right now who actually liked her.

Sarah squeezed her arm. Sarah was the only one who'd ever touched her without wanting something in return. Her mother had wanted her gifts. Titius had wanted other things. Sarah wanted the contact. Not anything that Cheyenne was used to. "Told me what? What have you told me?"

"About my shenanigans from the lucky..." Cheyenne gritted her teeth. That wasn't right. *Keep the focus. Keep the focus.* She didn't look to Sarah to see if pity was transparent or hidden. Couldn't deal with it either way. *The fox does glocks in sock. No. Focus. Get your words going.* "I've told you"—the words slowly poured from her mouth as she thought before each one—"about my dreams."

Sarah nodded. "You dreamed of Titius. Before he came to you." Her face tightened as it always did when they discussed him. If there was anyone Sarah hated, it was Titius. Maybe Marcus, too, the vampire who'd terrorized her and Nick a few years ago. Cheyenne didn't know whether Sarah hated them or merely disliked them.

"No!" Cheyenne lowered her voice as people stared at her. She'd tried telling Sarah this one time before. Why wouldn't she listen? Or maybe she'd only told Sarah in dreams? Debatable. "No. The dreams were not of Titius. He wasn't the one from my dreams. Not really."

Sarah scratched her cheek. "It wasn't Titius who was in your dreams before?" Now she looked puzzled.

"No. I dreamed of someone else. I thought it was Titius when I first met him, but I knew before he died he wasn't that man. Not the man that I thought he was." Her hands shook, so she lowered them into her lap, breaking contact with Sarah. Titius hadn't merely died. She'd killed him. To save Sarah. She'd do anything for Sarah.

"How did you not know that Titius wasn't him? That's the part I don't get. If you'd dreamed of this man, how did Titius make you think that he was him?"

"Because I never saw the man's face in my dreams. It was easy to fill in Titius's face once I met him, but the man in my dreams was always in the shadows. Covered." Cheyenne blew out a breath. "Until now." There. It was out.

Sarah's eyes widened. "Until now."

Cheyenne nodded. "Yep."

"You've been having dreams again."

"I only stopped for a while. After... A while after I'd become a vampire, they started up again. Only they were more intense. More vivid. I saw his face."

"You didn't tell us."

Cheyenne didn't answer. She hadn't wanted to share them. At least not right away, and it had gotten harder and harder to bring the subject up. Not to mention they already thought she was crazy. Telling them she wanted to live in these dreams would move her into the plus column of insane.

Sarah was silent for a long minute, but when Cheyenne didn't offer up anything else, she said, "Are you sure they are the same man? The dreams now versus then? It's not a different person you're dreaming of now?"

Cheyenne nodded. "I'm sure." After the last round of dreams, she'd never been surer of anything in her life.

"You said these dreams are vivid. More intense than they used to be. What are these dreams about?"

Heat moved up under Cheyenne's skin.

Sarah's gaze turned knowing.

"Not all of them." Cheyenne acknowledged without denying that some of the dreams were sexual, which Sarah had already figured out. Boy howdy, were they ever sexual. Her thighs clenched together as she remembered the latest dream. His cock splitting her apart. His seed as it pulsed from his body. How good he'd felt in her dreams. How wonderful his mouth had felt against her, nipping her skin with elongated teeth...

Sarah snapped her fingers. "I lost you just now. The dreams are that good, huh?" She settled back down in her chair.

Heat rose up again into Cheyenne's cheeks. "Yeah." Cheyenne blew out a breath. "They aren't all sexy and stuff, though."

"The ones that aren't sexy. What are they like?" Sarah fiddled with her own fingers. She almost seemed like she wanted to take notes.

"They vary." She watched as Sarah twisted a ring on one hand. "From night to night." From day to day. Because some of the dreams happened when she was awake.

"Tell me about these varying other dreams you have. What specifically happens in them? Do you have one more often than others?"

"The one I have most often is that it's a long time ago. I'm not sure how long ago. He's... The man...I dream of is with a bunch of humans...in the middle of them talking—"

Sarah interrupted her before she could get any more detail out. "So this man you dream about all the time is a vampire like you?"

Cheyenne blinked at her. How had she known that Marroc was a vampire? It hadn't been anything that Cheyenne had told her.

"You said *humans* were around him." A slight smile curved Sarah's lips. "So I took it he wasn't human."

Oh. Yeah, Cheyenne had. She'd forgotten how much Sarah paid attention. She'd have to be careful what she said, if there was anything she was going to hold back. "Yeah. He's a vampire." She clenched her hand open and closed. Thought of the words she wanted to say, was determined to get them out right. "They are debating with him."

"How do you see all this? Are you a human talking with him? Are you inside of him watching this go on?"

Cheyenne frowned. "I'm not a part of this. It's like I'm watching, but I'm not one of the people with him. I'm not inside of him either. More like a camera overhead. I see and hear what's going on." It was like a movie playing out in front of her. She was a spectator, not a participant.

That seemed to satisfy whatever Sarah wanted to know. "Okay." She waited for Cheyenne to go on.

"They tell him that he must go under until 'the one' comes. That it's the only way. I hear that over and over. He argues against it, but they keep arguing." Cheyenne shuddered. The anguish in their voices was tangible. They desperately wanted Marroc to survive whatever the future held. "They are worried about him being killed. He doesn't want to hide, though."

"He's hiding? Or he goes into hiding from something? From someone?" Sarah continued to drum her fingers and play with them as she listened.

"I guess. He doesn't want to do what they want him to. He doesn't want to hide. He wants to confront now and not later. There's a...man...I think, who must be a seer. A psychic. He tells him that he's seen his death. Afterward, mankind suffers. The only way to change this is to keep him alive. To get him to hide."

"How long is he supposed to hide?"

Cheyenne's lips pursed. "He promises the human he will wait until he's found 'the one.' That's the only indication of how much time he'll be hiding."

"The one?"

"Yep."

"Is that a person or a thing?"

Cheyenne shrugged her shoulders. The man hadn't been clear but had used "she" for "the one." "A person. Marroc thought so at least."

"What will he wait to do? What comes after he finds 'the one'? When will that happen?"

Cheyenne considered these questions. Things were still a little fragmented from the dreams. "He'll fight with someone. He promises him he will wait until he's found 'the one' before he fights with..." Her mind whirled. As clear as the

dreams were, the people talked about the situation without using footnotes or explanations. They knew what they were talking about, so why explain the situation? They had no idea there was an audience. "Ahrock? Aroock?" She chomped on her lip in frustration. That name wasn't right either, but she couldn't come up with the name they'd used. "I don't know who that is. Or how the name is said." Or even whether it was a human or vampire or a man or woman. She knew so little. She wanted to punch herself in the head, clenched her fists with that desire. She could pulverize herself.

"It's okay." Sarah's hand found her leg to squeeze. "What else happens in those dreams? Tell me exactly what you see. But not in the first dreams we talked about." Now it was Sarah's turn to flush.

Sarah didn't want to hear about the sex dreams, which was good, because Cheyenne didn't want to tell her. Cheyenne couldn't help but smile at that. While not a prude, Sarah could be a little innocent. Actually so could Cheyenne. Neither of them discussed their sex lives in any great detail. "Anyway, Marroc finally agrees to what they want him to do." It was a long struggle of words to get that out. "Goes into this tomb they've dug for him." It always made her shiver when they entombed him. To be put into the earth like that.

"What's wrong? What happens next?" Sarah had seen her shiver and looked concerned about her.

"Before they start covering him up with dirt, the psychic leans down. He whispers to him and puts him a trance, it seems like." That was one thing in the dream she didn't know much about. What exactly had the man done for him? "He doesn't move around much after that and his mind...goes blank."

"I wonder if he put him into a healing sleep." Sarah's eyebrows crinkled making worry lines appear on her forehead. "That could explain the lack of movement and his brain quieting for you at that point."

"Can a human do that for a vampire?"

Sarah considered that. "I don't know. I'll have to ask Henri. It does sound to me like he went into one."

If a human could do that to a vampire, it seemed dangerous. After all, in a healing sleep a vampire was vulnerable. Besides, Cheyenne thought you had to need healing to go into one of those sleeps. "Anyway, they bury him in the ground." Cheyenne bit her lip again. "Cover him completely up. And then..."

Sarah's eyes glanced over at her. "What?" Her voice took on a soft edge, encouraging Cheyenne to go on. Her body tensed. She'd sensed things didn't get overgrown with flowers and bunnies.

"They travel as far away from the tomb as they can physically get in a short time and at that period of history." Cheyenne's face squinted. She hated the images that traveled through her mind at this point in the dream. They were horrific. "They kill each other." The weapons of the day had been primitive. The deaths had been so primitive.

Sarah's eyes widened. "All of them? All the humans die." Her nose lifted up, as though trying to keep pace with her eyes.

Cheyenne nodded. "All of them. Either at their own hand or someone else's. It's brutal. They were all Marroc's people. They did themselves in so that...whoever Marroc is going to fight wouldn't find them. So he wouldn't make them tell where Marroc was sleeping. So whoever it is wouldn't kill their only hope." Cheyenne realized her voice had taken on a dreamy quality. Like she'd been woken up recently. Like the words that made no sense, she was powerless to control her tone of voice. That had happened before, but mostly when she was in the thrall of a vision. This wasn't a glimmer, though. She cleared her throat. *Focus.*

"Did Marroc know about this? That the people were going to kill themselves when they left him? Or he left them?"

"Not until he was already buried. He was already asleep. In the ground." Cheyenne's voice returned to normal. "They deliberately kept it from him. They knew he wouldn't go in if he knew. That he would try and stop the carnage." She had felt his frustration even in his slumber as he'd scratched at the dirt. Her hands clenched much like his had. He'd hated the innocents dying. He'd been trapped. Both physically and mentally. There was nothing he could do to help them.

"How do you know that?" Sarah looked at her thoughtfully. Her tongue came out to lick her lips, taking off the lip gloss.

"What do you mean?"

Sarah spoke thoughtfully. "You said you were like a camera. If you were only looking at things from *your* perspective, looking in on them, how do you know Marroc didn't know all that?"

How did she know? How did she know he'd clawed at the dirt too? He'd been underground by that time. Her head shook, hair flying. "I don't know how I know." The rest had all seemed like a movie, but she'd been in tune with Roc's feelings right there. Strange. She'd never even realized that part of the dream was different.

"I'd hazard a guess and say you're partially connected to Marroc. I assume that's the name of the man you've been dreaming about?"

"Yeah." Cheyenne had named him without thinking about it. He'd become "Marroc" and "Roc" to her already.

Sarah sat up, kicking her legs out from under her. "Chey." She blew out a breath. "This sounds a lot like you're connected to this man in some way. This vampire."

"Maybe." She'd never considered there might be a psychic connection between the two of them. Only that he filled her dreams.

"We have to be careful."

Now Cheyenne did give her a look. "Careful?"

"Yes. We... I know you have faith in people. In men. Things with Titius didn't go well." Sarah folded her arms in front of her chest, as if knowing she was going to get an argument. And she was right.

"Marroc isn't Titius." Far from it. The things she felt with Marroc in dreams didn't even begin to relate to Titius. The experience with Titius didn't even compare to what was going on with Roc.

"Maybe Marroc isn't Marroc either." Sarah sidled closer. Her voice softened. "There are bad people out there. Titius used psychic connections between you and me. He used us. I don't want you to be used again."

Cheyenne closed her eyes. No one had ever been this protective of her. How could she truly argue with someone wanting to keep her safe? "I...I can't stop the dreams." She had no idea how to. Nor did she want to. She couldn't tell Sarah that.

"We'll set up an experiment tonight. I'll see what I can do." Sarah's lips thinned in determination. "One way or another, I'll find out what's going on with your dreams."

Chapter Four

Cheyenne shimmied from her jeans and put them on her dresser. Slipped her bra from under her T-shirt without taking it off. Wasn't sure why she did it that way, other than she had company coming.

She peeked from the window into the blazing sunshine. Richmond. She'd grown up here. Still hated the move from winter straight to summer. There was a little spring some years, but most years, the seasons bulldozed right across each other. This year was no exception.

It was already boiling hot. Humid. Seemed to be stifling already, and it wasn't even July yet.

Her skin prickled. She hated being in the sun, especially since she'd become a vampire. The sunshine always made her feel itchy. Out of sorts. Not that she needed much help in that capacity lately.

She turned back toward the door of her room. Maybe she wasn't coming?

Sarah bounced over the threshold. She was wearing heart-covered satin pajamas. "Almost like a PJ party, isn't it?"

No such luck. Cheyenne shook her head and blew out an easy breath. "I don't understand why we're doing this." Only Sarah could turn something like this into a slumber party. Cheyenne wasn't sure she wanted to go through with what Sarah wanted. What if she did lose the connection to Marroc? What then? The dreams either kept her sane or pulled her further into lunacy. Cheyenne wasn't sure which. Did she want to take a chance? What if it was the former and she fell down further than she already was?

Then, you die.

That was helpful.

"I want to see if I can zero in on your dreams. I figure being closer to you, sleeping in the same room, will help me get a bead on what's going on. Maybe I can come into them to see this Marroc for myself." Sarah plopped down in a chair on the other side of the room. She didn't appear to take note of Cheyenne's apprehension or was ignoring it. Either way it escalated what Cheyenne was internalizing. "There is a catch by the way."

"What's that?" Cheyenne still stood by the wall over by the window. She hadn't moved except to fold her arms up under her chest. She didn't like this idea. Sarah had been insistent. Getting Sarah away from a task once she'd decided her course of action wasn't easy. Probably be easier to get a hyena away from a bone.

“Me.”

Cheyenne's gaze swung to Nick as he strolled through her bedroom door. The already small bedroom seemed even smaller with his entrance. Dark and brooding, he walked into the room on silent feet.

Her hands shook as she pushed down her shirt to make sure it covered her underwear. She struggled to get out the right words. Nothing crazy, only the words she wanted to say. “What do you mean, 'me'?”

“I'm the catch. I'm going to stay in the room with you two tonight.” His blazing eyes surveyed her. “Sarah sleeps in here, I sleep in here.” He didn't wear sleeping attire. He wore jeans and a short-sleeved shirt with *Seether* written on the chest and a picture of the band under the word. He looked about as happy about this as Cheyenne was.

Nick still blamed her for a lot of things that had happened in the past with her and Sarah. He had a lot of good points and reasons. His only desire was to protect Sarah, and she couldn't fault him for that. Sometimes, he didn't seem to see that she was on the same side he was. That protecting Sarah was important to her too. Sarah was her friend. The only one who had ever believed in her.

His desire to protect his mate was the only reason she didn't argue about him staying in her room. He looked ready to face an argument, but she didn't give him one. If Sarah wound up doing what she thought she could and came into Cheyenne's dreams, she might need Nick to come to her rescue. Cheyenne wouldn't risk Sarah over some infernal sense of pride.

If only Cheyenne had put on shorts when she'd changed. She'd expected Sarah to show up despite her protests about not wanting to try this thing tonight, but Nick was an extra. Her T-shirt was long, but not long enough for her take comfort in it. Nick, however, hadn't glanced at her body, nor would he, which made her glad. Maybe she had as many personal issues as Crimson? Now that was a scary thought.

Less scary than thinking about what would happen if the dreams turned sexual.

She grabbed a pair of shorts and headed to the bathroom to put them on. “I'll be right back.”

She stepped into the bathroom but didn't pull the door completely closed. She wanted to be out of Nick's line of sight when she raised her shirt. Not that he would care.

Raised voices carried through the crack where the door hadn't shut all the way. She didn't intend to listen. But they weren't trying to whisper, and she could hear them clearly. She pulled the shorts up her legs and hesitated when they snapped into place.

“I can handle this on my own.” Sarah sounded peevish. “I need to find out what I can about this man she's dreaming about.” Sarah probably had her hands on her hips and was giving Nick that look that only she could.

Bless Sarah. There'd never been any doubt expressed by her that this man wasn't real. Even if Cheyenne had her own doubts about her mind, it was nice to know that Sarah had that much faith in her.

"How do you know he's even real? It could be another one of her mind tricks. Something she sees but isn't there. You know she's schizophrenic, *ma petite*." Nick sounded as though he were discussing breakfast cereal.

Again, she knew Nick's motivations, but she had to wince at his direct characterization of her. Yep, "schizophrenic" was one mother of a word.

"Yes, I know what she is." Sarah had never had so much snap in her voice. She sounded irritated. "Better than any of you know her. Remember, I've been inside of her head. None of you have."

Cheyenne could picture Sarah with her mouth tight, teeth clenched as she talked. She had that sound to her. Her words were rattling out of her like a dog on steroids. Oh a dog. A German shepherd. Or maybe a Doberman pinscher. Somehow Sarah had always seemed to be a tenacious pug or a Lab puppy...

Focus.

"I know you've been in her mind." The sound of Nick sitting came to Cheyenne's sensitive ears. It was the *whoosh* of a beanbag chair. *That* Cheyenne couldn't wait to see. Nick would be overflowing the purple blob. "I also know that you're close to her and sometimes that dims your perspective where Chey is concerned."

Sarah snorted. "I have perspective on Chey." Footsteps. "So does Henri. It's the rest of you who have no patience or perspective."

Henri? Cheyenne had never pictured his being on her side. She swallowed, her throat dry and ready to close up. She pulled the cap from the toothpaste and loaded up the brush to do something. She needed her hands busy. Otherwise they'd get into trouble or she'd start babbling nonsense.

"Do you? Regardless, I'm staying here. In this bedroom. I'm not going anywhere until you do, *ma petite*. Nothing you or Cheyenne can say or do will change my mind." He shifted around on the chair, making it rustle.

Cheyenne frowned. She wasn't arguing against this, only Sarah was. Somehow, in Nick's mind, she would be too. Probably crazily. People only remembered what they wanted to. Before the sun rose tomorrow, he'd be telling everyone how she'd been nuts and hadn't wanted him in here.

She slowly lifted the brush up to her mouth to go over her teeth one by one with the brush. *Even vampires got tooth decay*. Which made her laugh. A little too loudly, but it broke the tension within her.

"Everything all right in there?" Nick called out loudly. Sounded as if he was trying to get up from his position on the beanbag chair.

Cheyenne hadn't meant to laugh so loud. "Yeah. Everything is fine and dandy. Brushing my teeth."

More murmured words that she could hear, though they were quieter than the previous ones. "Laughing maniacally when she's brushing her teeth? What's that all about? More symptoms of her not being crazy?"

"Nick. She's holding her own. She's almost through the worst of the vampire transition. She hasn't killed anyone."

"Holding her own from doing what? Going under? Sarah, because she hasn't killed, it doesn't mean she's fine."

Sarah blew out a breath. Or maybe Nick sighed. Hard to tell which one. "Marcus had killed by now."

Nick's voice was harsh and bitter. "Yes. Yes, he had." More rustling from the chair as though he'd tensed.

Marcus had been a vampire Nick had made who'd terrorized Nick and Sarah for a time. Nick didn't like remembering.

"Comparing her to Marcus isn't going to get her a free card to be as crazy as she wants. I knew Marcus, and see how that turned out? I barely know Cheyenne. You're too close to her to see her clearly."

"Okay, it wasn't fair to bring up Marcus." Sarah's voice remained consistent instead of moving around the room. She must still be sitting on the chair. "I get tired of hearing about Cheyenne. Henri doesn't have these concerns. I don't know why you do."

"Because someone has to, ma petite." Now it sounded as if his teeth were clenched.

"No matter how crazy you think she is, I don't know what you think you're going to do tonight. Nothing is going to happen here in this room. It will all be in Cheyenne's mind. Provided I can get in."

"I want to be here in case something does happen. You're not going to convince me otherwise."

"In case what happens?"

"In case you need me."

"Fine." The chair squeaked as Sarah shifted her weight. "I don't know what you think you're going to do, though. This is simple. I'm going to see if I can figure out who this man is. What the dreams are about. It's easy peasy."

"Uh-huh."

"He won't even know I'm there."

"Last time you went into dreams with Marcus, how well did that go? Hell, you were in Cheyenne's daydreams and dreams when she was with Titius. Both times you almost got yourself killed."

Sarah's voice sounded furious. "You can stay, but don't you dare interfere with me. I have to find out what's going on. To protect Chey." Footsteps sounded.

"And I'll protect you, ma petite."

Cheyenne hurriedly began brushing her teeth again. She'd been causing problems between them since the beginning of her association with Sarah. If only she and Sarah hadn't become connected in the first place. Of course, then she never would have met Sarah. She couldn't imagine that.

Sarah spoke from behind her and was reflected in the mirror over Cheyenne's shoulder. "I'm sorry we have an extra person. He's insisting on sticking around for this. I keep telling him I'm not even sure it's going to work."

Cheyenne spit and wiped her mouth. "It's fine. No need to be sorry." Her stomach clenched. Nick was protecting Sarah, as usual. No one would ever do that for Cheyenne. Except maybe Sarah. How long could she keep that up, though? It tore her apart with Nick feeling the way that he did about her when she knew it tore Sarah up inside. "I don't mind his staying."

Sarah looked relieved. "You can sleep in the bed, as we want you comfortably dreaming. I'll take the chair because I can sleep anywhere. Nick can have the floor since he's tagging along."

"I heard that." Nick's voice droned from the other room.

"You were supposed to." Sarah grinned, looking in the mirror. Then a look came onto her face as Cheyenne's eyes met hers in the mirror. A knowing look.

Sarah had figured out if Nick could hear her in the bathroom, then Cheyenne could probably hear them from the bedroom.

Cheyenne smiled in the mirror at Sarah. She was such a smart person. And sane. She mouthed so that Nick couldn't hear, *That's okay too.*

Sarah patted her shoulder. "Let's get some shut-eye. Before night falls. Hopefully you'll have some dreams."

That's what Cheyenne was afraid of.

* * * *

Roc settled down in his hotel room in Northern Virginia. Apparently well-invested money from the 1920s had netted him quite a fortune in funds. Not anything he'd ever worried about the last time he'd traveled, because cash hadn't been required, but it had been nice today. He owed Thomas's family a debt of gratitude that one day he'd repay.

Airplanes and cars were definite perks of this century. Much better than walking or riding horses to get where one needed to be. Much quicker too. *I'm going to like it here.* Hell, anything was better than the tomb.

He looked into the harsh sunshine and lifted his head into the beams of light pouring through the window of the hotel room. Even the itchy sunlight had been welcome today.

He was free. Taking full advantage of that freedom from the tomb that had been his home for so long. There was so much he wanted to do and see. So many new wonders of the world. He'd seen them from the minds of the humans he'd fed from, but nothing could compare to seeing them up close. Now he

could find all that wonder and take part in it. Soon Cheyenne would do and see all with him too. Once he found her.

He stretched as he stripped off his clothes before putting them on a chair. The air tickled his body with coolness. As hot as it was out there, it was nice and chilled in here. Air-conditioning. Yes, this century had a lot of perks.

If only Cheyenne were here to tickle more than his skin.

His cock tightened as he remembered her against him. Like with seeing the wonders of the world, it would be much better up close and in person.

He didn't know where she was. Not exactly. He hoped to get to Richmond tomorrow and find her. Surely she wasn't far. He'd stopped only because of the blazing sun and the tiredness in his limbs. He needed his strength and his wits about him, which he wouldn't have if he didn't rest. He would especially need all his faculties if he encountered Orrick. No matter how much he wanted to see Cheyenne, he needed this stop.

He also needed to feed. He'd been drawing energy in but needed to stop and concentrate on filtering the amount of life force he needed. Didn't want to sap too much from any one person in his haste and hunger.

After some sleep and a good meal, it was off to Richmond.

He didn't know exactly how he'd find her, but he'd find a way. He always did. Maybe he could dream while asleep and get clues from her about where she was. Nothing could keep him away from "the one," which Cheyenne must be, for long. He'd waited for her for a thousand years. What were a few more hours and days of searching? When one measured age by millennia, he couldn't be too choosy. He'd been made when mankind was still young enough to be foolish.

Who had the Celtic gods who'd made him been? He had no idea, not even after a thousand years to ruminate on the subject. It didn't matter anyway. All that mattered was finding Cheyenne. Defeating Orrick even came a short second to that.

When he tried to sleep, Roc heard the deafening blows that had killed his friends. His followers. Orrick might not have struck the blows, but he'd been the cause. Orrick's time on earth would be short now. He'd see to that.

He settled onto the huge bed, stretching out. It had room for his long body. He'd grown while he'd been in the healing sleep. No other explanation for why the tomb had been too big when he'd gone into it, but been tight when he'd come out of his healing sleep. He didn't understand it, nor did he try to.

He lay this way and that on the bed, restlessly moving around. Kept thinking of Cheyenne and finding her. Taking her. Making her his. Making her "the one." Sleep was a while in granting Roc a respite.

Cheyenne glided over to him, glancing furtively around. Her feet barely seemed to touch the floor. Her smile was strained and tight. She wore light clothing that showed her arms and legs, to his distraction.

"Lover." He rolled over on his side to face her directly. To look into her eyes and be able to touch her. "Cheyenne, I've missed you." It had been too long without her in his dreams. He was impatient to find her in reality. To touch and taste her for real. To see if the dreams had any chance of measuring up to the real thing. "I need to ask..."

She placed a finger to his lips, searing them shut. Her touch was hotter than the hottest ember. She leaned in to whisper against him. "They're watching." Her breath tickled him, even as her words made him glare.

He stared into her dark eyes. "Who's watching?" He couldn't see beyond her beautiful face.

She came against him without his having seen her lie down. Her body touched his with its warmth. She fitted her curves against him. Plastered herself against his body, skin burning wherever she touched.

He was lost to the feel of her breasts pressing against him. Of the sliver of musk scent that ran up and down him. He groaned, unable to keep the sound from erupting. He clutched her tighter.

He lowered his lips and lightly touched his to hers. Ran his tongue over the seam of her delicious mouth.

She moved as if she'd pull back. Pull away from him? Like hell she would. He needed this. She needed it too.

He grabbed her ass to keep her against him. Couldn't lose the feel of her. Rubbed his cock along her, making her squirm against him, which inflamed him even more. He wanted to rip her clothes from her body and sink into her depths. If only she were naked against him. He'd better work to fix that. His hands crept up to the back of her T-shirt to the bottom of the material.

Her hand slid up to his chest to make him burn with its presence. Again she whispered, "They're watching, Roc." She glanced behind her with a nervous twitch.

Again, he couldn't see what she did. Who watched them? Dammit, he'd kill them if he could only see them.

Her eyes widened as she looked at him. "Something's different." Her hands reached back to touch him, where before she'd been pulling away.

He luxuriated in her touch. "What's different? Who's watching?" He leaned into her fingertips. Sparks glided down his skin, setting off fire wherever they touched.

She looked around her but didn't seem to find what she was looking for. "Maybe she couldn't get in."

"Who?"

Her full attention turned back to him. She rubbed her hand along his shoulders. His skin tingled where her body slid against his. "Doesn't matter. You're different. Why are you different?"

He looked down to see her hand wander to the front of his chest. Liked the sight of her dark skin against his own tanned flesh. He didn't see anything different about himself, though. He was the same as he'd always been. "I'm not different."

She shook her head. "You are."

"How?" He continued to lean into her fingers, which were rubbing him back and forth now.

"You're..." She frowned. Pulled back her hand but then put it forward again so that it was touching him. "I can't explain it exactly."

"Try." He moved his hand up under her shirt to stroke her silky back. "Tell me how I'm different."

"It's like you're more solid. More alive. Something about you is more." She leaned her head back, rubbing against his touch. "Everything about you is more."

His lips curled up into a smile. "So I was less before?" He went under her arm to tickle her. Tease her. Knock out this nervousness before it caused some tension between them.

She chuckled and tried to pull away from him, but he kept her against him. "No. You weren't less before. But you're more there now than you were a few days ago."

His head came up as he realized something. There was only one difference between the last time they'd been together and now. It wasn't anything that she should be able to sense. Not in dreams. No one should be able to tell. "Do I seem more alive?" He tossed it out to see what she'd say.

"Yes!" She blanched at her yelling the answer, looked around again with a frown. "That's it. You're more alive." She looked triumphant to have realized this.

Cheyenne had the power of an utmost psychic. She had to. It was the only way she could know anything about what he'd been before and was now. "It's because I am, sweetheart. I'm finally free."

"What do you mean?"

"I was in a healing sleep. In a grave. Now, I'm out. I'm awake." Was he ever. He pulled her closer against him, tightening his hold on her. He rubbed her back under her shirt and carefully scooted her around. He could soon hold her with real arms. Feel her body against him beyond the dreams. He slipped his hips down and rubbed his cock against her center. "I'm here, Cheyenne. I'm out of the grave and ready to come for you."

"You mean...you're awake? You're not sleeping anymore?" Her eyebrows knitted together. At least she'd stopped looking for whoever she was worried about. "Oh, Roc, that's wonderful."

He nodded. Slipped his hand up to her breast. Her nipple promptly perked, and her stomach contracted from an inhaled breath. "I'm awake. Alive. Ready for anything." He leaned in to meet her lips while his hands massaged her breast.

Their tongues met in a flurry of a dance. He pulled his mouth from hers. Kept his hand on her breast. "I need to know where you are. Where you live."

She looked dazed as she stared back at him. Placed her hands against on his shoulders. "So there. You're so there."

He'd noticed before that she had little focus at times. "I know. I'm awake." He'd had no idea that coming out of his healing sleep would be something that she could perceive. "I need to know where you are. I need a city. An address. I need to find you." He squeezed her nipple between his fingers and rolled it around. Lightly. Then released her. "Tell me, Cheyenne."

Her entire body shuddered in tandem with the touch. "Where are you? You're not as far away as you were either, are you?"

He leaned down to press a kiss at the base of her throat. Tasted her honeyed, salty flesh. "I'm in the United States. If you're where I think you are, I'm closer to you, sweetheart. I need you to tell me the rest of the way." He laved a line down her throat to the top of her T-shirt and pushed both hands up to rip it in two pieces down the front. An address would be a start. He could request a map. His car even had mapping software. More than anything else, he needed to see her. To indulge.

"Hey!"

He lowered his head to her breast. Sucked it into his mouth to prod it with his tongue. Then he withdrew his mouth. "Tell me where you are."

She swallowed, looking around. "You're in the States?" Her mouth quivered as though she couldn't control it. Was she happy and hopeful? Or sad with his proximity?

"Yes. I'm looking for you." She was the reason he'd put himself in the ground all those years ago. She had to be.

"I'm in Richmond, Virginia." Her eyes rolled back as her head thumped down. "I'm living at..."

"Stop." The voice echoed through the dream with brilliant shades of color that wrapped around them both.

Cheyenne looked up into a vibrant red, which floated around them and settled onto Roc. "What was that?"

"Cheyenne, stop. Do not tell him where you are." The small voice continued on a tirade. "Don't tell him anything."

"Who the fuck are you to tell her what she can tell and what she can't?" Roc didn't release Cheyenne but held her tighter. She shook like a leaf in a strong summer storm.

"I'm her guardian. Her friend. That's who I am. Which is more than I can say for you." The voice was one of a woman. Small and tinkly. "I'm more interested in who you are. What do you want with Cheyenne?"

* * * *

Cheyenne rocked back and forth. She wasn't sure if it was in the dream or in her sleep. *Please help me.* She wasn't even sure whom she asked.

Sarah turned toward her. "Cheyenne?" She hadn't had a body before. She'd been a light. Had she manifested herself, or had Cheyenne started seeing her corporeal form? She didn't know. Sarah had made it into her dreams. With Roc. Not good.

Cheyenne pulled her shirt remnants together. At least he hadn't starting making love to her yet. That would have been more embarrassing.

Marroc turned toward her too, with worry lines creasing his face like little trails. "Sweetheart?"

They both said at the same time, *"Stop that, you're hurting her."* They confronted each other with defiance evident on both their faces.

Cheyenne rocked back and forth on the bed. Couldn't help either one. Could only watch as they went round and round.

Sarah glowered at both of them. "Don't tell him anything. We don't even know who this is."

Roc drew himself to his full height, towering over the petite woman, who didn't back down an inch. "I'm Marroc." He looked proud. Proud as a general.

Cheyenne's hand shook. Titius.

If he was expecting Sarah to knuckle under his authority, Cheyenne could tell him she never would. *"Roc..."* She switched gears, surprising even herself with the question. *"Were you ever a soldier?"*

"Uh yeah. Long time ago."

The man she'd dreamed of had been a soldier. Of course she'd known things about Titius too. Somehow the dreams and her visions had gotten combined.

Sarah snorted. "Marroc, my butt. Who do you think you are? Cheyenne, tell him nothing. Remember Titius."

Cheyenne whimpered. It was as though Sarah had read her mind as she was thinking of the general. She remembered him every damn day. Even with Roc appearing more in her dreams, she thought often about Titius and what he'd done to her. What he'd done to her. Her mind was such a shifting tower of ideas. She couldn't afford to make another mistake. The last one had almost cost Sarah her life.

"Sarah, I will find Cheyenne. I will claim her as mine. She's 'the one.' She's mine." Roc shrugged. "That's the way it is."

Shivers rocked Cheyenne at the way Roc said "mine." His voice grew so possessive. At the same time, trepidation filled her. How well did she know him? Sarah did have a point on some of her rantings.

"Over my dead body."

The words chilled Cheyenne down to the bone. She whimpered and thrashed about on the bed as if in denial of something.

Roc's smile was humorless and a little cruel. "Stand between me and her, and you might get your wish." He flexed the taut muscles in his arms.

Cheyenne straightened up her body. "You will not hurt Sarah. Ever." Her voice came tighter than bullets. "Monkeys will fly on the trampoline."

Both Sarah and Roc blinked at her.

She hadn't made sense again. Dammit, even in her dreams she was losing more and more of herself.

Roc was the first to recover. "This woman is your friend?"

"More like a sister." They'd been joined together for so long. Sarah had stayed in her mind at times even after their dreams had been delinked to keep her stable. Unfortunately that had stopped working.

Roc nodded and bowed to her. "If you wish her to remain unharmed, I will do so. For you and you only."

He'd never break his word. Sarah was safe.

"Oh give me a break. Don't do me any favors." Sarah was mad. Not something that Cheyenne or anyone else saw often.

It made Cheyenne want to shrink into the floor. She could melt into it like some wicked witch from the Wizard of Oz.

Roc reached for her, sensing her distress, and Sarah pulled her behind her so he couldn't touch her. She kept Cheyenne's hand in hers, squeezing her fingers. "You're all right, Chey."

When chickens flew. Oh wait, they did fly.

"I know you want to protect Cheyenne." He folded his arms in front of his chest. He opened his mouth to say more, but Sarah interrupted.

"Damn straight."

Cheyenne startled. Sarah didn't curse. Ever. She'd only heard one other curse word from her. About Titius. This was not a good sign.

"I want that too. Let me find her. Prove it to you. Help keep her safe."

Sarah shook her head. "I don't think so. I don't trust you." Her lip curled up to show a fang. "No offense."

Roc clenched one hand. "How can I prove it to you if you won't let me find her? If you won't let me be with her?"

"You can't prove it to me. You've been visiting her in dreams. Invading her mind without her permission. Leave her alone. Now."

Cheyenne stepped out from behind Sarah. "He's never hurt me."

"Only because he can't actually get to you." Sarah took Cheyenne by the shoulders. "He's invaded your dreams for years."

"That's not hurting me."

Sarah blew out a breath. Frustrated by Cheyenne most likely. Bad. Sarah never got frustrated.

Cheyenne cringed, moving away from her friend. She couldn't take the two of them fighting like this. Her arms wrapped around her head.

Sarah grabbed her again. "If he was so concerned with you and your well-being, what about Titius?"

"I would kill anyone who hurts her." Roc shifted around as though looking for the enemy. "Who is this Titius? What did he do?"

"I didn't see you there when things went down with Titius. Did you, Chey? Did you see him protecting you?"

"I was in a healing sleep." Roc ran a hand through his hair. "I couldn't wake up. I couldn't come to her."

"You're here now." Sarah snorted again. "Who knows where you were back then. You didn't show your face to Chey. Because of that she trusted a madman. For God's sake, put on some clothes. No one wants to see your wanker."

"This is a dream. Mine and Cheyenne's. You don't like my being naked, get out." Roc turned toward Cheyenne.

She rolled over in the bed and twisted the covers around her. "No."

"Who are you saying no to? Who is this woman?" Roc turned his head to Sarah. "How did you get in here anyway? Why can't I push you out?"

Sarah's smile was sinister. "I'm her friend. A true friend. I can feel you beating against my mind. Keep on. You'll never get me out."

Cheyenne rocked in her dream as well as on the bed. She could feel the soothing motions. "Sarah, he's not dangerous."

"How do you know?"

Cheyenne bit her lip. "How did you know Nick wasn't dangerous?"

Sarah's face grew thoughtful, and she didn't answer.

Roc looked back and forth between them both. "Who is Nick?"

"Nick Mancuso. He's Sarah's"—What? Boyfriend or lover didn't seem to cover what Nick was to Sarah—"mate." The one thing that Cheyenne liked him for. He was good for Sarah. Good to her too.

Sarah moved between them again. "Nick didn't come into my dreams uninvited." She stared Roc down.

"That seems to be a big issue with you." It was. Marcus had done that to Sarah and terrorized her. Roc moved around Sarah to Cheyenne. "Do you want me in your dreams?" He was asking permission.

She could say no and make Sarah happy and Roc pissed. She could say yes and have Roc happy and Sarah pissed. Either way this wasn't going to go well.

Sarah intervened before Cheyenne could answer. It was a rough spot to be in. "That's hardly fair. The time to do that was before you entered the first time."

Roc's lips thinned. "I can't win with you. No matter what I do, you have an answer to why it's not right for Cheyenne."

"I'm her protector. I will keep her safe."

It was as much of an admission as Roc would get. He was right. Sarah was going to find fault with whatever he did.

Roc turned away. "She doesn't need protection from me. Did she give you permission to come into her dreams?"

"Yes." Sarah hissed as Roc continued to walk away. "I would never... Where are you going?"

"Away, like you want me to from a situation I can't win." He turned around and looked into Cheyenne's eyes. "Remember I'll always come back for you, Cheyenne. Remember the dreams." He walked through the wall and disappeared.

"Not if I"—Sarah's voice shifted from Cheyenne's mind to her ears—"have anything to say about it."

Nick was now on the bed beside Cheyenne. Sarah was in the armchair. "What happened? Cheyenne kept moving around and talking in her sleep." His hair had grown wild. "I almost woke her up a couple of times."

"He came." Her voice grew a little unsteady. "I think he's real. He's real and in her dreams."

Nick settled back on the floor, sitting down. "Who came? Who was he?" He looked ready to pounce.

"Marroc. The one who's been visiting her dreams." Sarah tapped her foot on the floor impatiently. "Cheyenne didn't tell him anything about where we are, but she did tell him your full name. He can use that to track you."

Cheyenne hadn't even realized she'd done that. The only reason she wouldn't have told him where they lived was Sarah's insistence. "He didn't hurt Sarah. Or me." All Nick would care about was the former.

Sarah nodded. "He didn't. He was insistent on her telling him where she is. He wants her. Won't stop at anything to get her." Her face convulsed into one big frown. "I think we've got problems. He's strong. He almost kicked me from his head. I get the feeling he's not at his full power yet. When he does get his strength, and he wants her...it's going to get bad."

That was one thing Sarah said that Cheyenne agreed with.

Chapter Five

Roc dropped his arms by his sides as he walked along the sidewalk near the rental property. The sun was setting over the horizon. It cast a red and orange glow across the sky. He'd never seen a more beautiful sunset. Probably because it was the first he'd seen in a thousand years. He'd been too busy traveling and looking for Cheyenne to see one before now.

He'd gone for a walk to clear himself mentally for the task to come. Also, he'd gone out because he'd grown tired of sitting in the house waiting for the right time to try and contact Cheyenne again. He'd been cooped up too long and didn't want to be anymore.

It had been two long days since he'd last seen Cheyenne. The little minx Sarah thought she could keep Cheyenne from him. She had another think coming. She'd learn her lesson. He'd keep his promise to Cheyenne and not hurt the little one, but he would have contact.

The air was heavy with heat and the scents of the nearby river. The James River. Richmond, Virginia.

He'd fed. He'd come to the city where Cheyenne was. He was seeing the sights but not yet what he wanted to see. What he needed to see.

He'd tracked Nick Mancuso here. He'd been heading to Richmond anyway, so it wasn't out of his way. It was a bonus that the man happened to have arrived by plane many months ago and hadn't flown back out. Now he needed to find them. He'd be one step closer to claiming Cheyenne, "the one" he'd been seeking for so long.

He reflexively checked the minds of the humans around him. Nothing much except thoughts of getting fucked, fucked up, or fucked off captured their minds. He took a nugget of life force here and there.

He'd learned how to feed from the bits that he could sample. It wouldn't hurt them. They'd never even miss the scraps of soul he took.

He reached his rented house with a small garden courtyard on Monument Avenue and settled down on a bench by the delightful fountain on a pool full of koi. He liked the water running so peacefully. His life had at times been anything but peaceful. The scent of lily of the valley drifted on the breeze along with something else sweet that he couldn't identify. Probably another flower in the garden.

He centered his mind and focused himself as the moon came across the sky. He found his powers more clearly honed when used at night. Perhaps that

was because he was the first. Maybe that was why night gave him more power. Or perhaps that was true for all of his kind.

He'd never tried to contact Cheyenne when he was awake. 'Course he'd never been awake during their entwined lifetime before now. He'd never tried to contact her while she'd been awake either—not consciously—although at times, he'd sensed she hadn't been asleep. He needed her to remember every detail of what he was about to tell her, so he wanted her conscious.

He focused on the dripping of the fountain and let his feelers roam free. Maybe he'd find a location for her on this probing mission too. Even if he didn't, he had a meeting place in mind. He'd get Cheyenne one way or another.

He found Cheyenne's mind. A chaotic homing beacon that called his attention. He'd noticed the ripples in her mind many times before. Cheyenne wasn't the sanest person. Promptly after finding Cheyenne, small beatings flashed across his frontal lobe like the sound of a thousand bat wings.

Sarah.

She'd been attempting to keep him out of Cheyenne's mind the past few days. She'd put a shield in place to block him. He hadn't pushed it, simply felt the barrier in place the last couple of nights with his mind.

Giving Sarah a false sense of security.

His mind strengthened with every journey it took. With every feeding he sucked down. He'd used his mind over the last years but not like he did while awake. Not to mention he had less power asleep than he held awake. He'd had to warm up to it. Sarah had dealt with a lesser version of his mind in the last dreaming. An old version.

Now he was about to give her a full taste of what he could do.

She would learn not to stand in his way. She was clever, having put the shield up at night while Cheyenne was awake. She'd figured he'd try to branch beyond their former capabilities to probably to take her by surprise.

Not a bad plan.

Sarah was a formidable woman. He'd try to make her his ally. He could use her in the coming battle with Orrick.

First, he had to take her down a peg or two.

He shoved with his mind until it lay beside Cheyenne's, parallel to it. He brushed across Sarah's mind a few times. Testing. Checking for weak points. Not that he needed them to break across, but it would make things easier. She had a phenomenal mind. Yes, after this he'd better make her his ally. Unfortunately, before he could do that, he would piss her off.

One harsh shove and he knocked Sarah away from Cheyenne's psyche and slipped inside. She now beat at him, trying to drive him from Cheyenne's mind. Trying to oust him and make him withdraw. Not likely to happen. Not until he was ready.

He pressed his lips together. Concentrated. Shoved her completely out from Cheyenne's mind to the beyond. He'd found it more difficult than he'd thought it would be. He could taste her anger pouring out. The action was necessary, though, to give Cheyenne a message.

He heard Sarah's anxious frustrations as she rejoined them, trying to beat herself back inside and tip the scale to her mind. He kept her out but not without effort.

"Cheyenne. Not much time. Echo Lake Park. Midnight. Tomorrow."

He felt her nod that she'd heard him. Why wasn't she surprised at his presence? Because she knew he'd stop at nothing to get to her. She didn't comment, but all the tension drifted from her body. She'd be there to meet him.

He waited a few seconds, holding Sarah from getting back in. Didn't need the extra time, but Sarah needed the practice of trying to reenter. She should have been able to shove back harder than she had with the strong mind he'd sensed earlier. After a few more seconds, he willingly broke down his barriers and allowed her back inside Cheyenne's mind. *"As you were."* He slowly faded himself, letting Sarah know that she'd had nothing to do with his leaving.

Sarah sputtered in anger as he faded away from them. The message had been delivered and received. Now, would Cheyenne come as he'd sensed she would?

* * * *

Sarah did everything but curse as she railed from her position in the kitchen. "Did he do anything to you?"

Cheyenne shook her head. "He didn't hurt me, if that's what you're asking." She'd missed him. Missed Roc visiting her head. It had felt like old times as he'd drifted into her consciousness. Awake. She'd been awake this time. Usually in her waking state, the contact was rare and short. "The gumbos is clawed and fresh and will be a riot tonight."

Sarah didn't acknowledge her loss of control even as Cheyenne cringed over it. "You're sure he didn't hurt you. Or say anything to you?"

Cheyenne swallowed. Hard to get past the lump in her throat. "No. Nothing hurt. No messages in bottles or even in Styrofoam cups." She hated lying to Sarah. That was probably why the nonsense words were worse right at this moment. She had to see Marroc somewhere beyond the dreams. She had to find out if he was real. He'd been such a part of her for so long. Sarah would never let her.

Nick came running into the kitchen. "I heard you yelling..." He looked between the two of them, reading their faces. "He came back."

Sarah nodded. She bit her lip. "He got in, Nick. I couldn't hold him back. Couldn't stay in once he got inside of her. I couldn't kick him out."

Nick's face tensed. "Are you both okay?" He fixed his gaze on Sarah. He might have asked about them both, but his first concern was her.

Cheyenne's throat tickled at the emotion Nick showed over the fact his woman might have been hurt. Reminded her again of how she'd never had that in her life.

Sarah nodded as he enveloped her in his arms. "Did you hear what I said? He got in." She shook her head and looked mournful. "I wasn't strong enough." A single tear escaped her eye.

Cheyenne almost tripped in her haste but walked over to Sarah and Nick. She had to assuage Sarah's guilt. "You were fine, Sarah. He was stronger." The words left her mouth before she'd thought them through. Not the best thing to say. Dammit.

Nick rolled his eyes. "That's helpful."

Sarah frowned, her eyes narrowing. "No, she's right. He was stronger than I was. How can that be? How's that possible?"

"What do you mean?" Cheyenne picked up the bagels she'd dropped on the floor at the initial shock of Roc coming into her while she was awake. He hadn't been in her dreams this time, and his presence was so strong. She placed the bag on the counter.

The large walk-in kitchen had counters everywhere, including an island bar with stools. It had dark wood accents and marble countertops. All the fixtures were copper. Not to mention it had every appliance known to man. They'd rented the house stocked, and stocked it had been. Nathan had particularly liked the blender and the ice-cream maker.

"How can he be stronger than I am?" Sarah sat down on a bar stool. "I'm not being cocky, Nick." From anyone else, Cheyenne wouldn't have believed them, but Sarah didn't do cocky. "I'm stronger than both you and Henri. You're both older and my mentors. How can this vampire be stronger than I am?"

"My mind's not fierce, ma petite." Nick laughed ruefully. He'd never been circumspect about the fact Sarah was a stronger vampire than he was on the psychic level. "I'm not much to compare to. Henri is, though."

She stroked his jawline. "You do have a brilliant mind." She pressed a quick kiss to his lips. Didn't linger. "This vampire. How can he be so strong? Henri has never heard of him?"

Henri had said he didn't know who was stronger, Cheyenne or Sarah. Only Cheyenne was crippled by her instability. Her mind was hampered by the illness she couldn't seem to shake. She shivered. They didn't even know how unstable she felt at times. "Marroc was buried for years. That's why Henri hasn't heard of him."

Sarah's nose wrinkled. "Henri's Egyptian from when there were pharaohs. He's heard of most of the older vampires in one form or another. Why hasn't he heard of this one?"

Nick moved back from her. "Henri hasn't heard of every vampire in the world. He's good, but he's not that good."

"I beg to differ." Nathan's voice preceded him. "He's very, very good." He rounded the corner to the kitchen with a grin and looked at the three of them. His expression turned serious. "What happened? Who died?"

"Marroc came." Sarah twisted in the bar chair. It squeaked. "He got into Chey's mind around me. Then he shoved me out and wouldn't let me back in until he was done." She sounded so offended.

Nathan breathed a "wow" and stopped short.

Cheyenne sat on a bar stool next to Sarah. Now that Nathan and Henri were involved, this was going to take all day. She'd better sit down for the discussion. Where Nathan was, Henri wouldn't be far behind.

As if on cue, Henri breezed into the kitchen. If he noticed the biting air of the people in there, he didn't comment. "Bonsoir."

Nathan padded to the refrigerator. His bare feet made slapping sounds on the dark tile. "You tell him."

Cheyenne sighed. Yeah, this was going to be a long discussion. Might not be resolved before she had to sneak away to see Marroc. How was she going to get away? They'd probably give her enough time to figure that out during this long-winded dissertation on why Marroc wasn't good for her. She settled in for the long haul.

"Henri, Marroc came. He slid past Sarah into Chey's mind and kicked her out. Blocked her from access." Nick summed it up. Without commentary. His tense body indicated his mood about the current situation.

Henri stopped by Cheyenne, looked to Sarah, and blew out a whistle. "Been a long time since anyone has bested you."

Nathan pulled a blood bag from the fridge and put it in the microwave. "Yes, it has been. I think she's a little put out with that."

Sarah nodded with a little blush creeping up her cheeks. "I know it's been a while. What should we do about it, Henri?" Her eyes looked desperate. Haunted.

Cheyenne turned her way. "Sarah, it's okay." Sarah felt like she had failed Cheyenne. Cheyenne didn't know what to do to assure Sarah that she hadn't. Words didn't seem to be enough.

"No, it's not." Sarah's head swiveled back to Henri after she'd barely looked at Cheyenne. She surely hadn't meant to, but it felt like a dismissal to Cheyenne. Cheyenne bit her lip as Sarah continued, "What are we going to do?"

"What do you mean?"

The microwave *dinged*, and Nathan removed his blood. He stirred it with a spoon before pouring it in a cup and putting the spoon in the sink with a *clang*.

"What do we do about Marroc? He can get to Cheyenne around me. How can we stop him from contacting her?"

Cheyenne twiddled with her thumbs. Sarah wanted what was best for her. It was still frustrating to sit and listen to them talking about her like she wasn't

even there. She didn't want the visits from Marroc to stop. He was the most real thing in her mind right now. That, and her love for Sarah. Only those two things kept her sane. Could she resolve her mind's foibles without Marroc? She didn't know.

Henri cocked his head. "If Marroc can get around you, and you are the strongest mind here, what do you propose we do?"

Sarah looked stymied. "What? There has to be something."

Henri shrugged. "I'm not sure there is anything we can do. If Marroc wants to get in, it appears he shall. If you cannot stop him, I know I cannot. Neither can Nick or Nathan."

"There has to be something."

"Again, what do you propose?"

Cheyenne briefly closed her eyes. Henri didn't seem all that upset about this turn of events. Maybe he wasn't as protective of her as she thought. If only she could calm down Sarah.

Nick frowned but didn't say anything.

"I don't know." The words bit from Sarah's mouth like needles. "You're telling me we can't block him from Cheyenne? That Marroc can contact her anytime he darn well pleases? We need to protect her from him!"

"Why?" Henri picked up a cracker and nibbled a few pieces from it. Small amounts of human food were acceptable, but in large amounts, vampires got sick to their stomach. Nathan and she had once eaten too much chocolate. They'd been sick for hours. Henri took a sip from Nathan's cup, earning him a glare from the blond giant.

Sarah's face went slack as though she hadn't considered the question. Words broke free from her in gusts. "Because he's contacting her. He's getting into her mind. She can't control that."

Nick interjected, backing up Sarah. "He got around Sarah to do that. He must be one strong bastard to do that."

"I agree with strong." Henri looked thoughtful. "Only I haven't seen anything where he's done anything harmful so far."

"The elephants get peanuts at the circus." Cheyenne couldn't stop the words from guzzling forth. She bit down on her lip to keep more from escaping.

Henri's eyes were neither concerned nor unaware of her blabbering outburst. "That they do."

Sarah looked miserable after Cheyenne's gibberish. "We have to do something to keep him from Chey's mind!"

Sarah's exclamation made Cheyenne jump. Why was this so important to Sarah? Was it because Sarah hadn't felt like she'd protected Cheyenne from Titius? Sarah had been off-kilter at Cheyenne's taking over her mind and their minds switching places for a while, which had explained Sarah's lack of strength against Titius. Hard to be strong when you have a crazy person's mind

linked to yours. Did Sarah blame herself for that? Cheyenne didn't. "Sarah, it's okay."

Henri smiled at her. Nodded to her and patted her hand. "Why, Sarah? Why do we have to do anything? Explain it to me. Why this upsets you so much."

Who was more surprised at that, Sarah or Cheyenne? Cheyenne couldn't tell. Maybe Henri was on her side after all.

Sarah sputtered. "He invades her mind. Without permission. She can't stop him. Can't kick him out. He does whatever he pleases in there."

Henri appeared to consider that argument from Sarah. "Cheyenne, do you want Marroc kicked from your mind?" He snapped another cracker, acting as if he asked that question every day.

Cheyenne opened her mouth, only to close it. Sarah wouldn't be happy with her true answer.

"Cheyenne. Answer my question."

"I don't want him...to not be able to contact me." She winced even as she said the words. It would not go over well. She wanted that contact with Marroc. Needed it. No one would understand that.

Nick looked furious at the answer she gave.

Sarah cocked her head to the side. "Henri, you know that Cheyenne has...problems." She got stuck on the final word.

Schizophrenia. Yep, a big problem for most. So much for Henri's support. He'd been reminded of Cheyenne's biggest flaw. That would influence his arguments from here on out. He didn't tolerate insanity well.

"You said she's stable. That's she's 'holding her own.'" Henri's face took on a shrewd look. "Isn't that what you say every time we have a meeting?"

Cheyenne almost gasped as she saw what he was getting at. He'd taken what Sarah said and turned it around. She couldn't be sane at one thing and crazy at the next.

"Yes, but..."

Henri waved a hand with a cracker clutched in his fingers. "Either she's stable and can make decisions like this for herself. Or she's not stable enough, Sarah. You can't have it both ways. You've argued her sanity for months."

"But...but...but..."

Henri looked to Cheyenne. "Do you think Marroc is a danger to you? Tell me honestly what you feel."

Cheyenne shook her head. Wide-eyed. Henri was settling into being her biggest ally. She'd always thought he was on the other side. The side that thought her fucked-up. Her stomach did flip-flops. As he was the one who would kill her if she ever went too far over the crazy line, this was a boon she thought she'd never see.

"There you have it. Cheyenne knows this presence better than anyone. Thus far she's the only one who has had contact with him."

"Henri." Nick tightly clutched Sarah's hand. "Don't you think...we should be a little more worried? Cheyenne's not the best judge of people. She doesn't have the best track record. We should take some precautions at least."

Henri's attention turned back to Cheyenne. "Has Marroc hurt you in any way?" Again his eyes pierced hers, searching for her answer.

Cheyenne shook her head again. Her hand went under her to touch the smooth leather of her seat. She became obsessed with the way the material felt under her fingertips.

"Has he hurt any of your friends?"

"No." He hadn't, nor would he. He'd promised about Sarah. She'd never let him. Marroc sensed that in her.

"Has he come in to you when you truly don't want him in your mind?"

"No." There'd even been once when she'd asked him to leave. A bad time in her life. He'd left. He came to her because she *did* want him there.

"I fail to see where Marroc is a danger to Cheyenne yet, by her own accounts of what he's done. Titius was the cruel son of a bitch and was from the start. To Cheyenne. Therefore why should we worry about Marroc contacting her when he hasn't done anything bad to her?" Henri bit off part of his cracker.

Nathan stirred his blood with another spoon he'd grabbed from the drawer. The rusty scent drifted over the counter to Cheyenne. Tickled her nose.

"Henri." Sarah blew out a frustrated breath. Her eyes snapped with green fire. Another rare case of Sarah getting angry. "I don't think you understand."

"I understand perfectly." Henri took another sip of Nathan's drink.

"Hey!" Nathan grabbed the cup back. "Mine. You want my meal, you'll have to pay." He suddenly grinned and pushed the mug back toward Henri. "On second thought, drink the whole thing."

Their playful loving always filled Cheyenne with a sense that all was right in the world. The affection they had for each other was tangible. Her hands ran over and over the smooth leather. "The albatross won't go to sleep."

Henri looked fondly at his lover as he made a show of taking a big sip of the blood. "Birds sometimes sleep standing up so they appear like they don't slumber." He acknowledged her before moving on but didn't react like she didn't know what she was talking about. "I understand your fears, Sarah. Marroc has not proven himself to be a Marcus. Or a Titius." He handed the cup back to Nathan.

Sarah gasped. Sucked in a breath. Didn't reply.

Ah yes. Cheyenne had almost forgotten about Marcus during this conversation. That's why Sarah was being so protective of her. Marcus had gotten in to Sarah's head and used her. To horrible ends. Cheyenne didn't

know the whole story. That coupled with what had happened with Titius would definitely influence Sarah's thoughts on Marroc. "Marroc isn't Marcus. He's..." She swallowed. She couldn't quite say he was good. She didn't have enough data. She couldn't say he was bad either. "I have to find out for myself what he is."

Henri looked approving. "I see."

Nick appraised his mentor. "You know something." His mouth twisted. "That's why you're not more concerned."

Henri shrugged. "It's neither here nor there what I know or think I know. I'm only evaluating the evidence at hand."

"What about all the people who died around him in her dreams? On that note, could a human put a vampire in a healing sleep?" Sarah's face still looked pained.

As aggravated as she was, she still wanted to have her curiosity sated. Only Sarah would do that.

"I've never heard of it. That doesn't mean a psychic couldn't lull a vampire to sleep. Especially a strong one. As for the people in the dream, sounds like they did themselves in. This Marroc didn't have anything to do with it."

He hadn't. For once, Henri seemed to be on her side. Cheyenne quelled her shaking hands. Would make it easier to slip out later.

Sarah continued to glare at Henri. "We need to make sure Marroc is what he says he is before he gets free access to Cheyenne. If you won't protect her"—she shook her head, red hair flying—"I will."

Nathan downed the last of his cup. "How about those Spiders?" He offered a subject change. From a conversation that Sarah wouldn't let go.

No one said anything to that. Nor did Henri respond to Sarah.

"I mean the basketball team."

Still more silence.

"University of Richmond? College team?"

Nick looked away to hide his grin at all Nathan's explanations. He sobered when he saw Sarah's face.

"Come on, people. They rock. Rojo and I need tickets..."

"Big, fat, hairy spiders? I'd hit them with a shoe." Cheyenne often had. The house she'd lived in before had been breezy. No, she wouldn't think of that home now. It had been a lifetime ago.

The man she'd trusted had killed her mother.

Her stomach did cartwheels. Marroc was nothing like Titius. She kept telling herself that.

But was he?

Nathan's head lifted. "Hey, where are the Red Duo anyway?" Crimson and Rojo both had names related to the color red, so Nathan had termed them the Red Duo.

Henri tittered before he answered. "Gone."

Now he had everyone's attention.

Crimson and Rojo had just gotten back. Cheyenne hadn't even gotten a chance to say good-bye. If Sarah were her older sister, Crimson was a cousin. Older. Protective. Someone you could run around with. She might not stand up for Cheyenne at those meetings but she cared. And wanted to help her.

"They had a trip to make. Bastian and Copper too. They're together." Henri waved a hand as if dismissing them all.

Nick's eyes glimmered. "You do know something." He continued to look at Henri as if waiting for him to say something.

Henri looked mock surprised. "Me? I know little, my student." Another cracker went in, and he set the box aside.

Untrue. He always knew lots. More than Cheyenne wanted him to at times. She had a feeling he could see everything inside of her. One reason he made her so nervous.

His eyes seemed to delve into her inner recesses. How far into her psyche had he gone? Did he know about the meeting?

Didn't matter. She had to go.

* * * *

Roc stood with his hands behind his back, looking at the lake beside the trail. Water lapped at the shore as fountains rained down recirculated water in a spray of proportioned size. There were two of them. One nearer to the road and the other on the backside of the lake.

A duck quacked in the distance. Roc sighed and took step around the trunk of a tree. A goose honked absently at him from the water.

The nearby playground gleamed in the moonlight—a plastic and metal fortress of climbing instruments and one oddly shaped merry-go-round. He'd never seen the like of it.

He sucked in a deep breath, catching the mossy scent of the water. The woodsy scent of the nearby forest. Even a cow scent drifted to his nose. Cows? In these suburbs? Smells didn't lie. They must be out there close by.

His foot scuffled in the leaves.

Cheyenne was late.

Maybe he shouldn't have made the meeting place so far away from Richmond city proper. Echo Lake Park rested in a quiet residential section of Henrico County to the west of Richmond. Maybe it was too far away from Cheyenne. Maybe she couldn't get away by herself to come this far out.

Maybe she wasn't coming.

No, she'd be here. It was the location that had held her up from meeting him. That was the only explanation. The only one he would accept.

He'd chosen Echo Lake Park because it closed at sundown and the gates were shut, which meant that he and Cheyenne wouldn't be interrupted. It was far enough away from her protectors; he didn't think they'd be disturbed by Sarah or anyone else.

He'd parked a goodly distance away in a small subdivision and wandered casually into the park from the woods. The darkness was impressive. He'd noticed how light it was in the city when he'd wandered around at night. There were no streetlights here in the park. He could see houses with lights on in the distance. At the small playground, things were dark. Not that he needed light. Its absence struck him as different from all the places he'd been in the short time since he'd awakened.

He could almost taste the water running over the dam into the spillway. The creek crossed under the nearby curvy road.

A small snake slithered from a hole in a tree near the playground and slid along the ground. Its tan scales glistened in the moonlight. Leaves crinkled as the snake slid over them.

Tree branches rustled overhead as they swung this way and that. An owl hooted in the distance. The flap of heavy wings beat in the air. A shriek probably of the mouse the owl had been stalking rang through the night.

Roc's gaze ascended to the sky. Waxing silver clouds dotted the moon like streaks of paint across the darkness.

Movement.

Over to the left, coming from the bridge. He could hear the tromp of small feet as they headed this way. They clanked over the boards and onto the gravel path.

His nostrils flared as he scented the air. The breeze blew the other way. He couldn't scent who came.

Surely there was only one person who'd come this way this time of night. It had to be. He'd told her to come, and she would.

A goose honked in indignation as the person coming off the bridge passed close by, telling her off.

The breeze shifted. He could catch the scent of her. Mimosa.

Her.

Cheyenne.

His heart pounded. Blood pumped through his ears all the way down to his cock. She had come. Later she would come. All over him.

"The one."

He'd waited for so long for her. So long to find her. Claim her. Make her his. All those times in dreams and now she was reality. She was worth anything he'd gone through to find her. She had to be.

She scanned carefully down the path, coming around the lower one by the lake. She didn't slip on the loose gravel but found her footing easily. Gracefully. She had a dancer's gait and purchase as she threaded along. She seemed to have no purpose, yet each step brought her closer to him. She hadn't even glanced his way yet.

Did she know where he was? Sense him? Were they so linked that she could track him and know his position?

She didn't seem surprised that he knew she was there.

His heart pounded as he watched her approach. He'd waited decades to see this woman in the flesh. She didn't disappoint.

She walked up to him, presence so quiet in the night air. He liked the way her body flexed as she walked. "Marroc?"

"Who else?" He nodded. His cock felt like it'd been carved from lead. "You're Cheyenne." He moved to get a better look at her. Needed to see this beauty and commit her features to memory.

If only it were daylight. The moon, while casting a glow, didn't do the woman any justice. He needed to see the vibrancy he knew existed in her. The outpouring of self that he'd seen in his dreams.

Still, he could make out her features. A long, gauzy, rainbow-colored sundress did little to cover her curves. She had a long, willowy body. A cattail came to mind, but she filled out more than any cattail. Long, sinewy legs peeked from her dress. She had small breasts that had him wondering what color her nipples were as they stabbed the fabric. A tapered waist that flared down accentuated her hips. Her long dark hair was down and almost reached her curved ass. She wasn't pale but tanned and brown. Her eyes were the color of burned amber.

She looked up at him in wonder as if she couldn't believe he was real. It was all he could do not to reach out and touch her. If he touched her now, he'd be lost. He'd toss her to the ground and make her his woman. It would be over too quickly. He wanted to savor the moment.

She was beautiful. More so close up than she'd ever been in his dreams. His arms ached to hold her, to bring her against his fully engaged cock. *Soon.* Soon enough she'd find out all there was to being his.

First she had to show she accepted that fate. That she accepted being his woman in all ways.

She breathed, her breasts rising and falling. "You're real." The huffiness of the words got to him. Why wouldn't he be real? Why had she been so doubtful? She reached out to him as if she needed to feel his skin. Touched his arm. It was as if she had to make sure he was solid under her hands. Her fingers clasped at him as if they'd never let her go.

"Of course I'm real." He laughed at her expression that showed how tantalizing his being there was. "Did you think that I wasn't?" He reached down to take her trembling hands in his. "Why wouldn't I be real?"

"Yes. No." Her turn to laugh, the sound as nervous as the geese that hovered along the grass, with only a few in the water. "I don't know." Her gaze seared him with its intensity. "I told you. There was a poser. Before."

Who'd better be glad he was dead. Otherwise, Roc would have to kill him again. Painfully. He'd obviously hurt his Cheyenne. From now on, no one would live long after doing so. "I know. I'm not a poser." He straightened up his body. "I'm the real thing. The one you've dreamed about."

Her eyes filled with unshed tears. They glimmered on her lashes like shimmering diamonds. "I can't believe it's you. Here. Tonight." Her hoarse voice nibbled at his heart. "That you're here. With me."

"Believe it." He stroked her cool hand under his. She needed warming. So chilled. Like ice. What would make a woman who looked so hot feel so cold? "Did you have any problems getting away from your protectors?"

She shook her head. "I didn't have any trouble." Her lip trembled. She hadn't liked sneaking away from them. She'd had the worst of it getting here, having to leave everything she'd known behind. He'd make that up to her.

"How did you come? By car? Where did you park it?" He didn't care how she'd gotten there, only that she was there. At the same time, a parked car might arouse suspicion if put in the wrong spot, and cause others to search the park. He didn't want any interruptions tonight. Wanted it all to be perfect.

"I parked in a nearby subdivision. They won't notice the car tonight. I took Sarah's car." Her mouth pursed up into a little bow. "Told her I was going shopping."

She hadn't liked taking Sarah's car to come meet him. Probably hadn't liked having to lie to Sarah either.

He clenched his hands together. He didn't like seeing her in distress. The untruths had to be done if they wanted to meet. Now they had.

"Sarah thinks I'm going to the mall with Nathan. Nathan thinks I'm going to the mall with Sarah. They are both out for a while. So we have a lot of time." She grinned at him and shook her hair back.

"A mall? This time of night?"

A grin splurged across her face. "Neither one of them shop a lot. I told each that it was a new mall on the other side of town with later hours. There is a new mall... I don't know what the hours are, though."

She'd been resourceful. "Good." He let his fangs show and leered at her. "Because we have a lot of catching up to do."

"We do?" She gulped. Her throat moved with a nervous twitch.

"We do." His eyes grew deadly. "About fifteen years of dreaming about you to make up for." He licked his lips. If only he licked her skin. *Soon*. That was the only thing holding back his libido, that soon, he'd have her. "Now that I have you in the flesh, of course there's a lot to catch up on."

She backed up a step. "Oh." Nervousness exuded from her pores in a rush of scared hormones. She looked behind her as if to see if the trail was clear.

He shook his head. "Don't." He didn't want her scared of him. Her fear wasn't what he craved. He needed her to want him. Anything less was unacceptable. "Don't do this." He couldn't let her get away. Not now or ever.

She stopped.

"You came willingly to meet me. You knew what was to happen. Don't play coy now." From the moment they'd started dreaming of each other, they'd both known what would happen if they met in person. He'd fuck her six ways to Sunday. He moved toward her in a circular pattern. "Don't run from me." A growl pushed between his curled lips.

Her musk increased.

His nostrils flared. Couldn't stand this renewed attention to her obvious desires. "Don't do this."

Her eyes sparkled even under the moonlight. The nervousness had faded from her like a temporary tattoo. Instead she looked as if she was teasing him. Testing him. "What happens if I run?"

His eyes narrowed. "Then I chase." His heart picked up. Did he want her to run? Or did he want her to stay?

Her eyebrows waggled. "I'd hoped you'd say that." Off she ran in the opposite direction from the bridge where she'd entered the trail. Her feet slipped on some loose gravel, but she quickly righted herself and didn't go all the way down.

His fangs grazed his lips as they pulled up to smile. So he would have to catch his playground. Make her accept him. This would be even better than he'd thought. He advanced in the direction where she'd gone, taking his time.

She wouldn't be on the run long. He'd let her think she was getting away. Then pounce on her. After all, she wanted him to chase her. Or she wouldn't have run.

Chapter Six

Cheyenne panted as she dashed down the gravel trail around the lake. Her heart beat a solo in her chest, threatening to take over her hearing. She needed her hearing right now most of all.

Roc was coming.

If she concentrated, she could still hear his footsteps as he ambled carefully over the dry ground. He wasn't hurrying. Wasn't running. Just kept up a quick march as he barreled in her direction.

Because he knows he'll catch you.

She slowed her steps, coming to a small bridge. She caught her breath. Sniffed the air to see what she could scent. Was that cows she could smell?

Most of all, she could smell the man after her. The manly woodsy scent of her pursuer carried after her on the breeze.

She shook her hair back and stared up at the moon. Wasn't quite full tonight but almost. It gave her plenty of light to see by, even though she had no need of it. If anything, the moon made her feel like she stood out like a target as she dashed down the path eluding her pursuer.

What had possessed her to run? It hadn't been a conscious thought at first. One second she'd been standing there teasing him, and the next she'd run away.

The thrill of his catching you.

Maybe that had made her run? She ran her hands through her hair and continued along the trail, no longer running but walking briskly. Yes, that was why she'd run from him. One reason at least.

He'd shown up.

Roc had shown up. At the park to meet her. Like he'd said he would. It was *him*. The man from her dreams. She was sure this time. There was no mistaking his face. The body that had become so clear to her.

Those eyes.

That cruel mouth.

He was real. She hadn't imagined him or made him up in her mind. He was a living, breathing man. Real. Not a dream or daydream. A vampire who was flesh and bone. Blood. With a brain. And a cock.

A shiver raced across her.

That big body. That big body that is now out there hunting you. Waiting for the moment to take you down.

And make passionate love to you.

Which was what she'd come here for.

Frogs chimed in and along the marshy ground down by the lake. She could hear a nearby fountain, smell the dankness of the area. She could almost taste the pungent water, so strong was the smell in the air.

She could hear Marroc as he rounded a bend in the trail. "Cheyenne...Cheyenne..." His low baritone made more shivers race from her middle out to her extremities.

He made noise he didn't have to. He could be as silent as a ghost in the air. He was making sounds so that she'd hear him coming.

Overconfident.

He knew eventually she'd let him catch her. Let him have his way with her. Any way with her. Why wouldn't she? After all, as he'd pointed out, she'd come to meet him fully aware of what she was walking into. She'd known what he would do to her.

She wanted him to do those things. And more.

Her heart pinged and shimmied in her chest. Her breath became shallow. She trembled from her head to her toes.

She picked up the pace, running again along the trail. She wouldn't make it easy for him, though she wanted to. No, he had to earn her. Had to win her. Had to catch her. She wouldn't make this simple.

She met a fork in the trail and continued along the path closest to the lake. Kept going quickly, watching out for tree roots and goose poop.

A deck stretched out along this side of the lake, resting out over the calm waters. The light glistened from the ripples, making silver sparkles. A fish jumped, making a splash. Or maybe it was a frog.

She slowed down to take a look.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Roc strolled up as if he were at a picnic and she was the grill. Or the main course on the grill would be more accurate. He didn't come close but stopped on the nearby path.

She took off again on feet that didn't want to move. Her heart fluttered like a butterfly trying to edge out of a net. Her pussy felt slick as though every move drove down more moisture. Moisture in anticipation of his possession. It would be sweet to be under him. Over him. Any which way she could get him.

He could have caught her by now. He'd had the opportunity. Had the motive. But he hadn't. He toyed with her even now.

A chuckle sounded. "Why do you run? So I'll chase you?" His footfalls sounded in quiet, easy steps.

"Yeahhh." She did. She'd run from this even as she flocked to it. His possession would be the end. Not of her, but of so many things about her. It

would be a most drastic change. She wasn't sure if she could take it. If she could take him.

Another chuckle rang from him. He didn't even sound winded. "You know I'm going to catch you."

"Yeahhh." Why deny what she knew? She didn't say it aloud, but she'd let him catch her. He probably already knew that.

"I'm going fill you so full of my dick, you'll become a part of me." He let out a growl on the end of his sentence.

A frog jumped in the water with a croak and a splash. Maybe Roc's growl had scared it.

Cheyenne slowed her gait. It was hard to run and shiver at the same time. Her pussy swelled and ached. Wanted. Needed. She wanted his dick to pierce her in ways she hadn't even thought of yet.

When would he lose patience and take her, dammit? She'd not expected him to draw this out. Another demonstration that she didn't know this man. Or what he was capable of.

She reached the bridge. The bridge she'd crossed over to find him. A threshold of sorts. That was where his patience ran out.

She heard him coming nearer and nearer. Gaining on her. He'd finally sped up his pace to catch her. Her heart plummeted to her stomach. She resisted the urge to increase her speed. To run from him again. This was what she craved. He'd finally earned her.

She didn't look back.

She heard his heavy breathing, his rapid steps, which were getting closer. And closer. Until he sounded as if he was right on top of her.

He grabbed her and pulled her against him. Pulled her against his muscular self without room between them. She could barely breathe as his strong body shoved up against her, stealing the air she'd taken in. His body felt so warm and hard against hers. She couldn't even talk from being pulled against something so immovable.

He shoved his hard cock up against her to show her how much he wanted her. Wiggled against her, letting her know his desires. So hard. So big. He pressed and poked in all the wrong places.

"Gotcha." He sounded triumphant. And pleased. She could tell he was smiling without even seeing his face.

He'd had her from the first time she'd dreamed about him. She'd been young. Maybe fourteen? She couldn't remember exactly. That was the first conscious dream she'd had about him, though even then he'd seemed familiar. From that moment on, she'd never been the same. She'd been his from even that early point. He hadn't even gotten sexual with her for four more years. He'd bided his time. Waited. Until she was ready for him and old enough.

As he'd done tonight.

She'd needed that symbolic run around the lake trying to escape him but him winning her. Needed him to be worthy of her time and affection. He had to work for both. Didn't seem to mind working for both. Didn't seem to mind working to win her over to him. Which was good. She hadn't made it easy. Oh, the rewards would be so sweet when they were done. She'd see to that.

So would he.

His cock rubbed up against her, back and forth. Tickled her and pressed almost painfully into her skin.

He kept her against him but moved her up to the rail of the bridge looking over the placid lake.

Water licked at the pilings down below them.

She stared across the liquid, taking a deep breath. Hard to do with the man of her dreams pressed in behind her like a steel wall. It was so calm and peaceful. Hardly any ripples except out by the fountain. In places, the surface could almost be a mirror.

She was anything but calm. Nothing like the smooth portions of water where nothing showed on the surface.

The fountains bubbled and spouted white water, gushing them up in the middle of the lake with vigor. The moon shown down on what little choppy water there was. On the other side of the bridge, water poured over a dam.

She was like the fountain bubbling over. Her heartbeat roared forth in her chest like the water over the spillway.

He moved her farther against the rail until it touched her front, pinning her between his body and the wood. Kept his cock pressed against her back. Stood up against her, looking out over the water.

A shudder rocked him.

Did he want this as much as she did?

She closed her eyes. His body was so warm against her. So hot. She relaxed, leaning back against him as he supported her weight. Wherever his exposed skin pressed against her heated her like a furnace, made her tremble like the wind rushing through the upper limbs of the trees.

One hand released her as the other kept a tight hold. He moved her hair to the side and placed his lips against the side of her neck. The barest of touches that simmered over her skin. Lingered. Tickled her with whispers. The hair rose on her body.

The better to tear your throat out.

She told the voice to go away. That she didn't need it tonight. No one needed to look after her. She was fine.

He was trying to taste her; that was all.

Like chicken?

No. She didn't mean taste in that way.

He would not lure her here to hurt her. He wouldn't. He wasn't going to tear her throat out or anything evil.

Titius had hurt her in so many ways. He'd taken her life and warped it to his vision. He'd torn out her heart. Would have done it physically if the act had suited his own ends more than keeping her.

Marroc wasn't Titius.

He was different. He was the true man she'd dreamed about all those times. Titius had been a poser.

At first, you thought Titius was different too. That he was that man you'd dreamed of. Before he hurt you.

Go away.

She chanted the words over and over in her head. Tried to make the thoughts go away. Wanted to live in this moment with Roc. Focus on what he was doing to her. She couldn't do that with the voices in her head.

He lifted his head to survey her. "Are you okay? You're...shaking. You stiffened a second ago. Did something bite you?"

How many men would have noticed her reactions? He had. She couldn't tell him she was more worried about being bitten by him than by a mosquito. "I'm fine." Her fears had been laid to rest for now, until they reared their ugly head again. They would. It was just a matter of time.

After another long minute of looking at her, his lips finally moved against her throat. Openmouthed, he kissed her. A full kiss against the side of her neck. She could feel his fangs graze the sensitive skin.

Then she didn't think of anything else but his mouth and his body. Couldn't get past the shiver that started at the tip of her toes and worked itself all the way up to her scalp. It felt like her hair pulled from the roots out.

Kissing her again, he moved his mouth down around her collarbone. One small nip that didn't even draw blood.

He wasn't going to rip her throat out. Or taste her blood. He might drive her crazy with wanting, though.

His cock had stilled, had not pushed against her more forcefully. A subtle reminder of his desire, it rested against her.

She whimpered. She wanted it to do more than rest. Wanted his mouth and cock on her. She was greedy. It had been too long. This wasn't a dream but reality. This was real. Time to savor this moment with him. Who knew when there would be more?

His voice came as he pulled away his mouth. Her skin tingled with coolness in the night air. "Do not run again." He'd never sounded so masterful. Maybe it was because he was in person instead of from a dream.

Another shiver rocked her at his commanding tone. "Yes." There was no need to run any longer. He'd already caught her. He'd won.

"Yes, what?"

“Yes, Marroc.”

His chuckle was light. Almost playful. “Roc. You can call me Roc if you like.” His voice sobered. “No more running.” His hands tightened on her body as though he could anchor her to him.

“Yes, Roc. I mean...no, Roc. No more running.”

“Good.”

His hand ran around her body to pass down her neck. Stroked along the column of her neck. She leaned back against him, resting her head on his body.

“Lean back on me, baby.” He encouraged her to put her full weight on him, which she did. She loved the way his body fit against hers. It was like they were meant to be. They fit together like puzzle pieces. Was she the corner? No, he probably was. She was somewhere in the middle.

His hand slid across her collarbone down onto her breast. And rested there. Taunted her with its nearness, with his proximity to her nipple. He didn't move against her. Didn't touch her like she needed him to be touching.

Her nipples swelled, aching for his hand.

His face moved against her. Finally so did his hand. He moved it to cup her breast with his warmth. It seared her through her thin dress, like his hand was liquid, molten lava. He enveloped her breast.

His thumb strummed her nipple like he carefully played a guitar. Again and again, he passed over her, sometimes firmly and other times lightly.

The nipple had pebbled. Her pussy moistened and clenched at the sensations running down her front. She leaned her head back to shove her body more against the man's hands. Needed him to be forceful with her. Wanted him to take her in hand.

She ached as her nipple swelled more under his telling fingers. Streaking bands of desire flowed down her body.

He slowly moved her hair away again and kissed the same spot on her neck. A rough kiss that made her close her eyes. She could feel his teeth. Feel his mouth as it closed around her skin.

When his other hand left her hair and drifted down to her other breast, she gasped and opened her eyes. Had to see something other than darkness. Had to see the light to keep herself rooted in his touch.

He chuckled and nipped the side of her neck again. Both hands stroked and strummed her breasts, making her skin crinkle with an awareness she hadn't thought possible. When had all her sensing nerves gone down into her breasts? They felt so heavy. So alive.

Pent-up feelings surfaced and roared to the forefront until she thought she'd explode with the sensations. They bubbled up in her like the water in the fountain, and she needed to expel them or go nuts from the wanting.

The first hand left her breast. She almost cried out with dissension. Caught the words at the last second. Needed to see what he was doing first.

"Spread your legs." His voice was hushed. Commanding. Right against her ear. His breath tickled her earlobe.

She widened her stance. Did what he commanded. Wanted as much of him as he'd be willing to give to her.

His hand ran a course down her stomach to the farthest point he could reach without having to stretch. His other hand followed it down. Logistically his arms weren't long enough for him to do anything down there. At least, not to do what she wanted.

His body shifted away from her before his hands centered at the bottom of her dress. They grabbed the flimsy material.

She didn't want him to rip it. It was her favorite dress. "Please don't rip..." She clamped her mouth shut. Wasn't sure how he'd react.

He stilled his body and his hand. "Rip your dress?" His voice didn't come across as mad. He only sounded concerned.

She nodded, unsure of what to say. Never should have busted out like that without asking. Should have trusted him not to.

"Cheyenne?" He hadn't seen her response. Maybe he hadn't been watching. "Cheyenne?" he asked again when she didn't answer.

"Yes, my dress."

He pulled the material away from her slightly with hands that had never let go. "I won't." He let out a low growl that sounded more ferocious than the last. "I can smell you. Have been scenting you since you arrived."

Well, yeah. She'd been turned on since the beginning of this visit with him. Chasing her around the lake had only served to whet her appetites. She was turned on by what was about to happen. She'd experienced this in dreams. Now she was about to have the real thing. Of course her pussy was creaming.

He moved farther away from her, causing her body to miss his, but didn't drop her dress hem. "Turn around."

She did so without question. She would now get to see his face. Would be facing his body with her own.

"Lean back against the rail." He didn't hesitate in giving her commands. He leaned back and surveyed her face.

She laid her back against the rail. Could feel the hard wood as it pressed against her through her thin dress.

His voice turned hoarse. "Beautiful." His gaze swept along her whole body. "Keep your feet wide."

She went back to the stance where her legs rested apart. The movement spread her pussy lips apart. The split cooled them with night air.

His gaze penetrated her to her soul. He cocked his head as he looked at her middle. "No underwear?"

She shook her head. Undergarments only got in the way when it was time to fuck. They were a nuisance.

He groaned. "God. You're killing me, Cheyenne." As he'd been situating her, his hands had shifted along the hem of her dress without letting go. They now tangled in the gauzy folds.

The dress you wore with Titius. The first time you met. The dress that sucked him into you too.

She closed her eyes. Swallowed. It had been a deliberate choice to wear this dress again with Roc. The dress had been a favorite until she'd met Titius. Until her memories had killed her affection for the garment. She wanted to reclaim it for herself. Wanted to reclaim so much of what Titius had taken away. The dress was a start. A new beginning.

With Roc.

"Open your eyes, Cheyenne." His hands moved down the dress a minute amount as he tugged on it.

Her eyes popped open without consideration. Would she always do what he said? Probably. With him, that didn't seem to be a bad thing.

"Where did you go?" His mouth twisted. "You drifted away. Shut me out. Went into your mind."

She lowered her head. So he'd noticed her distraction. If only he hadn't. Now she'd have to explain. "The geese raising Arizona behind the flower stall." Her head shook with the injustice of babbling the wrong thing. She sounded like a goose in heat.

His gaze surveyed her face as if he looked for something. He waited for her words to come back to sense. Didn't say anything or comment on her rambling. He stood there and waited for her to bring her errant mind back under her own control.

She took a deep breath. Cleared her thoughts. She wanted to say something particular. She formed her lips and spoke slowly so that the right words would come out. "I met the poser in this dress." Thank goodness that somehow being a vampire made her more aware of her slipups. Before, she'd been unaware when she'd sounded like a loon. Sometimes that was a good thing in an almost blissful way. Sometimes, like now, being unaware wasn't. She didn't know which way was better to live with all the time.

His hands tightened on the material. Knuckles whitened and tendons stretched. "Then why wear it with me?" Was that jealousy she saw lurking on his face? Lingering in those beautiful eyes.

He had nothing to be jealous of. Titius had been a pretender. "Because it was my favorite. I want it back for me." She would reclaim the bits of her life that Titius had squired away. He had given her a true gift. Vampirism. He'd helped her meet Sarah. The only good things he'd ever done for her.

Roc's gaze softened. His face relaxed as his mouth filled out. "You think I can do that for you?" His head cocked to the side again. "Or at least help you do that?"

She nodded. "I think you can help me with that." Ultimately she had to be the one to take back her life.

His hands lifted the skirt up and away from her skin. Coolness filled the space beneath the material.

A car rumbled slowly down a nearby road around the curve by the lake. There had been other cars roaming across their vision tonight. But she hadn't been facing them. Or about to be naked. Would they be able to see anything? She didn't want to give everyone a show. Only Roc. "Roc..."

"What?"

"What are you going to do? I'm facing the road." Where anyone could see her. If a suburban housewife saw her, the woman'd freak and 9-1-1 would be called in a millisecond.

Yet the idea of possibly being seen made Cheyenne's pulse race. Made sweat break out on her arms. They could be spotted fucking on a bridge in a local park. By anyone.

A shudder rocked her.

He seemed to understand her dilemma. "No one will see you." His smile came easily. "Or maybe you want them to?"

His words didn't reassure her, especially with the question at the end. "Roc..." Her breath hitched. She didn't want to be a spoilsport. She'd come all this way. She wouldn't let fear of discovery turn her away. "Never mind."

He didn't let the matter drop. "There are no lights over here to illuminate us. No human eyes are as good as ours in the dark. No one will see you from the road by only moonlight." His hand twisted the fabric.

True. She was so used to seeing the world with vampire eyes, she'd forgotten that tidbit. Her eyes were far superior to a human's. It was a dark night. This subdivision didn't have streetlights either. When she'd lived with... Her throat convulsed. No, best not to think of her mother now. Not in this situation.

"No one will see you naked but me."

Her whole body clenched in tension, doing away with the brief thought she'd had. Roc had taken care of that for her. She wanted him to see her naked. Wanted him to do more than see.

He lowered himself casually to the wood of the deck. Put himself on his knees in front of her. Not a position she'd expected him to take. That last thing this man did was bow down before anyone. She'd sensed as much in her dreams.

Yet for her, he did.

What was he going to do to her? She had an idea of what, but that couldn't be it. Titius hadn't liked to go down on her much. The first boy she'd been with was better left unmentioned. He wouldn't have known what to do with her if she'd sat on his face and given him a manual.

Roc would know what to do.

He lifted the skirt around his head, pulling it out and away from her and ducking his head under the gauzy material.

Her breathing caught for several seconds and then sped up. He was going to do what she'd thought he might. He was going to kiss her down there. Down at her pussy. Touch her. Taste her pussy juices.

Good thing she hadn't worn underwear.

He rose up slightly on his knees, giving himself more purchase and a higher angle, letting the skirt fall around him.

His hand lifted to her hips. He stroked her curves as though trying to memorize her every contour.

Her skin tingled wherever he touched. She shifted herself around, trying to encourage him to touch her more.

Her skirt blew in the breeze around his head. Her pussy drove out more moisture as she imagined his tongue slurping against her.

Another growl. It was short. Fierce. As though it broke free from him without his meaning to let it loose.

His hand drifted around her pelvis. Slipped around to cup her pussy. Pressed against her center with the palm of his hand. Didn't grind against her. Rested there as though it were any other body part.

She sucked in a breath. Grew slicker between her thighs. The ache there grew. Her whole body became an electric fence ready to shock anyone who came too close. Why didn't he move his hand? Her entire body shook with the idea that he should move his hand. Give her what she wanted.

"Something you want?" His voice was light. Teasing. It was all she could do not to throw him in the lake. He knew what she wanted. "Tell me what you want."

More shaking. She could barely move the words past her trembling lips. "You." That was all she'd ever wanted. "The grindstone isn't kosher."

"Tell me how you want me. What you want me to do."

A laugh broke free. "The windshield wipers are on stun. I want you to taste me. Touch me. Mypussy." The last word was said as one instead of coming out as two.

"As you wish."

One single finger pressed through the folds to touch her. To touch the innermost part of her body.

One finger dived for her clit to stroke it up and down. The finger then circled around her wet pussy, playing in the softness.

She couldn't breathe. Couldn't get enough air into her lungs to survive this assault on her body.

A second digit joined the first. Pressed in and against her. The finger found her hole and slowly ran across her opening.

“I'll give you everything you ever wanted.”

Coming from him, she believed it.

Chapter Seven

Roc's fingers were coated in her moisture as his hands slipped over her folds and played with her clit. He could smell her longing all over. Still, he wanted more. Wanted to be coated in her.

Soon.

He'd have her in the flesh. Have his flesh in her.

Soon.

His cravings were magnified. His hunger was intense. Both for sustenance and for lust. He should have fed immediately before coming to her.

He could feed from her. Take bits of her life force. A prick to his conscience. It would be without her permission. Granted, the humans he typically fed from didn't grant him permission. With her, it would seem wrong.

Even though she would taste so good. Her soul would be sweet with a little bit of tang. Taste good on the way down his mind.

And probably reek of insanity.

That had been a surprise when he'd gotten close enough to sense her mind. Cheyenne's mind had issues.

He pinched her clit between his fingers. Squeezed it to the point of pain but didn't go past that.

She moaned. She'd leaned farther back against the rail.

He nipped at her thigh, pressing his tongue to soothe any hurt from his teeth. Licked her salty skin.

He could hear her breathing pick up. Become faster and faster. Was she imagining everything he'd do to her? Maybe.

Good.

He leaned up and pulled his fingers out at the same time he licked up her slit. Her juices coated him.

She gasped, hips thrusting forward a little at a time.

He removed his mouth and then slid it up her the same way again. He didn't press in. Nor did he find her clit.

"Ohhh." He couldn't see her face, only hear the little noises she made and feel her move around.

Her dress fluttered around him like fairy wings as he moved. He put one hand on each side of her hips.

Naughty girl. No underwear.

He plowed in his mouth, nipping and licking. Kissing and groveling into her folds. All at the same time.

She bucked under him but was unable to escape his mouth.

He tormented her. Taking her up to the brink of an orgasm, then backing off so that her hips thrust in frustration. The dreams had held true. He knew how hot to make her. Knew exactly how far to push.

He waited until the moment when every part of her shook. When her mouth made sounds like keening. Then he attached his mouth to her clit and suckled like he would draw the entire piece of flesh into his mouth.

She came hot as a firecracker, a scream exploding from her mouth.

Ducks flew. Geese flew. Hell, he thought the entire lake might have tried to get away from her noise. Her scream broke the quiet stillness of the night and echoed around them.

As she came, her power broke around them. Hair raised on his arms as all that she was and ever had been circled them. He'd never seen power rain like this from any one being.

He couldn't help it. The power was there. Surrounding him. He only meant to taste. To imbibe a swallow. Once it flowed into him, it was like opening a faucet wide.

Her soul combined with her abilities infused him. Filled him with her. Her power went down him like a smooth gin.

Mimosa drifted to him on the breeze. He could taste it along with her juices on his tongue.

The flow only stopped when her power ran back inside of her. The hairs prickled on his arms as she sucked it back down.

Now he trembled as though a winter wind had caught him in its icy grip. Yet his body was covered in sweat like he'd run a marathon. He panted, trying to keep up with the needs of his body. The needs of his desire.

He was as old as some of the ancient mountains. Yet he'd never felt like this. What the hell had happened?

* * * *

Orrick exited the plane onto the tarmac at Richmond International Airport. The small plane was an overrated tin can. He hadn't been about to fly commercial. Fuck, he hated flying. In any capacity.

Richmond. A midsize town with a long history. Why the hell would Roc come here? Orrick had no idea why or if he was even there.

Vegas trundled along behind him. He hadn't said anything the whole flight down. Maybe he hated flying as much as Orrick did. No, he wasn't smart enough to detest it as much as Orrick.

"Did you arrange to have a car waiting for us? To take us to the hotel?" The airport was a ways outside the city. He frowned. Still had no idea where Marroc was in the city. This was a gamble to see if they could find him before he left. They'd found his stated destination on a rental-car agreement to be Richmond. That didn't mean he'd come here, though.

Yes, he'd find out where the bastard was no matter where he'd gone. Find a way to take Marroc from the world after learning all his secrets about feeding from souls. It would be a fine day when that happened. Orrick would finally be able to take his rightful place. He rubbed his hands together. If the plane took him one step closer to that, so be it.

"Yes, my liege. Of course I did." Vegas nodded nervously, Adam's apple bobbing up and down on his throat. "Have to check in with the rental office..." He hurried in that direction, sensing Orrick's impatience.

More pesky paperwork. At times, Orrick longed for the old days. It had been much easier to take someone out or pursue them back then. Now there was always paperwork and little things like passports that had to be obtained before one could travel any great distance. Things seemed less anonymous in this day of technology.

A pain in his ass.

One reason he'd traveled with only Vegas in tow. Roc wouldn't have an entourage surrounding him either. Made it easier to take one minion on this exploratory trip.

His cell phone jingled in his pocket. He walked from the hangar to a sidewalk. Now some things couldn't be beat in this century. Like communication. "Hello." He could talk to someone a half a world away. Nothing could beat that.

"Orrick. I've some news." Fort sounded almost happy, not anything that Orrick had ever heard before in the man's voice.

"It's about damn time."

Fort swallowed.

What was the man fucking scared of? Orrick couldn't come through the phone to throttle him. The only limitation of cell phone communication. "Tell me your news."

Fort's enthusiasm picked up again through each word. "I've been going through records. Hard-to-find records. You know it happened..."

"Yes, a thousand years ago. Tell me something I don't fucking know..." If he heard one more time how long Marroc had been in the ground...

Fort cleared his throat. "Well, uh, yeah. Um. I found that, uh, about five hundred years ago, one family claimed a blood relationship."

Orrick turned to watch a plane taking off. Tapped his booted foot on the ground. "This isn't getting more interesting."

"They claimed a blood relationship to Daly Smith." Fort sounded almost triumphant with the statement.

Orrick stretched his head. Another plane landed at the hangar next door. Where was Vegas with that car? "And? Why's that so important?"

Fort stumbled over the next words. "Oh, I thought you'd know. Ah, Daly Smith was one of Marroc's followers. One who died when he went to ground." Did Orrick detect a note of disdain in Fort's voice for Orrick's not knowing that?

His fists clenched. "I never memorized names of those who died. They weren't important to me. Because I wanted Marroc. Alive. In my hand." He turned to face Vegas, who came trailing back with keys. Growled at him. "Took you long enough."

Fort swallowed again. "I told you the records aren't good from that long ago... I've had a lot of trouble..."

Fucking insufferable. "Not you. My *other* minion." He looked at the parking lot full of vehicles. "Which one is ours?"

"That red one." Vegas motored to it as though he couldn't get out of here fast enough. He held the door open for Orrick to get in.

"So how does that help us?"

Silence on the other side of the line. Only breathing and a light whine, probably from a computer.

"I'm now talking to you, moron." Orrick shook his head. What idiots surrounded him most days.

"Oh!" Fort sniffed and let out a sneeze. "Daly Smith was also said to have the gift of sight."

"So he could have been a psychic?" Orrick settled himself into the backseat as Vegas drove through the convoluted roads exiting the airport.

"Some of his descended claim to be, regardless of what he was. So yes, I'd say that Daly Smith was indeed a psychic."

"I'm not sure how this helps me now. Marroc is already on the move. I know he's in the United States or coming here. We wanted to find this out to locate him, but he's awake now."

Fort hemmed a minute.

"Spit it out." Orrick had no time for lackeys who couldn't complete a sentence. If only Fort were here. He'd have carved up his tongue to show him how to talk.

"Knowing the site of where Marroc was would probably help. He might run back there again if he needs to hide. Not to mention..." Fort hesitated. "Suppose Marroc is contacting descendants of his followers? They were loyal enough to him to kill themselves rather than risk outing him to you. He might be counting on their help again."

That was true enough. Fucking cowards. "There're two dozen people who committed suicide that night. He could go to any of them." They didn't have time for Fort to sit back and research back in time forever.

"If I were a leader..."

"Big fucking if." Orrick growled into the phone. How dare the minion assume that role even in pontifications?

"If I were a leader, I'd want to seek out those who might be loyal to me. I'd also... Well, if Daly Smith was a psychic, I'd want to find out if he passed that ability through his generations. I'd want to find that ability again in the people I surround myself with."

Ironical as hell, but the minion made a good point. "So you can find this man's lineage? This man, Daly Smith." What a stupid name... Wait a minute. "Vegas." He bellowed the name into the phone.

Orrick heard the phone move away from Fort's ear or at least that's what it sounded like from the rustling.

"Yes, my liege?" Vegas sounded nervous. He was always nervous these days like a scared little rabbit.

"Didn't Marroc take the last name Smith from what you saw on the passport list?" Was that where he'd found the name? "The plane list?" Maybe that was what he'd seen? Orrick couldn't remember. "Oh hell, whatever you saw."

Vegas wouldn't have corrected him no matter how many times he'd gotten the source wrong. Orrick should have left his ruminations at passport, and that pissed him off more. "Yes, my liege. The name listed on the passenger list was Marroc Smith."

Orrick rubbed his hand on his knee. "Hot damn." Two Smith names couldn't be a coincidence. Maybe that meant that Marroc was on his way to seek out a descendant of someone who'd helped him eons ago. "Fort?"

The voice came back toward the phone. "Yes." The man seemed to be cringing and wasn't showing the proper respect. Orrick growled again low and deep. Fort instantly babbled, "Yes, my liege?"

That was better. Might still need a show when Fort came to him in person later. "I want you to research this family. Find out where they went and who the descendants are. See if any have ties to Richmond, Virginia." Perhaps that would explain why Marroc had traveled here to this sleepy town.

"That will take some time."

He could hear Fort's mind working out how much time. Hear his mouth opening to interject how much time. "That, you don't have." Orrick gritted his teeth together as he interrupted. "I need to know yesterday." He looked at Vegas. "Step on it. You're driving like a grandma."

Vegas pushed down the gas, and the car accelerated.

"Yes, my liege." Fort sighed. "I'll get right on finding this out." He clucked his tongue as though he couldn't decide whether to speak again. "Might I suggest Bluetooth for your cell phone? I've used..."

Orrick hung up the phone without saying anything more. Probably leaving Fort still talking into the phone. "Vegas."

"Yes, my liege?" Vegas's hands gripped the wheel. His knuckles whitened. He was now traveling with the rest of the cars and looked nervous. Perhaps it wasn't only flying that Vegas didn't like.

"Take me to a cell phone store. One that has Bluetooth." Whatever the hell it was, Orrick would need every advantage in the days to come.

* * * *

Roc sat on the wooden planks of the bridge. The roaring water matched the sound in his ears. Although the power in the air was gone, residuals still lingered in him. He'd ingested enough of the bits to last awhile. He was full to brim with power.

Her power.

It was a rush that he'd never ever experienced before. With anyone. "What happened?" He'd never taken power like this or such as this. It rolled around inside of him, making him feel like he was drunk.

Hell, he might be drunk. He focused his eyes on the petite, graceful woman in front of him who had sunk to her knees and lay on the bridge as soon as he'd pulled his head from her dress. She looked as if she'd been rolled too.

"I...don't know."

"That makes two of us."

He always got such a rush when he ingested life forces. He'd had a rush when he'd been a blood drinker too. This...this was something different. He'd skimmed from the top of her power. Taken a vampire's... What had he taken? It had felt like pure energy. Pure power. Maybe that's what their life force turned into when they became a vampire. He no longer felt hungry. He felt sated. He'd not eaten anyone else, either pussy or soul. One person had never satisfied him like this.

She blew out a breath. "My skin is still tingling. It feels like little springs are going off everywhere."

So was his. Not to mention he felt like his head wanted to explode. All the hairs on his body still stood at attention. He surveyed her.

She sat with her legs out and her dress bunched up around her body. She was in the same position she'd gone down in.

So many years he'd lived, and it had taken a wisp of a woman to surprise him. What was she? Who was she? There were things he'd need to be finding out about her. Once he dealt with Orrick, he could take a lifetime to get to know her.

She leaned forward, blinking as though that made her feel woozy. “Are you tingling as much as I am?”

He was about to say *More*, but amended it to, “Yes. Probably.” She'd orgasmed and had a rush of power. He couldn't begin to imagine what that had felt like. He'd not climaxed. His cock was still hard and needy. Leaking. Hadn't even gone down with the rush that taken him over. If anything, he'd gotten stiffer.

She looked over to him, as if focusing on him for the first time since her orgasm. Her eyes twinkled. “That was incredible.”

That he would have to agree with. He'd felt many things over the years, known many things from his time feeding from humans, but he'd never experienced anything like this. Would it happen again?

She stood up on legs that continued to shake. Pushed her hair back in a wave like a waterfall over a cliff. Slid the dress to the ground in one simple, graceful move that didn't have her struggling.

His eyes centered on the dress pillowed around her feet as she stepped from the material, leaving on her shoes, which looked like ballet slippers. Slowly, his eyes moved up firm calves to slender thighs. To a pussy that smelled good enough to eat, and he had sipped from her enough before to know that was true. Her hips flared from her body. She had a flat stomach that ached for more kissing. Two firm breasts that, while small, were perky, and her nipples pointed to him like firm arrows. She had fine tits. Fine ones. Her nipples and areolae were a dusky rose in contrast to her skin.

Her skin was almost brown in color all over. Nothing broke the continued shading. No tan lines. She'd probably tanned naked when she'd been human. Naked like she was now. His breathing stalled in his chest.

He couldn't breathe. Couldn't move air from his lungs. His tongue felt as if it had been coated with wax. His cock stiffened to the point of being painful.

She stepped over to him. Grinned down at him from her position over him. “Can we try that again?”

He chuckled at her exuberance. “I suppose. Only”—he wagged his eyebrows at her—“I want to be inside of you.”

She nodded. “I figured.” She knelt down to put a hand on his chest. “How are you going to take me? Tell me.” Her eyes lit with a fervor.

He pushed to his feet, coming up close to her. “First, I'm going to lean you against the same rail where I ate you out. Then, I'm going to take you from behind and make you scream again.”

She blew out a long breath. Lowered her hands to the button on his jeans. Slowly she flicked his pants open. It was an acceptance of what would happen. Of what he would do to her. What she would do to him. The action conveyed much more than the simple act it was. This would become the first thing on his to-do list.

He scrambled to get his jeans off. Hadn't felt this inept since his first time, which had been too long ago to even think about. He yanked off his shirt, baring his body in the moonlight.

She sucked in a breath. "Oh, Commander."

He froze and stiffened. Looked at her. "What did you call me?" He moved forward toward her. Surely she hadn't said what he'd thought she had.

Her eyes grew wide. "Commander."

"Why did you call me that?" He grabbed her arms in his hands and tightened his hold on her. "Why? Whom are you working with?"

She didn't try to fight him. Stood there and took his assault. "I... It felt right to call you that." She looked down toward the ground. "Sometimes...I have visions. I know things I shouldn't know. Couldn't know."

So she was a psychic. Probably had been as a human. Probably was why she was the fabled "one." He'd sensed this in his dreams but hadn't been sure if it were only in dreams or would translate over to reality.

"Why would that name upset you?"

"Because someone who betrayed me used it. He used to call me that." His mouth thinned. Face sobered. He hadn't heard that name in a long time. He never wanted to think about Orrick's betrayal.

She put her hand down over his, which had never let go of her. "You should take the term back. To yourself. Away from the betrayal."

Like she was trying to do with her dress. He relaxed. She'd meant him no harm. She was right. It was only a name. "Maybe. I'm not ready for you to call me that, though."

She nodded. "I won't."

They stood like that a long second more.

He looked at her beautiful body. Curves. Her nakedness. His cock filled with blood again.

Lust filled him. Not only did he want to be inside of her, he needed to be inside of her. Now.

There was a bench in the middle of the bridge, near where they were. He eased her over. With their height difference, he had to do something to offset it so they could work together this way. Otherwise they wouldn't match up.

She followed him complacently. Hands went out over his body to stroke along his back and backside.

He reached the bench and turned around to face her. "On your knees on the bench." He stood up straight and watched her. His cock throbbed. He was back to being as hard as he could be.

She inched up on the bench and held her hands in front of her. Looked back at him with come-hither eyes. Eyes that begged him to take her.

So he would. He'd give her everything she'd ever asked for and more. Because she was his.

Mine, his psyche said. And he agreed.

He needed to mark her beyond the physical, but that was a good place to start. As he came up behind her, he draped himself over her. Took one hand to hold his cock and slipped it to her opening. Poked a finger on his other hand into her depths to find her still dripping wet. Tight. Warm.

She groaned at the intrusion. Enveloped his finger and welcomed him inside of her depths.

That was nothing. He withdrew his finger. Now would come the real penetration. That had been a test.

He leaned forward using one hand and thrust his cock inside of her. Surrounded himself with wet, warm walls that throbbed around him. His entire body jerked in the reality that was her body.

Mine.

He straightened up and slipped more deeply inside of her. In and out, until soon he pounded himself inside of her.

She moaned. "Oh God. I never thought... Oh, Roc." Her litany was constant as she told him anything but nothing. Probably wasn't even aware of what she was saying, considering how often she repeated the same words over and over. His name was a particular favorite. She made little noises too, which drove him nuts and sent him closer to the edge.

He gripped her tightly, measured his pace. Kept thrusting into her and trying to get inside of her as far as he could.

His whole world narrowed down to thrusting inside this woman. To filling her with himself and his seed. To making her beg for the finish.

Mine.

Her body was tight around him. So tight it was like chugging into a vise. A hot, moist, wonderful vise.

Pounding. Thrusting. Hearts beating in tandem. Panting. Sweat-coated bodies. Cool breezes that did nothing to cool inner fires.

Mine.

A shriek rent the air as she came with a shuddering of her body.

Power lay flat in the air again, surrounding them both. It was thick like fog and almost choked his throat as he breathed it in.

His orgasm ripped through him, splitting the power and making him suck even more of it down his gullet. He poured into her as she poured into him, filling him to overflowing as he did her. The tangible power rippled around them as aftershocks flew through them both.

Roc collapsed partially on top of her before rolling to the side. He sat back on the bench, spent. Sated. His body was sweat covered, and he couldn't

breathe. But that was okay. He didn't care. His heart was about ready to race from his chest.

He leaned up to look at her as he tasted blood in his mouth. He blinked at the coppery flavor. It had been a long time since he'd tasted that.

A string of blood ran down one of Cheyenne's arms.

He jumped to his feet and went back to his original position behind her.

"I think I'm going to need to recover." She panted around the words, making them hard to hear. "Before I do that again."

He didn't answer but looked at her shoulder. A bite mark. He'd bitten her. With fangs. He didn't even remember doing it. When had that happened? He'd marked her. As *his*. Even as pride ran across him, he said, "I bit you."

She turned her head back to him. "I see that." She tilted her head so she could look at her own shoulder.

The blood had mostly stopped flowing.

He rolled his tongue around in his mouth. She tasted sweet. Succulent. She must be sweet everywhere. "Did I hurt you?"

"With the bite, no. I didn't even feel it. I can see your tooth prints." She reached up to touch them. "Not with the fucking either." She looked back in front of her. "That was incredible. It happened again. Didn't it?"

He nodded. What exactly had happened, he couldn't be sure. Somehow he was feeding from her powers. It was an actual feed. He felt as full as he did when he'd taken blood or souls. He was now complacent. "What do you mean by 'it'?"

"My power. It throttled up through me. Hung in the air."

Yes, that it had. "Yes, that happened again." He didn't mention he'd sucked down her power like he was drinking.

Yet the power was nothing like anything he'd ever eaten before. His entire body felt energized. Like he was full of electricity. Like he could do anything, including fly. His skin prickled with the adrenaline racing through him.

His cock rebounded to full hardness as he looked at Cheyenne again.

While he was quick recovering, he'd never been that quick. Especially as it had been a long time since he'd had sex, and it had been full-blown, knock-your-socks-off sex. He shouldn't be recovering this quickly.

Which meant whatever she was feeding him was better than anything else out there. She was better than coffee. Better than the best energy drink on the market.

He'd never felt so alive. Not even after waking up after a thousand years. This was much better.

"Do you know what makes my power flare like that?" She settled down on the bench and wiped off the blood with her hand.

It was all he could do not to lean over and lick it from her fingers. The desire to take her blood, to taste her, winged through him again on an incredible flight. She'd tasted so wonderful.

He shook his head. "No, I don't."

She shrugged. "Me either."

So it hadn't happened with the poser. Only with him.

A grin raced across her lips. "I only hope it happens again. I see you're up for the next round."

Yipee-ki-yay. He sure was.

Chapter Eight

Cheyenne hopped on the odd-looking merry-go-round. "Push me." She sat, holding on to the piece of playground equipment with both hands in front of her. This merry-go-round looked nothing like ones she'd played on as a child. They'd been wooden. Splinters had been common, and kids had fallen down pushing the thing. She'd never have hopped on one of those naked. Like she did now with this plastic piece.

Roc idly pushed the circular merry-go-round with one hand. It putzed around but didn't go as fast as she wanted it to. Still, it took her back to being a child. So idyllic. Much like tonight had been.

She looked up into his strong face, shrouded in the moonlight. He was so beautiful. His body was so strong. She ran her gaze lovingly over him. His cock was hard again. Showing his need for her.

Her body clenched, and moisture oozed from her pussy. He was so ready yet again. So was she. He'd brought her to orgasm twice already. Yet she was still trembling with the want of him. The yearning for him.

Would it happen again?

The orgasms had set off a chain reaction in her that had never been equaled. She'd felt her power flare up each time and bubble over. The power had been around her like a warm glove. It had been powerful but so refreshing. Like dipping a toe in a cool stream. A wondrous feeling.

She shook her hair back. How had it felt for him? She'd seen his face. Had felt her power wash over him and bathe him in its radiance. Felt it touch him before the power rolled back into her. What he'd done with the power pushing around him, she didn't know. She'd watched it stream like water over his body.

She turned from him to look up at the dark sky. She could see a few stars. They weren't visible in the city due to all the brightness. The sky always held a glow from the street and building lights.

Here some of them glimmered beside the moon like pinpricks in the whole of the sky. Glittered like they'd been sprinkled with fabled fairy dust. In more rural areas, you could probably see even more of them.

She breathed in deeply. So calm. So peaceful. The water lapped, and Roc pushed her again on the merry-go-round.

This was serene.

My head isn't foggy.

She blinked as she looked at Roc again in shock. There'd been something different these last few minutes. That's what it was.

Her mental illness had always been there. Always. Never went entirely away, even with the medicines. The medicines only succeeded in repressing the darkness. That was all. Since she'd become a vampire and aware of the problems in her brain, she could always feel it hovering. Even when she had good days, it rested there. Like an elephant that bided its time before it attacked.

Right now, she couldn't sense the area in her brain she'd referred to as her "crazy place" or "her darkness." Sarah hadn't understood her. Had thought it was more insane speak. Right now, Cheyenne couldn't feel the spot picking at her. Couldn't feel it tugging at the layers of her sanity. Waiting to take her over. Make her the object of pity.

What had caused this reaction? She wasn't on any new medicine. Nothing had taken it away since she'd become aware of its lurking.

Maybe Roc's presence?

Only no vampire could take away schizophrenia. Not to mention, she'd had insane speak down on the bridge. He hadn't even commented.

Maybe the night?

There was nothing different about this night from any other she'd spent lounging at home or traveling with the others.

Henri had told her once that she needed to learn to manage herself by herself. That no one knew if anything would take away the darkness in her head. At the time, she'd gotten the impression he understood her better than anyone else, which was why she'd feared he would act against her one day. Sarah certainly didn't truly understand having a monster inside of you.

Maybe the power surge had banished her crazy place?

Her hands clenched on the plastic as he pushed her again. That had to be the cause. That was the only different variable. That was the only thing different about having sex with Roc.

The power surge.

Maybe that had somehow siphoned off something in her that disturbed her brain chemistry? Was the effect permanent? Transitory? Would orgasming again make it even stronger? Would it last forever? How long would it last if it wasn't permanent?

Roc leaned down to brush a quick kiss on her lips, startling her because she hadn't seen it coming. "Penny for your thoughts."

"They'd need a quarter." They would. They were huge. Her brain was clear as the crystal of a wine goblet. To not be crazy had been her dream since...forever. Since the moment she'd begun to sense her own insanity or had had it pointed out by others.

"I have some of those too." He moved to sit beside her so she stopped spinning. He didn't ask what she was talking about. She wasn't sure she was ready for him to know yet. "Like the playground?"

She did. "Uh-huh. I've always loved playgrounds." She and Sarah had visited one near their house. The swings were a favorite of Sarah's. She leaned back, making the merry-go-round spin a little. "That's why I asked to come see it again. Before I was running by so fast, I didn't get a chance." Before he'd caught her. Even her blood shook at that.

"Darn."

"What?" She looked curiously at him. Why would he say that? His face betrayed nothing to her.

"I thought maybe you came over here to have your wicked way with me." He flashed her a grin with white teeth gleaming. His eyes twinkled as they teased her. He looked so relaxed. So different than he'd been in dreams. There'd always been a tenseness about him. Now it was gone.

She chuckled. "Anytime." He played with her. Teased her. Not anything she'd ever experienced with anyone, except maybe Sarah. Most didn't know how to handle her when the insane speak started, and would never interact with her because of that. Even Sarah had her limits.

"We probably should be getting you home soon." His mouth turned down as though that was the last thing he wanted to consider. He rubbed his chin. "We don't want to be here when the sun rises."

"We won't turn to ash."

Now it was his turn to chuckle. "I know that. They open the gate at dawn and probably patrol the park."

"Oh." She turned her body toward him. "We won't still be here. We have several more hours before dawn."

"We won't?"

She shook her head. "Nope. We'll be long gone before then." Back to her house. He wasn't a puppy, but she was keeping him nonetheless. She didn't say that, though. Instead she reached toward him with one bold hand. Stroked down his chest and lingered over one of his flat nipples. Couldn't push herself to be more bold without his permission. "Roc."

"Yeah?"

"I want to touch your cock. Take it in my mouth. Suck you. May I?" She met his careful brown eyes with her own. Looked up into his gorgeous face surrounded by moonlight. Even without the power trip, she'd found heaven.

He let out a strangled moan. "Boy, can you."

She lowered her head in deference to him. "Thank you." Now she could continue uninhibited. Funny how she could act now that she had his permission.

He tipped her chin up before she could move to do what she'd asked. "Look into my face as you touch me." He stared down into her eyes as if looking into her soul. Delved into her entire being.

She nodded. Kept her eyes on his face. She'd obey his every command. Not something she did with everyone.

She moved her hand down over the flat expanse of his stomach, exploring slowly as she drifted along his skin. Followed the trail of dark hair down to his cock and played over his smooth skin.

His stomach sucked in until she reached near his cock. Then his hips reared up, making the merry-go-round move. His cock bumped her hand like a cat wanting to be petted. He nudged her.

She took him in hand, answering that nudge, closing her fingers around his hard expanse as she also rose to her feet. So hard. So tight. Yet the skin wrinkled smoothly under her fingers. Softness.

She looked down to see a vein under the skin. She ran one finger over the river of that vein. Then she closed her hand to cup him like her hand was a tunnel.

He didn't fit well in her hand. Too big.

She released him and ran her hand up to his tip again. Stroked up the ridge, to the edge of his cock. He was warm and a little sticky.

From her. From earlier. Her juices.

She could still smell her scent on him.

She toyed with end of his cock. It looked like a plum. She lightly circled it with the edge of a finger. Light liquid squeezed out as he groaned.

She held his life in her hands. She'd read that somewhere. That a man's cock was his life. He'd entrusted his member to her. He might still order her around, but she had the power.

She ran her hand back down to the bottom. Reached under to find his balls. They were tight and cool in her fingers. She massaged them with careful ministrations.

She squeezed gently, playing in the wrinkled skin and hair.

He thrust his hips forward, causing the merry-go-round to slip almost out from under him. "God, Cheyenne."

No, she wasn't a god. But he might be.

She moved closer to him and knelt down in front of him. Placed her knees in the dirt and mulch.

He viewed her with half-lidded eyes from his place on the merry-go-round. He widened his legs slightly, causing his cock to bow out.

She got at eye level with his cock. Her vampire vision could see him plain as day. He was red. Shiny. Tight. A vision.

She blew a breath onto his cock.

He jerked, almost coming off the merry-go-round. It rocked back and forth with his motion.

She reached out with her tongue to lick. Only the tip. Salty. A little taste of her own essence, which maybe should have bothered her but didn't. She wanted to coat him completely in her cream. Cover him in her scent.

What a primal thing to do.

Cheyenne realized something else.

He wouldn't mind.

She'd never felt like she belonged anywhere. She'd always been the odd duck. Always. From her palm-reading mother, who'd embarrassed her on more than one occasion as a child, to her crazy brain that had made her an outcast. Hell, even among vampires, she was odd. She'd never killed, except when she'd been with Titius and Titius himself. Sarah tried to understand. Crimson understood more than she wanted to, hence her reluctance to be sympathetic. Henri got her more than most but also had set himself up as the guardian to humans, so he couldn't let her be herself. There was no one in her life who accepted her for who she was.

Roc did. He always had. He didn't even question her crazy moments.

She finally felt as if she belonged somewhere.

With Roc.

She swallowed, throat drying up and closing. Belonging. Could she finally achieve that? With Roc?

She pushed those thoughts from her head. Right now, she'd enjoy the moment with him. She was going to have to face her friends. So would he. Right now, she had him to herself. Wouldn't think about their future.

"Need that quarter again?" He sounded amused by her reverie.

She didn't answer but rolled her tongue around his tip. Pressed into the hole and then swallowed him down like good tequila.

He filled her mouth to the brim. Almost gagged her as his hips thrust forward at the quick insertion of him into her mouth.

She carefully kept her teeth away from his cock and went up and down on him. In and out, she pressed him. Went down to his base and up to his top, rolling her tongue around him as much as she could stand.

She could feel the vein she'd felt earlier with her hands.

Felt him pulsing as he writhed under her mouth.

When she suckled him, he lost control and bucked himself into her mouth as fast as she could take him down.

Her jaw hurt from the strain of keeping her mouth that wide as he pumped himself into her. She held on by his thighs to keep her balance.

His come squirted into her throat with wild abandon. Salty. Nothing sweet. Sort of like licking a potato chip.

She removed her mouth from him and ran her tongue through her mouth, getting the taste down her throat.

He was still half-hard.

She couldn't help but giggle. "Do you ever get spent?"

He half closed his eyes, long lashes shifting to cover his eyes. "Never with you."

The words almost knocked her from her feet. She'd never imagined hearing words like that from anyone.

Belonging.

She'd felt him since she was fourteen. There had always been a connection there. Now she felt it even stronger than before.

He smiled and reached out to caress her cheek. "So beautiful." His rough hands torched her skin like kindling.

"Only for you."

The power quotient hadn't splashed forth this time. She frowned. Maybe her orgasm did drive the action. That's when it had happened before. She hadn't intended this to be a test—she'd wanted to give him head, but a test it had been.

She reached up and placed her hand on top of his. Sighed with the warmth of him. The strength in that one hand.

His cock regained full hardness.

She shook her head. "Insatiable." She didn't mind, only wanted to give him a hard time and tease.

Roc grabbed for her with a growl. "Uh-huh." Got up and pulled her up from her position on her knees. He was insatiable. For her and her alone. Needed her again like breathing. She was turning out to be an obsession.

After two power surges, he felt as if he'd been strapped to an extension cord. Felt more alive than he ever had in his life. His quick recovery times after orgasming were because of the power he'd imbibed. It filled his mind and body and made him feel like a god among men. Even among vampires.

His mind slithered out and probed hers. Needed to get a vibe for what she was feeling. She'd been so thoughtful the last few minutes and the whole evening.

That's when he got the shock of his life.

He'd been able to slip inside her mind when they'd first met at the lake. It had been an easy way to keep track of her around the lake. That was how he'd sensed the crazy. He'd let their minds go apart after he'd caught her, not needing the constant connection.

This time at this moment, he got nothing from her. He couldn't get in. Couldn't press inside of her mind. Couldn't read one iota of her thoughts.

Something had closed him out.

He'd never been able to not read anyone, human or vampire. Had always been able to glean at least something. Try as he might, he couldn't get anything from her. Nothing registered on his radar.

Interesting.

Nothing he needed to debate right now. He could save that for later. When they'd sleep. Or when he wasn't with this incredibly alluring creature.

He led her to the slide. Kept her cool hand in his, touching along the smooth skin that tempted him. He wanted to find each mole, each freckle. Kiss it and become more acquainted with her body than she was.

He laid her down, giggling, onto the plastic. Arranged her so that nothing dug into her sides or arms.

"Going to slide down me?" Her voice sounded coy. She winked at him flirtatiously. Her voice deepened.

He nodded. "Oh yeah." As many times as he could. He couldn't wait to get inside of her. Shouldn't this lust be lessening? Instead, if anything, it seemed to increase with each sexual encounter that they had. He could tell from her voice that she wanted this as much as he did. Of course he could decipher that from the increase in the smell of her musk.

He liked not being able to see inside of her mind. To have to read her body language instead. It left him with less control than usual, but it also made him have to work to get knowledge of her. Work for her. She was well worth any effort. His gaze swept across her again. Yes, well worth any effort.

"The one" was going to be his greatest asset toward killing Orrick. So he'd been told. "*The one' will help you defeat Orrick once and for always.*" Yet she was also going to be his greatest passion. If only he'd known that's what Daly meant with his circumspect words, he would have tried to awaken sooner. Tried to find her sooner.

He looked down on her, lying in front of him.

Her pert breasts waited for his mouth. Her fine, dripping pussy invited his cock. She was his smorgasbord.

That was okay with him.

He planted his feet solidly on the ground and slipped into the space of her body. Lined up his cock to her pussy. And leaned forward.

He popped fully inside of her. He found himself seated within her depths when he'd only planned for his tip to enter.

She moaned in unison with him.

Her moisture surrounded him. Walls tightly enveloped him, taking him even deeper into her silky depths, making him feel like warm wax had been poured all down him. It was good. Too good.

He gritted his teeth and bit his lip. Thought about all the boring statistics that he'd learned while being in the ground. Thought of anything that would distract him from this path. Couldn't come this soon. Not yet.

Because she had to.

He should be able to put this off. Only, he did feel about to explode. Was so ready to come, he felt his desire wash over him. Felt his body do a familiar tense reaction that would lead to an orgasm.

No. He would find his control. He would find a way to draw himself out so that she came first. Somehow.

In and out, he worked himself. Grinding down on her. It was a different angle than he'd used before. He had to work to stay close to her. Keep her from sliding down the slide as he impaled her over and over again.

He slipped one hand down between their bodies and found her clit. One ping to it and she shook. Another touch and she keened.

Power rolled out from her center. And into him. It took him over without lying around her in the air. He felt as though he'd been taken over by it. As though an electric current popped through him. His body stretched along its wake.

The orgasm literally felt as though it ripped him apart. He exploded all over her and didn't think he would ever stop coming. Even after the main thrust was done, aftershocks continued to knock him off his feet. Good thing he had her and the slide under him or he might have fallen.

His breathing raced in pace with his heartbeat. Sweat cooled his nova-hot body. Stars retreated from his vision.

His body tingled with the remnants of the power and with the strength of his climax. Every hair stood up on him. Goose pimples rose among the little hairs. His body chilled, even though his core temperature rose.

He'd never felt so alive. So strong. His muscles bulged. Tightened. He pulled away from her and took a step. Almost fell with the gelling of the power inside of him. Couldn't seem to find his footing.

He felt drunk with the awesome strength of the pure power he'd sucked down his throat. Into his pores. It was so pure that he could feel the raw, throbbing edges of what had infiltrated his being. "God, what you do to me." He tried to get enough air in his lungs so he didn't feel like he was drowning.

Her eyes sparkled. "You do the same to me." She picked herself off the slide. Stretched out her back. She looked as if she might be stiff. As though her muscles had contracted and wouldn't go back to normal.

"You all right?"

She nodded. Stretched out each leg, one at a time. "I'm fine. Not used to all this is all." A rosy glow popped up along her cheekbones.

Neither was he.

It had been so many years since he'd had sex. His cock felt well used. Hell, he hadn't even started sex in dreams until she'd come into his picture, and he'd waited until she'd been old enough. Of course when you're a vampire who'd lived as long as he did, time was relative. Transitory.

Her gaze flew around the playground as though testing every piece of equipment. "How much more time until dawn? I've lost track."

"A few hours." It would come too quickly. What next? He'd been so into this moment, he'd not even thought about the morning. Morning would come no matter how much they didn't want it to.

She blew out a breath. Looked concerned, as though she faced the gallows. What could make her look so serious? Were there problems he didn't know about? "Think there's enough time for it?"

"For what?" He kept his gaze trained on her face. Was she thinking about morning too and what they would do next? He wanted to rush to reassure her, but he didn't know what would happen either. They had a few decisions to make that would affect everything. She was "the one," and he needed her. In more ways than one. He'd not willingly let her go.

"To try out all the playground equipment." She winked, letting him know she didn't want to play on it. Not in the regular sense, at least. "Disinfect it before morning."

His cock resumed hardness as if it had barely left that state to be soft at all. "Just enough I think. Just enough."

* * * *

Orrick rolled over in the bed. Last night's dinner had been disposed of earlier by Vegas, who hadn't yet come back from his errand. Again, Orrick hadn't been able to feed from this one's soul. Instead he'd gotten a hearty meal of blood. That had pissed him off at the time, but now he was sated and half-asleep. If only it had been Marroc whom Vegas was disposing of. Marroc's day would come.

What was Roc doing right now? Why could he feed from souls when Orrick couldn't find the trick to tapping into souls every time? What the fuck was so special about Roc? Nothing. There had to be another explanation. Time to go in search of his maker and see what the bastard was up to.

Orrick slipped out of himself, drifting this way and that. Sought out vibes in the air. Searched all over the night air of Richmond. He sensed several vampires. Swooped down on a few in his mind's eye.

A glimmer caught his attention but then was gone like a shooting star. He hadn't even sensed enough to get a location. He'd barely realized it was there before it had been flitting away.

He tried again and again, going out of himself. Drifting over the confines of this tepid city.

Where was Roc? Orrick couldn't find any sign of his former lover. Couldn't get a sense of him, much less a location. Only that gleam, and that hadn't lasted long enough to get any fix on. He wasn't even sure that had been Roc. It might have been anything.

He balled his fists in frustration. The sheet twisted along his legs as he turned over a few times. He wanted to gnash his teeth. Sink them into a bloody victim. Sad thing about ingesting blood—the rush of it always made him want another. He could do without being so addicted to the blood he took.

If only he could make some sense of Roc. To do that, he'd have to find him first. He wanted to know what Roc was up to here in Richmond. He had to be up to something. The best way to know would be to get into his mind. Obviously he was shielding. Hard. He must be doing something he didn't want Orrick to know about.

Roc must be better at shielding himself from Orrick than he used to be. He had never been able to hide from him so completely before. Even when Orrick hadn't been able to contact him, there'd been something. Maybe Roc's time in the ground had increased his powers. Dammit, that was hardly fair.

Roc hadn't contacted him since that first encounter. He probably didn't want to chance Orrick doubling back and flushing him out. That led more credence to the position that Roc was up to something. He was always up to something. That's how he'd made it away before Orrick could kill him.

Bastard.

Orrick's cell phone trilled a tune throughout the hotel room. When had his phone had a song programmed? Fuck it, he didn't need a song. Too bad he couldn't eat Vegas. Then he'd have to make another minion, and that hardly seemed worth the effort.

He stalked from the bed and walked to his pants, cock swinging. Dug in his pockets for his phone. Shit, the woman had bled on his new jeans. Not that he cared, but now he'd have to replace them. It could cause too many problems for him to continue to wear the things, because people might ask questions. Dumb bitch couldn't have bled in the other direction? “Yeah?” Whatever this was, it better be good. He wasn't in the mood for screwups. Or anything else remotely resembling a serious conversation.

“It's Fort.”

Fucking duh. Orrick had caller ID. Orrick could see who fucking called him. Moron. “What?”

“I've been going through the records. It's taken a while, but I think I've finally gotten a hit on a descendant or two.” Fort sounded tired but elated. As though he'd found something and wanted to play show-and-tell.

Orrick had no desire to play any games with anyone. He turned back to the bed and walked toward it to sit down. “You found people who have this ancestor, Daly Smith? Are they alive?”

"Yeah. Someone was into genealogy. We lucked out. They'd done a lot of the legwork for me already. There are several current ancestors living in the United States." Fort switched the phone to his other ear from the sound of it.

"Where are these relations of Smith? How many are there?" He didn't like the plurals. Dammit, things couldn't ever be simple.

"Well, here's the interesting part of what I found. The part I called to tell you. You're in Richmond, right?" Fort smacked his lips. "Richmond, Virginia?" He sounded as though he had a bomb to drop.

Orrick nodded, until he realized Fort couldn't see him. "Yeah. That's where we are. It's where we think that Roc's gone." If they were wrong about that guess, then heads would roll. He'd still have to find a new minion but would be most satisfied by the violence of the kill. In fact, he'd look forward to it.

"Well, one of the relations is from Richmond originally, and she's currently living in Richmond, according to the latest I can find on her profile." Fort sounded triumphant. Yes, that had been a bomb to drop.

"You're sure?" Now that was interesting. It was something he could use. Finally the turning of the brainiac into a vampire was paying off for Orrick. A she. Even more interesting. Maybe this woman was the reason Roc was here in Richmond. He had slept with anyone before. Men or women, he hadn't cared long as he'd gotten off.

"Yes, I thought the coincidence was too big to ignore." Fort sounded as though he were about to burst.

"That is too much to ignore." This could be the key to helping him find Roc and taking care of the vampire once and for all. "Go on. Give me all the information you know." Orrick cringed. That was a mistake to tell a brain.

"Okay. There are other branches of Smith that have many forks, but this one is an only child. This one is the end of that particular line of the branch of Smith. That's one reason she might be special."

"Oh?"

"Well, from the point of view of trying to find family."

Orrick didn't care about finding family. Only about finding Roc. "Do you have an address?" Orrick opened a drawer and found a pen and piece of paper.

"Yeah. One item of... Well, you may want to proceed carefully." Fort hemmed like he didn't want to say anything.

"Why?" Like Orrick needed protection or something? What a crock of shit. Orrick could take care of himself.

"Henri Baptiste is in town. They are staying together at this house."

The Egyptian. Orrick's heart rate tripled. Henri had always avoided him until now. Perhaps he could take out Henri and Roc in one fell swoop. Henri's line was the last major line left from Roc. "What is this woman's name?" He couldn't wait to meet her.

Chapter Nine

Cheyenne entered the house through the front door with Roc following behind her. The sun had peeked up over the horizon, casting brilliant light down over the green plants and beaming flowers.

She was deliciously sore, aching between her thighs. She'd never been such after sex before. She'd never had sex so many times either. They'd played. They'd teased. They'd talked. Under the light of the moon.

She'd finally told him of her illness. He'd already sensed it. She'd never talked with anyone so candidly before.

"I'm afraid one day I'll lose myself in the vortex of my own thoughts. That I'll go into crazy and I'll never come back out." Her vampirism had made her more aware of her slips and even more afraid.

He'd held her. Offered no empty promises. Nothing to set up her hopes. Wrapped his arms around her and held her tightly. He hadn't told her that everything would be all right, and she adored him for that. That was something he could never guarantee.

"I do feel saner with you." That had launched them into more sex. She'd felt his dismissal of what she'd said. She hadn't explained the comment. She should have, but she wasn't ready to share and go into detail with him. Not yet. She wasn't sure why the sex, or rather her orgasms, affected her so much.

Her clarity was true even now. She could feel her mind clearly for the first time in ages. It felt crisp. Like she'd not felt since the trouble had begun way back when. She'd never been this lucid, or at least, she didn't remember ever being this sane.

Of course, now there was to be more trouble. Intense trouble. Marroc's appearance wouldn't go over well.

Sarah rushed into the living room before the door had even closed. "Where have you been? I thought you were shopping with Nathan until he ambled in. He said you told him you were with..." Her eyes narrowed as she spotted Marroc. "Who is that?" She halted in the middle of the room.

Cheyenne swallowed. Facing down Sarah was going to be the hardest part of all. "This is Roc." She didn't mention anything else. Sarah would fill in the rest by herself. Then the arguments would start. Cheyenne tensed her body.

"The man from your dreams?" Sarah's eyes widened as large as Cheyenne had ever seen them. "That's the man you've been dreaming of?" Her breathing hitched, as though she couldn't believe this turn of events.

Cheyenne nodded. She knotted her hand up into a ball. She'd never prove to them she wasn't crazy. So best to rely on emotion rather than logic when the rants started. Roc's hand found hers to stroke along the knuckles. It reassured her as well as got the blood pumping all over her body.

"Nick!" Sarah sounded panicked. "Cheyenne, step away from him." She bared her fangs at the man. A laughable fact, considering how tiny she looked next to Roc, but Cheyenne knew how formidable Sarah could be. "Are you sure this is the man you've been dreaming of? How did you find him?"

Roc ignored Sarah's questions. "Sarah." His use of her name received a glare. "Calm down and let's talk about this like reasonable vampires." Roc moved closer to Cheyenne. Sarah wasn't going to calm down. Not yet anyway.

"Get away from her." Sarah moved forward and glanced behind her. "Nick! Henri! Nathan!" She belted the words out like she was singing opera.

Something thudded upstairs.

Which meant she'd been heard. The cavalry would come to save Sarah. Cheyenne planted herself in front of Roc. She'd not let them hurt him. No matter what else happened between them.

"I won't move. I'm not leaving until we talk." Roc looked almost amused by Sarah's order.

Sarah folded her arms over her chest. "You will leave her alone. Move away from her." She pointed a lone finger at him.

"You can beat at my head all you want...but you're not going to get inside. Unless I want you there." Roc continued to look amused.

Sarah glared more.

"Sarah, please talk to him—"

Henri, Nathan, and Nick barreled into the living room, interrupting Cheyenne. Nathan wore a towel, and Nick looked as though he'd already been in the shower. Soap glistened on one shoulder, and his jeans weren't zipped.

Roc paused as he looked at the three of them. "Sorry if I interrupted anything." He lifted a brow.

Cheyenne winced. Though Nathan laughed, that comment would not go over well with Nick. He wouldn't appreciate the humor.

Nick growled as he wiped the bubbles from his shoulder. "Who the hell is this clown, ma petite?" His eyes sought out Cheyenne and tossed the blame securely her way. Like he always did.

She straightened her shoulders. She'd take the heat for this from everyone. "This is Roc."

All three faces went blank.

"Actually I guess it's Marroc. Roc is a nickname, isn't it?" She looked to Roc for confirmation. Wanted to get his information correct. There'd be much to debate. She didn't want to give them more fodder.

He nodded with a small smile for her. Made her heart beat faster. Made her skin tingle with awareness. "Marroc, at your service." He nodded to Henri. "Or you can call me Roc. Your choice."

"I'd prefer not to call you at all. What are you doing in my house?" Nick tossed back his wet hair. Still didn't look happy about this series of events. "What's he doing in my house, Cheyenne?"

Sarah stepped forward, trying to grasp Cheyenne and yank her from Roc's side. Cheyenne resisted, keeping herself beside the man she wanted to be with. "He's the man Chey's been dreaming about. For years."

Henri's cool eyes sought Cheyenne out. He didn't seem as fretful as Nick. 'Course not much seemed to rattle him. "You're sure?"

Cheyenne nodded. "I'm sure this is the man I've been dreaming about all along." If only she hadn't made the mistake with Titius. In his own way, Titius had given her all that he could.

"She thought that Titius was the man she'd dreamed about all along too." Sarah seemed to be getting her emotions under control. She remained tight and drawn in, especially her face.

There it was. Cheyenne would pay for that for the rest of her life. "I was wrong with Titius. I admit that." She'd been too crazy to tell Titius about the dreams and doubts until the end. "I'm not wrong here. Roc confirms the dreams."

He nodded, looking again to Henri. "I dreamed of her too. From a point in time forward."

Sarah snorted. "Titius would say whatever Cheyenne wanted to hear to get her. Anything. We don't know this man or what he's capable of. He could be saying this stuff because he wants Cheyenne."

Roc did want her. Badly. He'd mentioned her being "the one" a couple of times. He wouldn't lie to her about anything. It wasn't his style. He was so different from the poser.

"Sarah..."

Roc had pulled himself to full attention. "I do not lie. I would not lie to Cheyenne about these dreams." His face expressed all his outrage that Sarah would even question him about this subject.

"Sure you don't. Neither did Titius." Sarah pointed at him again. "You need to move away from her."

Cheyenne opened her mouth to object to Sarah's order but didn't get to speak. Didn't get to say anything before others started talking. At the same time, so no one could hear anything else.

"I won't." Roc's mouth set in a tight line. An impenetrable line that wouldn't budge, much like Marroc himself.

"You will if Sarah says to move." Nick flexed his biceps. Cheyenne had never seen him show off like this.

Marroc did some flexing of his own, stretching out his arm, making the chorded muscles display. Cheyenne could get lost staring at them. Get lost in that body. Her pussy dripped again. "Unless Cheyenne herself asks me to move, I'm staying right here."

Yes, this was going well. "Sarah, he's fine. He's..." More than fine. Fuckable. Glorious. None of those words would go over well. "He's okay. He's not like the poser." She always wanted to hiss when she said that word.

Henri looked confused. "Poser?"

"Titius." Cheyenne shrugged. "It's what I call him. He was fake. I know that now more than ever."

"You need an urban dictionary." Nathan affected a bored expression as he surveyed them all.

Henri rolled his eyes. "I don't speak slang."

"Roc is different—"

Sarah interrupted. "You thought Titius was real and different too." Sarah grabbed Cheyenne, not to pull her away but to link hands. "I know you want this to be real. You want him to be real. But I don't want to see you get hurt again." Sarah squeezed her hand. "That's all I want. Titius almost broke you. I don't want that to happen again."

Sarah was the only one who understood. The only one who'd thought she'd been worth picking up the pieces. Except maybe Henri.

"I want Sarah safe." Nick shifted closer to them both. "Last time, you two became linked, and all hell broke loose."

Roc looked straight into Sarah's eyes. He spoke clearly, in a commanding tone. "I will not hurt Cheyenne."

Nick's eyes narrowed. He'd caught the same thing Cheyenne did. He hadn't said he wouldn't hurt Sarah.

Sarah shook her head. "Like I'd believe that."

"Roc, Sarah's my friend." Cheyenne bit her lip. "I don't want her hurt. By you or anyone. Remember your promise in the dream. I don't want her hurt." If it came down to it, Cheyenne would protect Sarah. At all costs. As Sarah had protected her time and time again.

"Of course I remember my promise in the dream." Roc's glance at Sarah was brief and cursory. "Because you wish it, she's under my protection as well." He bowed his head.

Nick growled again. "Sarah needs no one's protection but mine." He moved between Roc and Sarah. "Ma petite..."

Cheyenne blinked. Was Nick jealous? Surely he couldn't be.

Roc held up his hands. It didn't make him look safer. In fact, it increased a sense of danger about him. Must be the bulging biceps under his shirt. Had his arms been that big when he'd first arrived? Had he seemed to glimmer so much?

Henri's voice was quiet as he stepped forward. Thoughtful. "Now that you're here, Roc. With Cheyenne. You obviously sought her out, which means you must have a purpose. What do you intend to do?"

Cheyenne's head swiveled to look at Roc. They'd made no promises. Hadn't discussed what could happen next between them. What would happen next. They'd simply accepted today and moved forward with that.

"I intend to make her mine, of course. Fuck her six ways to Sunday." Roc's face lit with a grin as he winked at Cheyenne.

The words filled Cheyenne with a rumble of desire. It moved across her like lightning. When had she become all consumed with lust? It felt good, though. Felt like it crackled along her senses.

Sarah gasped. Blushed.

The men didn't react at all.

"Who are you anyway?" Sarah finally found her voice. "Who is he? Titius was a former Roman general. Who is this guy? You'd never heard of him, Henri."

Cheyenne opened her mouth to tell them. Then found she couldn't. Roc and she had talked about so many things. His past and their future hadn't been two things discussed. "I... Uhhh."

Sarah looked pleased. "You don't know, do you?" She sounded triumphant, as though she'd revealed something.

Roc rocked back on his heels. "That's easy enough to answer." He paused. "I'm the first vampire."

* * * *

Whatever Roc was expecting from his announcement, he didn't get. Wasn't even sure what he'd thought would happen.

Instead everyone but Henri started talking at once. They all babbled on, not listening to anyone but themselves.

Roc had known that Orrick would try to wipe his existence from the earth after he couldn't find him. Judging from these reactions, apparently it had been done well. All seemed dubious of his claim.

"You can't be. Fucking moron. No one knows who the first vampire was." Nick ran a hand through his hair, which was long and dark. He had a slight accent that Marroc couldn't place. Maybe Russian? Yes, that must be it. "Not even Henri."

So Henri was the apparent leader of this little band. He looked the part with some regal air that transcended through him. Seemed levelheaded. And almost familiar. Especially as he tried to get into Henri's head. Henri didn't hold him out but let him in to specific quadrants. Smart. That way he could conserve his strength to keep Marroc from sensitive areas of his mind. He was Egyptian. That explained the olive skin tone and relatively short stature.

Sarah ranted in her own noncursing way. "I don't believe the audacity you have. First you come into Chey's mind..." She threw her hands up in the air at one point as though she was disgusted with him.

Nathan seemed the least outspoken but looked the most skeptical. "Don't know what you think you're up to, but dude, that's a major claim." He shook his head. He was a mammoth of a man with short blond hair. "I hope you have proof to back it up." There seemed to be a vibe between him and Henri. A current almost. Which explained a lot.

Of course, when the three had come downstairs he'd thought that Nathan and Nick had been showering together. Until Nick had started his threats about protecting Sarah. Then Marroc had realized that Sarah and Nick had a "thing."

"Everyone, please. I'm sure he has a good explanation for his claim. You do, don't you, Roc?" Cheyenne looked doubtful and troubled. Hers was the worst reaction of them all. Why didn't she believe him? She picked at the material of her dress, twisting it this way and that. "Tell them."

More arguing and yelping ensued, especially when Roc didn't speak up. He wouldn't be heard over the din anyway.

Henri folded his arms in front of his chest and watched. His gaze met Roc's. He was calm. Serene. Wings beat at Roc's head. Tried to get into his mind. Roc easily blocked the probing. "Not gonna happen."

Henri shrugged. "I had to try."

"Of course." Henri had, to make the attempt and Roc didn't blame him for that. It had needed to be done. Now Henri knew he couldn't get into his head.

Henri whistled loudly. The sound split the air like a careening cry of a hawk or predator. Like the rabbit stopped what it was doing to listen, so did everyone here.

All talking ceased. All gazes turned to Henri, and they gave him their full attention. Yes, he definitely led this bunch.

Henri spoke quietly, yet like he wanted to be heard. "You're the first vampire?" He didn't sound dubious. Didn't sound nonplussed. Asked the question and gave Roc a chance to reply. No bullshit.

Roc liked the vampire already. If crossed, Henri would be a formidable enemy. Roc would have to stay on his good side. Allies always were good. "Yes."

Henri's smile was slow in coming. "Funny how I've never heard of you." His gaze appraised Roc up and down.

Nathan moved forward. "Not to derail this conversation, but why don't we retire into the kitchen? Where we can sit and discuss this. All civilized-like." He headed for the door to presumably the other room. "Not to mention"—he laughed—"I'm hungry. For food, that is."

Henri nodded. "I think that would be a good idea." He followed behind Nathan. Seemed entranced by the way the man's ass swung. Yes, they were definitely an item. They had the ease of having been together awhile too.

Roc took Cheyenne's hand in hers to pull her forward. He stroked his hand over her knuckle. "Okay." His hand tingled from the touch of her skin. So tiny. He liked the smallness of her hand against his much larger one. Liked the way they seemed to fit together. Like a key into a lock.

Sarah breezed by them. She didn't shoot him a dirty look but did give him a hard glance. Like she was sizing him up.

Well, at least they weren't kicking him out. That's what Sarah had wanted to do at first. She was such a blazing redhead. Small yet fierce. He'd sensed her power when she'd sent it licking at him. They were all pretty strong, but she stood out. For being such a young vampire, she had an incredible strength. And could control her powers. Yet another reason to get them all on his side in the fight against Orrick.

Cheyenne sat down in a kitchen chair, distancing herself from Roc, but he plopped down in the chair beside her and resumed contact. His thigh touched her leg. His cock bounced up into an erection.

It would be a while before they got to go do anything else, if these others had their way. The talking needed to be done first. So he pushed down any lust. Wasn't time for his desires, yet they still remained. After all the loving they'd done the night before, he still wanted Cheyenne as bad as a man could want a woman. How could that be? Shouldn't he be easing down on lust by now? Instead of rolling full barrel into it? There was also the power rush that her orgasming brought him. It was better than any power shake or drug. Yet he craved her with or without that rush of energy.

Nick turned a chair backward and sat down between Roc and Sarah. Yes, there was a jealous man in the house. Roc best do well to ease that down. "You expect us to believe you're the first?"

Henri's eyes glinted half closed. "The real question to ask, is why wouldn't he be?" He sat back in his own chair, folding his hands in front of him. The wood emitted a harsh *squeak*.

Sarah pulled herself closer. "Because he could lie about that?" She didn't sound as confrontational as she had earlier. She hadn't found anything in his mind. Or at least, he didn't think so. Could she get in there without his knowing?

He frowned. Surely not. What would make her change her mind? Her gaze had appraised him again on the walk. Maybe she'd seen something she'd liked?

Her words still riled him once they sunk in. "I don't lie." He growled and sat up straighter in his own chair. Crossed his legs. Damn, these people had a bad opinion of him. What had happened to them that they distrusted so much?

Cheyenne squeezed his hand. It was the first time since the arguments had all started that she'd made the effort to touch him.

His heart warmed along with his cock. Ironical how a simple action could bring him back to what was important. Her.

Henri watched as Nathan took some blood to heat it in the microwave. Henri seemed distracted for a moment, whether for the blood or his lover, Roc couldn't tell. "Roc came here to find Cheyenne." He looked to Roc for confirmation. "Correct?"

Roc nodded. She was the reason for his being in Richmond. He started to say more and defend himself.

Henri cut him off with the wave of his hand. "Roc knew walking in here would be difficult. That we would mistrust him." Roc had expected a little trouble. This was much more than he'd anticipated. "Because of the events with Titius that I'm sure he's heard about from Cheyenne." Maybe he should have expected more because of what he'd known. "Other events that he doesn't know about yet." Ah, that explained the intensity. "Cheyenne's own mental faculties." His gaze shot to Cheyenne after the words left him.

Cheyenne blew out a breath.

Henri looked at her fondly. His face softened for the young woman. "I mean you no offense."

She nodded. "I know. None taken." Her laugh came a little brittle. "It's all true, after all."

Roc tapped into her mind briefly and was able to get in for the first time since they'd had sex. He found her to be clearer than she'd been when she'd come to Echo Lake. Lucid. Not that he'd seen much evidence, but this seemed the clearest that he'd ever encountered her in life. Or in dreams. Even then, he'd known there was something off about her. He blinked. How interesting that her clarity would happen with sex, especially when he'd discovered extras to her lovemaking too. He was still feeling the best he'd ever been after their rounds of lovemaking. Definite win-win situation, if it helped them both. There might be another explanation for this sanity, but he'd assume for now it had something to do with her release of power when she'd orgasmed.

"So why would Roc come in here with such an outlandish story, i.e. being the first vampire?" Henri leaned forward again. "Why would he tell us something we would find laughable when he knew what he was up against?"

Marroc wasn't sure he agreed with the entire sentiment, even though it made sense. He'd expected a reaction to his declaration. He'd known what Orrick had done. They'd been a way for him to test out his status. It hadn't gone all that well. Damn Orrick.

Sarah looked thoughtful. "You've got a point." She didn't seem to like it and said the words grudgingly. As though they made her cringe. "I guess."

She was going to be one to watch. Like Henri, fairness seemed to be her motivator. He had to find out what motivated these people because that was a key to easing Cheyenne into life with him. These people were important to her. Their acceptance would be vital. Also they'd be of help to defeat Orrick. Not that he needed the help. Except he wanted Cheyenne well protected. That meant concessions and working with others.

Henri's mouth curved into a bigger smile, which said he knew he had the point. "However, that you're the first vampire begs the question... Where the hell have you been? You've not been walking among us. Or I'd have heard of you long before now." Henri tapped on his leg.

Nathan poured blood into a mug and pushed it toward Henri. The fresh red shimmered in contrast to the white ceramic. "Would you like some too, Roc? Anyone else want any?"

The smell of blood permeated the room. Rusty and old, it seemed to hover around them, heavy in the air.

Roc hadn't had this much blood in so long, it almost smelled good to him. Like ambrosia. His nostrils flared as he surveyed. He'd forgotten how good blood could smell. Could taste. How warm it would feel on his throat.

Nathan laughed at his expression. "As you're looking like a wolf about to find a pig, I guess you want some?" He grinned at Roc. He seemed easygoing, yet his body was hard and his reflexes fast. He busied himself with several more mugs of blood.

Roc shook his head. "I don't feed on blood." It had been so long since he'd had to explain this part.

Nick sat back. His eyes narrowed. He looked at Sarah and back to Roc. "Then what do you feed from?"

"Life forces." Roc shrugged. "I've evolved, I guess." He probably shouldn't have said it that way, but that was what had happened. One day he'd been drinking blood, the next he'd been sipping down life forces. So much better to deal with. Not as messy, and people didn't need to die for him to live. He pressed forward before they could digest what they'd been told. He informed them how he'd been in the ground for a thousand years because the psychic had said he needed to avoid Orrick. How he'd woken up with Cheyenne in his dreams. How he'd dreamed of her long before he'd been awake.

"So this Orrick wants to kill you?" Henri continued to tap on his leg. "He thinks that will buy him some powers of yours. Perhaps he wants to evolve to take souls as well?" He nodded after Roc's own nod. "He probably figures this will give him an edge over all other vampires. Knowing the type."

"First he wants to know how I do what I do, which is a good question. I'm not sure." Roc squeezed Cheyenne's hand again. She'd been strangely silent during this last interrogation. Hadn't stuck up for him or dissed him. Roc would have preferred either to this silence. "Then he'll try to kill me."

"The psychic who helped to bury you." Nick took a sip of the blood Nathan had fixed him once Roc had started with his story to explain his origins. "He said 'the one' would help you defeat Orrick?"

"Yep. That's it. What he told me. Cheyenne is 'the one.' 'The one' who will help me defeat Orrick for good." His gaze softened. "Not to mention, she's my passion. My woman." It was odd to be saying such after so short a time. The truth was, he already couldn't imagine his life without her.

Sarah frowned. "You've known Chey for all of what? A few hours? She's your passion? Your woman?"

Leave it to Sarah to point out how short a time they'd known each other. "We were connected. Been connected for many years." Cheyenne's trembling hand left Roc's as he continued talking. "We knew each other in dreams long before we met here." He didn't follow her hand though he wanted to. "Long before."

"Still doesn't mean you're soul mates, bub. Or fated lovers." Sarah stretched out her arm. "You're expecting a lot from her. To help you with this Orrick and to be your 'one.' Not to mention be your girlfriend on the side."

"She's more than that to me. She's 'the one,' and I—" He broke off. Perhaps he shouldn't reveal this. He should tell Cheyenne first about the boosts of energy. Not reveal it to her like this. In a crowd.

"What?" Henri paused over his mug of blood.

"And?" The little redhead was sure to dig her claws in now. She'd want to know what he wasn't saying.

Whatever test she threw at him, he'd pass. He'd win Cheyenne. He wasn't accustomed to having to try at this sort of thing. He'd always had whatever he'd wanted before. People had given him whatever he desired without arguing. Not this woman. Or Cheyenne either for that matter. "She's..." He shook his head and didn't bother continuing. He couldn't drop this on her in front of all her friends. He should have told her as soon as it happened, but he hadn't been able to get his mouth from hers, and then she'd started talking and telling him about her life.

"After what she's been through with the one who took your place, that's a lot to expect considering how little you two know about each other." Sarah's mouth trembled as though she remembered something awful.

Cheyenne swallowed loudly and reached across the table to clasp Sarah's hand. They held tightly.

The two had shared something. Something horrible. Whatever it was, it had formed a bond between the two.

Titius.

Roc gritted his teeth. He'd like to kill that big idiot, Titius. For a lot of reasons. He ran his knuckles over Cheyenne's hand again. Noticed Nick doing much the same thing to Sarah's hand. "We know enough about each other." This little urchin was looking out for Cheyenne's best interests, but she was going to be a pain in his ass. A thorn in his side. He could already tell. "Don't we?" The last was directed at Cheyenne. She'd stand up and tell them that they knew each other.

She bit her lip. Didn't reply but looked away from his gaze. Her hand tightened on his, and she removed her other hand from Sarah's.

"Do you?" Sarah arched a brow. She sat up straighter in her chair. Looked him full in the eye.

You'd never know she was probably a foot shorter than him and less than a third of his weight. She was a little thing, yet she didn't mind challenging him and taking him on.

Cheyenne's voice was quiet when she finally replied. "No. We don't." Her hand slipped from his, pulling away from him completely as her words had done.

All heads swiveled to look at her. The expressions ran the gamut from shocked to nothing revealed.

Roc frowned. He sought out her hand again. Tried to capture it with his. Cheyenne wouldn't let him. "We do. We know each other well enough. I"—What? He wanted her. Had dreamed of her for so long, she was his reality—"need you."

She shook her head back and forth. "You're the first. The first vampire. You never once told me that during all the years we spent dreaming of each other." Her speech grew clipped and raised an octave. "I don't know enough about you to say what's up."

Sarah didn't look triumphant. Only sad. Her forehead wrinkled, and she tossed off Nick's hand.

Roc looked back and forth between Cheyenne and Sarah. "How do you expect me to settle this?" This was fucking impossible. Orrick wouldn't care whether they knew each other, would only kill anyone close to Roc.

Why hadn't he told her? He didn't know. It hadn't seemed to come up that he was the first.

"Date her." The challenge was issued by Sarah with a lift of her chin and a glint in her eyes.

Nick blew out a long whistle. Sat back as though he expected fireworks to explode any minute now.

Nathan laughed. A full belly laugh that made his head tip back. "You've got props, Sarah. That's all I'll say."

Henri looked down into his mug as though something interesting had popped up in there for him to study.

"You've got to be kidding." Roc looked into Sarah's face. She looked serious. "You're joking right?"

Nick shook his head. "Where Cheyenne's concerned, Sarah doesn't joke. She's serious about this."

Sarah shook her head. "Not kidding." Her eyebrows creased again. "I think you need to date her."

He almost said, *I fucked her six ways to Sunday, and now I'm supposed to date her?* He managed to catch the words before they tumbled from his lips. "I need to date Cheyenne. After spending hours in dreams with her?"

Sarah nodded. "That's what I think." She picked at a hole in her jeans. "It's not actually up to me. It's up to Cheyenne. And what she wants. Whether I like it or not, I'll abide by her decision. Whatever it may be."

A little burst of air sounded from Cheyenne. A puff. As though she'd been expecting something but now had to deal with it. "Roc. I know we've been intimate in dreams. Talked for hours. Made love in them." A flush ran across her cheeks. "And more."

"Damn straight." Cheyenne wouldn't deny him. No matter what, they'd work this out and be together. She'd not capitulate to the demands of her friends. She was the only person in the world who could ask for him to back down, and he would give in. That had to count for something.

"We were intimate tonight. Very intimate." Cheyenne didn't falter, nor did she leave any doubts as to what she meant.

Sarah's turn to blush. Showed up much easier on her fair skin than it ever would on his woman.

"Damn straight." He sounded like a broken record. Maybe he should say a broken DVD to go with the changing times?

"Sarah's right. We need to date." The words bubbled out of her like a stopped-up wellspring that had been released.

Well, hell and damnation. He could take her and bend her to his will, but that would accomplish nothing. He needed her to be with him because she wanted to be. If he forced her, he was no better than Orrick. No better than Titius. If it were the others asking, he'd blow them off. This was Cheyenne. He blew out a heavy breath. "Then I guess we're going to dinner tonight, Cheyenne."

The relief in her face was almost enough to make him feel better about this. Almost. If only Orrick would never find him.

"Should he ask?" Nathan tottered on his chair. "Ow." Someone must have hit him. Roc didn't see who, but his money was on Sarah. "I'm just saying..."

Roc had never asked for anything. Ever. He looked over at Cheyenne, who stared up at him with dark eyes shining. A shadow passed over her face. Her breasts bobbed with a catch in her breathing. The words tumbled from him. "Would you go on a date with me tonight, Cheyenne?"

He gave her the choice. It was up to her now to continue this between them or walk away. How could he let her walk away? He couldn't. Even though he was asking.

"I'll go to dinner with you." A shy smile moved across her face. As though she knew what this had cost him.

His chest tightened. "Pick you up at eight?"

She nodded.

If only this little fairy-tale world of dates and dinners could go on forever. But it couldn't. A real danger lurked.

Orrick would find them. He was out there. Roc would have to deal with him, dates or no dates.

Chapter Ten

Cheyenne pulled up a pair of jeans. Should she wear something fancier? She had no idea or frame of reference for going on a date.

A date *with* Roc. Going out to dinner. An actual date, when she'd never gone on one before.

She'd been so fucked-up in the head once she'd been able to date that her mother had never let her go on one. The few sexual encounters she'd had, had been brief and clandestine.

Things with Titius hadn't left time for dating him. Hell, he'd killed her mother and taken her not long after their first meeting.

She slipped on a tank top. Beads. Spritzed some perfume on her neck and wrists. A little dab on her elbows.

How did this work?

Of course, from what she knew about dating, the cart had already been put before the horse. They'd already had sex.

When she'd been with Roc, she'd been sure he wasn't after anything. Wasn't using her for her power or what he could take from her.

Like Titius had. Titius may have loved her, cared for her, but he'd been after her power. That had been his driving motivation. She'd realized it before she'd accepted it.

To hear that Roc thought she was “the one” had—well, it had crushed her. She'd thought he'd wanted her for her. Not because she was “the one.” She was still having a hard time reconciling everything. Stupid, but she'd never thought he'd consider her “the one,” even though she'd heard him talk about it when she dreamed. He hadn't told her his thoughts first either.

He'd asked her out, which was a start. She knew how hard that had been for him. He'd not demanded but asked. Yet was it because she was this fabled “one”? Or was it because he wanted her?

A date had seemed an easy answer to questions she wasn't sure she should ask or wanted the true answer to.

Sarah breezed into the room. She flopped onto Cheyenne's bed. “Getting ready?”

“Yeah.”

“You like him a lot.” Sarah put her chin on her hand and put her feet up in the air behind her. She swung her feet back and forth.

"Yeah." Even if she'd been stung about not being told she was "the one," she did like him a lot. Couldn't help it.

Sarah continued kicking her feet.

"Do I look okay?" Cheyenne spread her arms out in front of her. Looked down at herself critically. She looked like she always did.

Sarah grinned. "You look fine." She looked down at the blue bedspread. "You know I'm only looking out for you. Right? I'm not trying to take anything away from you."

Cheyenne did. She walked to the bed and plopped down beside Sarah. "I know that's what you're trying to do."

"Roc likes you. And he's not Titius." That admission from Sarah was surprising. She blew out a breath. "I'm still worried. There's so much we don't know about him."

"I know." There was a lot Cheyenne didn't know. A lot she hadn't told him either. She hadn't had a minute alone to tell Roc about her mind. How having sex with him seemed to clear it. Something had prevented her from telling him while she'd been with him. Somehow it hadn't seemed to be the time. Then she hadn't wanted to tell him with everyone around. She'd felt him plucking her mind while they'd been talking to everyone. So he might already know. He should hear the truth from her first, though.

"Please be careful on this date. Don't...let him bully you into anything. And"—Sarah sighed—"enjoy it. Nick and I had a date before things started with us." Her eyes got a dreamy look that she always did when she talked about Nick.

Did Cheyenne look that way when she talked about Roc? For the first time, she felt a connection on another level with Sarah beyond what they'd had so far. It felt wondrous. "What did you do on the date?"

"Well, it was sort of a date, and well, it wasn't official. He took me out to dinner. I was a starving college student, so it was nice. I enjoyed talking to him." Her eyes took on a faraway look. As though she was remembering. "We did a lot of talking that night. He...wound up being shot. That's how I found out he was a vampire." She shook her head. "I had no idea what I was getting myself into."

Neither did Cheyenne. Roc was an enigma. Granted, she already knew about his vampire world, but not much else. Hence the dating. "It worked out for you." It had. Nick loved her, and she loved him. No one could have asked for a better ending. Maybe Cheyenne would get lucky. No, she was never that fortunate.

Sarah nodded. "It did." She grasped Cheyenne's hand in her cold one. "I hope it does for you and Roc. I do. I don't want to see you hurt. I don't want to see you broken again."

She'd been at her worst after Titius had left her and she'd killed him. Grief over her mother and over losing Titius had threatened to consume her. Sarah had helped her pick up the pieces. "I hope it works out for Roc and me too."

"Yeah, in fact, Mr. Delicious is sitting in the living room right now." Nathan didn't come far into her room. He leaned against the doorjamb. Scratched his calf with one bare foot and wiggled his toes.

"Mr. Delicious?" Cheyenne arched a brow. Only Nathan would come up with a name like that.

"Please. Don't act like you don't know why. You came home reeking of sex. Only missing the candy." He laughed, but no one laughed with him. "Ahem. Guess you don't know the song 'Sex and Candy.' Regardless, I know you think he's yummy." He waggled his brows suggestively.

Heat fanned out on her face. They all knew she thought Roc was hot. She'd smelled of sex, and her juices hadn't stopped flowing whenever she was in Roc's presence. Even when her friends all been in the same room with her and Roc. As her roommates were all vampires, they definitely knew how she felt about Roc. "Yeah. I guess I do."

"Guess?" Nathan snorted. "Yeah. Right." He shrugged wide shoulders. "He's no Henri, but I can see why you think he's a hunk."

Nathan thought Henri rocked all worlds. As Sarah thought the same of Nick. Would she be that way about Roc in time? If God was good...

"He's down in the living room?" Sarah lifted her head and nodded to the doorway. "Cheyenne is being fashionably late?" She grinned. "How like a girl. Only you haven't changed fifty-one times."

The easy camaraderie was new for them both. Sarah hadn't had any close friends as a teen, and neither had Cheyenne. Hard to make friends when your brain is moving into a cycle of lunacy that would be repeated over and over. Until now.

"Yeah, good for you on making him wait. Anything worth having is worth waiting for." Nathan guffawed. "Only you do know he's down there...with Nick. And Henri. Sitting in the living room."

Cheyenne's eyes widened. "Both of them?" Oh, Henri wouldn't be bad, except he'd have tons of questions about Roc's past. Nick would give him stink eye the whole time they were waiting. "You're serious?"

"Yep. He's like chum to the sharks right now, you know. You better get down there and rescue him. Or all he'll have left is a nub. Not the good nub either." He winked at Cheyenne.

"Nathan." Sarah sat up and dangled her legs from the side of the bed. "You're incorrigible. Leaving him alone with them."

He didn't deny it but leaned back with a goofy grin on his face. His eyes twinkled with merriment.

Cheyenne got up. "We'd better get down there." God only knew what they were doing to Marroc by now. Of course, the sooner she got there, the sooner

she'd be going out on this date with him. She didn't know whether to be happy or disturbed at that.

"Enjoy yourself on the date." Sarah slowly rose from the bed and spoke as if she knew the turmoil going on within Cheyenne. "Enjoy him."

"Yep, Chey. Do enjoy him. Get to know him." Nathan's face turned serious. "Know that if he hurts you, I'll rip his lungs out through his nose." Nathan turned and walked out of the door without a look back.

Cheyenne watched his retreating back. "He meant that, didn't he?" That he would stand up for her like that made her heart pump that much faster. Nathan, the easygoing one, had threatened bodily harm if Roc hurt her. She hadn't thought he cared that much for her. Sure, they joked around. She'd mainly spent time with Sarah these last few months. All this time, she'd thought Sarah was her only ally. First Henri had come through for her, and now Nathan.

Sarah nodded. She didn't look as shocked as Cheyenne thought she should, but Sarah did look surprised. "I'm pretty sure he was serious." Her face sobered. "He'd be behind me for that."

Cheyenne couldn't swallow and found it hard to talk. Her throat closed up. Sometimes she doubted these people's affection for her. Sarah was a given, but it still struck her in the head like a weight. For whatever reason, Sarah cared about her. For her, not because of any other reason. That was still an amazing fact to her.

They traipsed down the steps. Nathan had disappeared, and they found him in the living room. He sat by Henri on the couch. Nick sat beside them in an easy chair with a frustrated look on his face.

Roc sat on the opposite side in a hardback chair. The battle lines had been drawn with a coffee table separating the participants.

"I figured I'd better get back down here. In case they were starting to feed. Wouldn't want a frenzy." Nathan lifted his eyebrow toward Cheyenne. "I know how much you want that nub intact."

"Nub?" Nick said with a glance over at Nathan. "Wait a minute. Never mind. I don't want to know."

Cheyenne rolled her eyes at Nathan. Her attention turned to Roc as Sarah sat down in Nick's lap. He looked happy finally and nuzzled the back of her neck, whispering "ma petite." She leaned into him to get the full effect.

As her gaze sought out Roc, she realized his face was obscured. By a huge bouquet of flowers. He moved it aside and leaped to his feet as though he'd just noticed she'd come down. "Hello, Cheyenne."

His baritone voice sent shivers up and down her spine. Made her innards feel woozy. She liked the way he said her name. "Hi, Roc." She couldn't say anything more. Why not? She didn't know. Everything that came to mind to say was stupid. At least the words weren't crazy, and they didn't slip out of her before she could catch them.

"These are for you." He handed her the bouquet, his fingers brushing over hers in the handing off, and she became transfixed. Not by the bouquet, but by the man revealed by the moving of the flowers in front of her.

He wore a suit. A tailored black suit that hugged every curve and muscle of his body. That showed off said body with flair. His dark hair and eyes were complemented by the color, making them stand out even more. His entire body hummed with electricity and seemed larger-than-life.

He was more than yummy. He was gorgeous. More than that even. She didn't have a word for what he was. He took her breath away. Her moisture increased as she looked at him. Her thighs wanted to slide together.

She stood there, holding flowers, gaping like a geek, not saying anything, dressed in jeans and a tank top. So much for good impressions. She managed to squeak out, "Thanks for the flowers."

"We figured they were either for you, or it was an arrangement for someone who'd died." Nathan looked nonchalant as Henri shook his head at him. "What? They do. I'm sure he knows."

"Only you would comment."

"Darn right." He didn't look put out by Henri's comment. Only more determined than ever.

"On dates, you're supposed to give flowers." Roc looked down at her and his lips curled up into an easygoing smile. He didn't seem irritated by the course of the conversation. "Or so I have heard. Correct?"

This date was a first for him as well. That hadn't occurred to her until now. "Yes. Yes, that is customary. I think." His smile dazzled her. She could hardly think straight.

"The bigger the better."

Nathan sounded as though he were strangling. "Oh, I can't touch that one. Bigger the better." He broke out into laughter.

Cheyenne didn't even look at him as she thrust the flowers at him. "Put them in water, please." She shook her head, clearing it and trying not to look at Roc again. Or she'd be captivated. "Where are we going? Should I dress up some more?" She sounded stupid. There was no way to fix that. If they were going somewhere fancy, she wanted to look the part.

"I don't believe you need to dress up more." His eyes devoured her. He didn't conceal a lick of his lips. "You look wonderful, by the way." A glance down showed her how much he was looking forward to this time with her. His erection bulged from his pants, tenting them. "The restaurant we are going to says casual clothing." His second smile bedazzled her more than the first. "I wanted to wear this for our first official date." He acted like the suit was some old thing that he'd put on for kicks. He hadn't come out of the ground with anything, and she had a feeling he'd bought this just for the date.

"Okay."

He offered her his arm. His bulging arm. Even through the material, she could see his muscles. She'd be able to feel them when they contracted and expanded too.

She hesitated a moment. She wasn't merely taking his arm. This was more of a commitment than that. By taking his outstretched appendage, she was taking him on. At least for the night. It meant her acceptance of him. Did she want that? Yes, she did. Her hands shook as she plastered her fingers onto his elbow. She had to seize this moment. See where this thing with Roc took her. Her whole life had been playing into this with the dreams she'd had of him. She had to see where it led.

Whether Roc would want just Cheyenne, or whether he was looking for "the one," remained to be seen. She wasn't sure how she'd feel if his motive was both, but knew the differing emotions it would be with one or the other being true.

"You kids have fun on your date. Have her home by eleven thirty." Nathan still sounded as though he teased.

"Nathan." She shot a glare his way. Put a hand on her hip to emphasize her glare. Some things he shouldn't tease about.

"Okay, midnight." He looked amused as she looked up to heaven. "Remember what I said, Chey." His voice didn't shift octaves. No one but Sarah and her would believe he was talking about something so serious as killing Roc if he hurt Cheyenne. Knowing Nathan, he would do it too.

"What?" Roc looked deep into her eyes.

"Nothing." She nodded to Nathan and gave him a small smile. "I do remember what you told me." Her voice almost broke, but she kept it calm. Didn't want Roc to get any more suspicious than he already was.

Roc didn't hold on to her hand but let it free float on his arm near his elbow. The warmth of his contact singed her like a match. Would he always have this effect on her? "I'll see you later." He nodded to all of them.

"Do have her back by midnight." Sarah didn't look at them but down at her tiny feet. Was she serious? It was hard to tell. Nathan had been joking up to the last. Sarah could well be serious.

"Sarah." Marroc was going to think she lived with a bunch of crazy vampires. She was starting to believe it herself.

Sarah laughed, breaking a little of the tension for Cheyenne, and looked up with mischief in her eyes. "Kidding." That was better. Sarah was kidding. She continued, "Home by one would be good."

Cheyenne snorted. "I'll be back when I get back." It was like having four older siblings who'd beat up everyone who wanted to date you. At least Crimson and the others weren't here. Rojo would probably pull a knife on Marroc.

Marroc nodded to Sarah with a gleam of his own. "I'll bring her home. Eventually." He led her to the front door and opened it. Herded her through it

before quickly shutting it behind them. Good thing, or they'd have come up with more rules. "Man, inquisitors have nothing on those people." He rubbed the back of his neck with one hand and put the other back for her to clasp onto.

"They were rough?"

"They care about you. Which I understand." He clasped her closer to his body. "Shall we head to our dinner? Not that we'll eat much."

She nodded. She was hungry, but too much would make her sick. "Sounds good. Lead the way." She'd finally get to see how a date worked.

* * * *

Roc watched the sway of Cheyenne's ass as she entered the restaurant in front of him. Got lost in the side-to-side rocking motion of her hips. Almost bumped into her when she stopped before the hostess.

The instant his body touched hers, flares went off. Like a big signal in the sky. His body burned like he'd been immersed in a campfire.

She moved away. Her face blushed prettily. "Sorry."

His cock was so tight, it hurt. But he wasn't sorry. Not one bit. "It's okay." He looked to the hostess, who was watching the whole exchange. "Two."

The hostess, who'd introduced herself as Jean, said, "Okay. Follow me."

She seated them at a small table in the back of the restaurant. Candles dotted the tables with small flames above the bright red tablecloths.

Roc pulled out Cheyenne's chair and motioned for her to sit, though she looked at him like he was crazy.

Jean grinned and stood back.

Cheyenne looked surprised as she took her seat and Roc pushed her in. Like no one had ever held out a chair for her.

He'd never understand the men who she had known before. He ran his hand up her shoulder to her neck. Her muscles quivered under his hand. "Comfortable?" His hand tingled where he'd touched her. He moved to his own seat and sat down.

"Yes. Yes, I am." She sounded flustered. As though something had her on edge. Maybe it was him? His heart pounded.

Jean handed them their menus. "Here you go. Your waiter is Bill. He'll be with you in a few minutes. Excuse me." She rambled back to the door, where another couple waited for seating.

"This looks like a nice place." Cheyenne skipped her gaze around the room as if to see where it landed. Looked anywhere but him.

He enjoyed his effect on her. "It does. You haven't eaten here before, I take it?" The small Italian restaurant had appealed to him. It wasn't a chain. He'd gone online to find out about this place where Cheyenne lived, and found all kinds of entertainment and restaurants.

She shook her head. Looked down at the menu and began perusing it. "Nope. I haven't." She scrutinized the menu like it was her favorite novel.

"Good. It's my first time too. We can split a meal, if you like. Or a dessert. Since we can't each eat much." He hadn't fed since he'd had sex with Cheyenne. A remarkable record for him.

"Okay." Her eyes sparkled. "Why don't we do dessert?" She flipped the menu over. "They have cheesecake. New York style."

Marroc had learned good things about cheesecake during his time underground while he'd fed from humans. "That would be fine."

"Have you ever had it?" Cheyenne put down the menu.

He shook his head.

"Oh my God. You have to try some. It's amazing." Her face gleamed in excitement. She blew out a laugh. "I gorged myself on it with Nathan once. He has a high tolerance for human food. He was fine with what he ate, but I was sick as a dog." She looked down again at the menu. "Oh, they have it with cherries!" Her tongue slipped out from her lips.

Her face was lit with passion and excitement.

His cock shivered. He liked seeing her like this. It reminded him of what it had been like to fuck her. To take her to the brink of orgasm and hold her there. To...

A waiter stepped up to the table. "My name is Bill... Cheyenne?"

Cheyenne's head shot up to look at him. "William?"

The man laughed. "Most people call me Bill, but you never did. I hadn't heard you were back in town." His face sobered to the point of looking sad. "I was sorry to hear about your mom."

Cheyenne paled. "Yes. It was hard to believe. Still is."

Why was this man reminding her of things better left in the past? He'd never understand why humans did that. Roc tapped his toe impatiently on the floor.

"Did they ever catch the robber? I heard they finally located you"—the man never once glanced Roc's way—"and you'd been kidnapped."

Which pricked Roc. After all, he was with Cheyenne. Did the man not see him sitting there? He was interrupting their date.

Cheyenne waved a hand. "They never solved it. So what are you up to? Still living beside the psychic shop?"

"It's now a bakery." Bill gazed down at Cheyenne with something like adoration. "I can't believe you're back in town and you didn't come by. Mom was worried when no one could find you. So was I."

Roc tapped his toe a little more.

"I've been busy." She looked a little embarrassed. "I will have to stop by and see your mom."

"And me."

"And you." She smiled, briefly and softly.

Roc leaned back in his seat. The action caught her eye.

"Oh. Will—Bill. This is Roc. He's a friend of mine."

What the fuck? A *friend*? Marroc's mouth tightened. She hadn't been calling him a friend at Echo Lake.

"Roc. This is Bill. He lived next door to me growing up."

The man's eyes surveyed him. Sized him up. Yes, this was a rival. Roc resisted the urge to bare his teeth. Take Cheyenne and run. "Hello, Bill. Nice to meet you." He kept his voice civil. But not too civil.

"Nice to meet you too." Bill turned his attention back to Cheyenne. "Are you in town long?"

"I live here." Cheyenne flipped her menu around so that she was looking at the other side. "Been back awhile."

"We'll have to get together. Soon as you're available."

Roc spoke low. Calmly. "Yes, we shall." He met the other man's gaze directly with his own.

Bill's gaze turned speculative. "I guess I should take your orders."

Yes, you should. Roc settled down in his chair. *Mine.* He wanted to piss around her and mark her off. That had never happened before. He'd never been the jealous type. Hell, he and Orrick had shared both women and men on occasion. He'd shared lovers with others before. "We'd like cheesecake. With cherries."

Bill looked to Cheyenne. "Two?"

Now that made Roc seethe. Why look to her when he'd ordered for them? "One to split. For both of us."

The man didn't lower his gaze away from Cheyenne.

"Yes, one to split."

Bill snapped his order pad closed. "You never did eat much. I'll be back with the plates and cheesecake. You'll have to give me your number before you go." He darted toward the kitchen.

Roc looked Cheyenne full in the face with a twist of his eyebrow. Met her gaze with his unflinching one.

She blinked at him. "What?" She looked genuinely puzzled, as though she didn't know what he could be asking her.

"What do you mean, what?" He grimaced. She'd introduced him as a friend. What should she have introduced him as? There hardly seemed a fitting term.

"You don't like him." She settled back in her chair. Put her elbows on the table and hunched her shoulders forward.

"It's not that I don't like him. I'm reminding you, you're on a date with me." He should remind Bill.

Her mouth parted into an O. "He's an old friend. Friend. Neighbor. That's all. It's the first time he's seen me since...my mother died. I didn't come back for a while, and then I had to clear things up."

"He wants to be more than your friend." Bill wanted to be in her pants. He'd made that clear. But that spot was already taken.

She did have the grace to blush then. "Maybe. He did before. But when I get...crazy, he doesn't. Nor does his mommy want him to." She shook her head. "You're going to be as bad as Nick. I can see that now."

It took a minute for that to sink in. Nick and Sarah were in a relationship. That meant she had to be expecting them to go further than one date. A good sign. He looked as she glanced toward the kitchen. "Did you like him?"

Her eyes closed briefly. She paused. "Once upon a time I did. He didn't like all of me, though." Her voice lowered and so did her head. That had hurt her.

"I do." He liked more of her than she knew. He could deal with anything as long as she let him into her life.

Her head lifted, and she smiled at him. One of those ball-tightening ones that took his breath away.

He reached across the table to take her hand. His skin tingled where she touched him. Her coolness accentuated his heat. "I do, you know."

"You've been inside my head."

He nodded. "I have."

"Which meant you saw what's there. The illness I have. It's not going away." She licked her lips. "It will always be there, haunting me."

"You've been better than you used to be. Since you became... Since your mother died." Best not to say anything odd, in case someone was listening.

She nodded. "I have. It will come back. It always does."

This would have been the perfect time for her to tell him how clear she'd been after sex. The perfect occasion. She didn't take the initiative to tell him. Why not?

Bill stepped from the kitchen, looked at their entwined hands, and ran from the kitchen to the table. "Do you want the cherries on the cake? Or on the side?" He looked disturbed to see their hands touching.

Roc didn't move his hands from his woman. Sent his mind into hers the tiniest bit and saw her answer. "Side."

Cheyenne's face remained impassive.

Again the man seemed to wait for her to say something. As if he were asking her opinion of what Roc had said.

She didn't answer. Didn't contradict or agree with what Roc had said or give Bill any sign she disagreed. Her hand crept a minuscule amount away from his hand. Her body stiffened.

After Bill finally walked away without an answer from her, Roc watched her face. She didn't look happy. "What did I do?" Because he'd done something wrong. Every nuance in her body told him that she was unhappy with him.

"Nothing." Her voice was clipped. Short.

"Cheyenne." He needed to know. "Talk to me." He wouldn't beg her to talk. The only way he'd know was for her to tell him.

"You answered for us. Without checking with me first." She sounded the tiniest bit hurt by this.

She liked her cherries on the side. He'd seen that serving style in her head when he'd tapped in there. Maybe she wasn't aware that he'd tapped into her head. *Wait a minute.* He hadn't been able to tap into her head earlier after sex. He could now and had been able to at the beginning of the date. Why the change? "But you like them that way."

Her face curled up. "How do you know that? We never talked about it. Have you been in my head recently?"

Apparently, he'd given another wrong answer. "Yes." Why lie? She would find out anyway. He wanted no secrets between them. "We talked about the fact I'd been in your head before." They hadn't discussed the fact he couldn't get in at one point and he could get in now. Which meant what? He didn't know.

"The runners are gliding over the ice to the isthmus." Her eyes widened, and her hand came up to cover her mouth. Her other fist clenched into a ball. "No. No. No." Panic entered her eyes.

It was the first crazy thing she'd said since before they'd had sex. Her brain was cloudy as he reached inside it again.

Maybe her power surge had cleared the demons from her head, but it must be transitory. When she'd been sane, he couldn't get in. The more troubled her mind became, the easier it was for him to slip inside.

Her head shook back and forth as she shivered like there'd been a big wind. "No." She kept repeating that over and over again. As though she could negate what had happened.

The cheesecake popped down in front of them. Roc hadn't even noticed Bill coming, as he'd been so focused on Cheyenne and her problems. "Here you go... Cheyenne, what's wrong?"

Her eyes were full of tears as she looked back up at Bill. Roc ached for her. He wanted to make it right. Make her right. "Nothing. It's fine." Her voice sounded as flat as yesterday's pancakes.

"Did he do something...?"

“Bill.” Her voice didn't pick up any octave. It lay there, small and hurt. “Leave us alone.”

There was nothing Roc could do to fix this for her. The cloud in her head had returned to torment...

Roc blinked at her as if seeing her for the first time. Maybe there was something he could do for her to help.

Chapter Eleven

Cheyenne wiped a tear away with one hand. Bill had stumbled back toward the kitchen, where he stood watching and glaring.

She didn't need any offers of protection from him. Didn't need him watching over her. Dammit. She had enough protectors. Had enough problems.

She'd overlooked her head filling up with lumps like cottage cheese until the moment the nonsense words had flung from her mouth. She didn't even know when she'd started to become less lucid. Now she could feel the familiar lurking darkness. The familiar weirdness in her head that made her crazy. She'd ignored its encroachment, staying in the bubble of the first lucidity she'd had in a long time.

Now the schizophrenia was back and looming large.

Dammit.

She hated her mind. If only she didn't have this illness. But she did and had mostly learned to adapt to it. Now, she'd had a taste of what not having it could be like. She'd enjoyed that brief respite.

Roc reached across to take her trembling hand. He unfolded her fingers that had balled into a fist and stroked her hand. "Cheyenne?"

She didn't want to look at him. Didn't want to see pity in his eyes. Didn't want to see his reaction to her continued craziness. Didn't want to look up and see the familiar things she'd seen from everyone else. Not in him. Never in him.

"Look at me." His commanding voice deepened. Grew more insistent. "Cheyenne. Look at me."

She unwillingly lifted her head but saw no way to get out of doing what he'd asked. Her gaze met his.

She got lost in his gaze, which was not filled with pity. Nothing like that existed in his gaze. Only caring and heat. She couldn't call it love yet. Some type of emotion was there. Shining through his eyes. It was like nothing she'd ever seen in anyone else's eyes before. His gaze took her by storm and added to the winds blowing across her mind.

I can't be crazy. Not with Roc here in my reality.

His foot slipped across hers to stroke against the top of it. He'd taken off his shoe. Wasn't wearing socks from the feel of him.

She blinked at him. Why did he take off his shoe? That made no sense. Why was he playing footsie with her?

His foot clambered up her legs, slowly moving up to her knee, only then to push between her thighs.

She widened her stance as his toes found her core. He couldn't be up to what she thought. Not here in public. With his foot.

That'd be kinky.

With so many people around. How was she supposed to keep them from knowing what he was doing? No, he couldn't be up to that.

His toes wiggled against her center. Put pressure directed onto her already sensitive pussy.

Maybe he was up to that. She cast furtive looks around the room. They weren't in direct view of any one table from the scattering of tables and booths. No one was paying any attention to them.

Bill lumbered over. "Can I get you anything else?" He'd started to irritate her with his constant observance.

Roc's big toe located her clit and moved back and forth against her flesh. Making her squirm. Making her heat up. "I'm fine." Did she sound breathless? She tried to rein in her increasing desire.

Roc nodded to Bill. "I think we're okay." He didn't show any signs that he had his foot on her crotch, trying to bring her to orgasm. His face remained impassive.

Bill still hovered. "Are you sure you're all right? You haven't touched the cheesecake." He frowned, surveying her. Seemed to be looking for any sign that she wasn't happy with Roc. Which she wouldn't give to him.

I'm more than okay. The toes rippling across her core made almost made her gasp. They rocked against her, pressing inward until she thought she couldn't stand it anymore. "I'm fine." She wanted to add, *Go away*, but didn't.

"You're flushed." Bill glared at Roc, as though he might be the blame for this affliction. Of course he was, only not in the way Bill was expecting. Why had Bill decided to play the hero now? When she needed it least.

"I'm fine, Bill." She choked out the words, glad they sounded more normal coming from her than she thought that they would. Sweat beaded on her upper lip, which trembled. She wanted so many things not acceptable in a restaurant.

Bill left with a couple of backward glances. They weren't done with him. He'd be back whether they wanted him to be or not.

"What are you...doing?" Her voice went into the higher octaves on the last word as his foot found a pleasant spot to tickle and torture. Who would have thought toes could be so flexible?

"I think that's pretty obvious."

Of course his intentions were obvious. She shivered. To bring her to an orgasm. The tremors started from the inside and worked their way out. "I'm not sure...but I don't think this is appropriate behavior for a first date." His big toe pressed in the center of her body. She pushed forward against him. Couldn't

help it. Needed to feel him more against her. Needed to have him take her over the edge. Here? Did she want that? She rubbed her bare arms with shaking hands.

He chuckled. He looked so nonchalant. As though he were sitting there doing nothing, instead of pushing her ever closer to orgasm. "I think the amount of time we've spent together qualifies me for about the hundredth date. Anything after fifty, intimacy is left up to the people dating." He pushed in and jiggled his toe against her clit. "And you don't want me to stop."

True. She lowered her voice. "I'm going to come in the middle of this restaurant if you keep this up." Her breathing came out in a pant. God, he was good. She sat so close to an orgasm, she could jump in its lap.

"I certainly hope so." His smile was cunning. Telling. Told her that this wasn't the end of what he'd do to her too.

"What if I scream?" That was her biggest fear. If she screamed in here, everyone would look at her. Would be like her outbursts in school where she'd come out with crazy shit.

"Do you want to scream?" His lips pursed together as his nostrils flared. He must be able to smell her excitement, which had coated her pussy. She felt undeniably slick.

"Yes." Oh God, yes, she wanted to scream and arch her back up. Wanted the full measure of where this orgasm would take her. She wanted to come all over him, with him inside of her. Regardless, she wanted him to take her there. Didn't want to stop.

"You'll get some looks, then." He looked amused. As though the idea of her not being able to control herself pleased him.

He had no idea what looks she would get if she screamed as loud as she wanted to. "How will we explain?"

He shrugged. "We'll come up with something, I suppose." The jackass removed his foot as he finished speaking.

She moaned in protest. Now she didn't want him to stop. Even if that had meant doing the unthinkable and screaming out her pleasure in the middle of this restaurant.

Then he got up and took the seat next to her. His body heat wrapped around her. His scent flooded her nostrils, even over the food smells. He smelled woodsy. He waited a careful moment before casually dropping his hand beneath the table. "Thank goodness for tablecloths. Don't you think?"

"Yes." Not that she cared about them. Except they would block what he was doing to her. Or at least that was the hope. His hand was going to touch her. Her heart squeezed as though a fist had grabbed her.

His hand started on the outside of her thighs as he leaned in close like he was whispering in her ear. It would look to all the world like a private verbal exchange. Perhaps a romantic sweet nothing. Instead his act was the most intimate of physical ones. If only she'd worn a dress to make it easier for him.

He managed to snake up his hand and get his fingers down her jeans. Not a lot of wiggle room for him, but he managed. He scooted forward, keeping his body more around her. Covered her with his body to keep her from prying eyes.

As he looked around, he muttered something that sounded like, "If Bill brings our check right now, I'll have to eat him." His fangs grazed his lip as he looked over at the kitchen where Bill had disappeared.

She nodded in agreement. She would help him. Where were Roc's fingers? She needed them to dip lower.

His finger found her clit. He teased it, stroking across the aching flesh with a tender digit. Swirled his finger around her in ever-tighter circles.

Moisture dampened her. She felt so wet. She shifted her weight around him, trying to maximize his touch. Get him where she wanted him. She couldn't quite slide enough to get him at the right point. She was so close. Dammit. Why couldn't she go over?

"That night at the park."

She looked up at him as she tried to decipher what he'd said and the relevance. Licked her dry lips. "What?" She snapped the word. Her body was in turmoil. "The fish lay eggs."

He continued as though she hadn't spoken. "I ate you under the moon and stars. Licked across your clit. Pulled it into my mouth like a sucker. Tasted your cream as it poured in my mouth."

Her whole body shuddered. Shivered. Took one step closer to release. She didn't go over yet. The words brought her so close. Dammit. Her fingers grasped onto the tablecloth and squeezed.

"Your cream is the best I've ever tasted. Sweet like sugar. I want more. If we weren't in this restaurant, do you know what I'd do?" His gravelly voice tickled her ear and rumbled up from his chest.

"What?" she squeaked. Yeah, that was sexy. She was on the edge of an orgasm. Needed something to take her over.

"I'd slide off your clothes. Put you on the table. Feast on your pretty pussy for my dinner. Eat your come for my dessert." His chuckle was quiet. "I'd not use a napkin but lick your juices off my face. So as not to miss any."

His finger rippled across her. That with the words was enough. The orgasm bubbled up within her like foam in a soda until she burst into flames.

He caught what might have been a huge scream in his mouth so that no sound escaped. He slanted his lips against hers and kissed her harshly. Deeply. Ground his mouth down on hers so that it felt like he was trying to meld with her. He sent his tongue into her mouth like he was drilling.

Like he'd drilled into her pussy with his tongue when they'd been at the park under the light of the moon.

Like he'd drilled her with his cock later that night.

Waves of aftershocks rolled across her body, taking her by storm and letting her out in the surge only to tense back up again, not letting her rest from the last one before the next one ran across her. The power snapped across her like a whip chasing a mark. She could feel it hanging in the air.

Nothing had ever affected her like he did. Like these orgasms rolling from her. Nothing had ever been like they were.

He pulled his mouth away reluctantly and looked down at her. His chest contracted and expanded with his heavy breathing. A pulse beat in his throat. A raging pulse. He looked down at her with eyes full of wonder.

Full of power. He seemed to buzz with an electrical current. Like he had at the park. His eyes glowed with vibrancy.

His strong eyes seemed to see into her soul and heart. They glimmered as if they liked what they saw.

His mouth curved into a grin.

"Proud of yourself?" She felt him whisper along her mind. So strange to feel him like that, trying to access an opening to her psyche. She'd never felt the like. Not even from her maker.

Yet he couldn't get inside her head. He didn't slip in, despite many proddings of her mind with his.

She'd never had that happen either. Although Sarah didn't often probe her without permission, she couldn't get in unless Cheyenne let her. Neither could Nick. Henri was like Sarah. He didn't push in without permission. He hadn't been able to access her either without her opening.

She could keep Roc out this time without even trying as she had to do with Henri and Sarah. How? Why? Why could she feel these things happening now but obviously couldn't earlier? It made no sense. What was the difference between now and then?

Now her head felt free. Clear. Earlier her mind had been more like cottage cheese than water.

Sanity.

She didn't feel the darkness intruding right now. There wasn't even an inkling of it anywhere in her mind.

That was why he couldn't read her now but could earlier. Why his mind couldn't make a connection with hers. She always battled the darkness. Always. It had to take some of her mind to do so with any success. Some days she felt like her whole brain was engaged in the fight for sanity. Made sense that when that part was freed up, she could concentrate on other things.

Like recognizing someone in her mind or keeping them out of her mind by using parts she usually couldn't when her mind was dark.

That her mind was lucid brought her to another conclusion, which she could now mark as confirmed.

Orgasms with him were making her mind clearer. She'd thought it before at the park. Now she was certain. They had to be changing her brain chemistry to something she could work with and keep the lunacy at bay.

Was he smiling because he knew something about what was going on? Or was it merely male pride at making her climax? In public? No telling with him. The former seemed impossible, but she'd never imagined his being caught up in the latter.

Nothing on his face showed what he knew or didn't know. She wasn't ready to tell him yet about her realizations. He knew about her crazy mind. It was such a hard thing to admit, not to mention the other things, which were even harder.

My name is Cheyenne, and I'm crazy. Except when I'm coming with you. You're the best medicine I've found.

Lame. Corny. All of the above.

Roc picked up a spoon. "We'd better munch our cheesecake and get back. Before they call the posse out on us."

She nodded. Her breathing slowly fell back to something within the normal range. "We'd better." She reached for her spoon, but he stopped her.

Took a bit of the cheesecake on his spoon and held it up to her mouth. "Bon appétit, Cheyenne."

* * * *

Orrick watched from the car. How long did it take to eat a damn meal anyway? Especially for them. Wasn't like they ate fucking much as vampires. "You're sure she's in there?"

"Yeah." Vegas leaned back in the seat, showing great inattention. Orrick never should have let him drive. "I tracked her myself. You know I'm good at that." He sounded prideful. Almost hopeful. If he was hoping to impress Orrick, the bastard better think again.

"One of the few things you're good at." Orrick sighed and kept his eyes on the door. "She better be in there." Or someone would be looking for his head under their car. Their plan was to nab her when she came out. To take a hostage.

They had tracked Smith's relative to Richmond and followed her around. Now she was out eating dinner.

Roc was nearby. Orrick had seen him leave the house where they all stayed. Scented him. Spied him. Felt his signature energy. Which had been too fucking bright for having been in the ground for so damn long. How had Roc managed that?

Had Roc spotted him lurking about? This would be too delicious either way.

Forget taking the woman to find out where Roc was or what had happened so long ago. Now that they knew Roc was around, they'd take the woman as

bait. Leaving Roc hanging would be the icing. Then Orrick could arrange a meeting with Roc on his own terms. Make it happen, leaving Roc defenseless. He'd always cared too much about the sniveling little humans and vampire minions who surrounded him. Now he'd lose his life over them. Poetic justice.

"Did you know the guy who went in with her?" Vegas tapped on the steering wheel. The staccato rhythm was grating.

"Of course I did." A little too well. Orrick continued to watch the door. "Why do you ask?" Did Vegas suspect who had gone in with her? He hadn't gotten a good look. Orrick had seen to that. If Vegas knew who'd gone in with her, he'd be too nervous to pull off the snatch. Now that Orrick knew where Roc was, torturing him appealed to him. Taking the woman would torture Roc, so he wanted this score. Best not to tell Vegas who the man was.

"He's a pretty big guy." Vegas waved a hand. "If he fights us, then...it could get bad."

"If he fights us, we hurt him. Bad. I don't want him dead, though. Yet." This woman lived with others he'd need to eliminate. Orrick would seize this opportunity and get rid of all his enemies in one fell swoop with some torture involved. There'd still be imprints of Henri's line. Amaretto. Celie. Bastian, and by default, Copper. Not to mention little jaunts that had spread out like bad vines that would have to be dealt with before they created vampire assemblies to oppose him. Theo and Anna Grace. Rojo and Crimson. This would take the fight out of them.

Losing the first vampire and Henri Baptiste would give superiority to Orrick. Once and for all. The rest would be easily defeated once he had those things in play.

This small woman would give him all that.

He couldn't ask for anything more. Except maybe Roc's head on a platter. Now *that* he could ask for. Willingly.

"I hope he doesn't come out with her." Vegas scrunched up his face like was worried as he carefully gazed out the front window.

Orrick shrugged noncommittally. The man was certain to come out with her. No one would leave her alone for too long. She was always well protected, even when not with the main protectors. He wouldn't shatter Vegas's illusions, though, or make him any more nervous than he already was. Another reason not to identify the man with her. "You know the plan, right?"

* * * *

Cheyenne looked stunned at his holding up a mouthful of cheesecake. Or maybe it was his shaking hand.

The power had about kicked him back in his chair. It was even stronger than what he'd felt at the park. He was now jazzed. Almost drunk on the power.

That was going to go over well with her protectors. They'd wonder how he got drunk, as alcohol didn't affect them. Not to mention they'd smell her come all over his hands and smell it on her.

He didn't care about their reactions beyond the fact she would, which he couldn't help. She was his. It was about time he declared that to whoever would fight to keep them apart.

He rocked the cheesecake back and forth. "Open wide." If only he were saying that in a different context. A context of putting something between her legs.

Like his cock.

She'd be a fun plate to eat cheesecake off too. Or anything else. He could sip wine from her belly. Do tequila shots from her skin. Yes, there were a lot of fun ways to explore every inch of her. Hopefully there'd be a chance to do all that.

Despite the threat of Orrick.

Roc knew he was nearby. He'd felt him. Being with Cheyenne, Roc could protect her from the threat. Not to mention, she was the reason he was going to defeat Orrick this time, according to his psychic. So he hadn't worried overly much at the sense of Orrick there. He didn't want to prick at Orrick's mind, or that would alert him to what Roc knew. And he didn't seem that close.

Roc hadn't sensed Orrick until they'd already been away from the house. Orrick's mission was to come after Roc. So he wasn't worried about the others. After all, Orrick shouldn't know anything about them.

Cheyenne licked her lips and then slowly opened them slightly. Enough to get the spoon inside of her mouth. She closed her lips tightly around the creamy dessert. He watched the rounded spoon disappear inside of her mouth. "Yummmm." Her face lit up in that glow that only she acquired.

He would enjoy seeing her tonight, looking that way around him. With his cock stuffed up fully inside of her. Ready to burst inside her tight walls. Or her beautiful mouth around him, taking him down deep before he filled her throat with his seed. If only they could find...

Soon.

He'd only tolerate her protectors keeping her away from him for so long before he went out and did what he wanted anyway. Before he claimed her. He'd try patience because he knew she cared about them.

She knew that.

Knew that she'd lose herself to him as she had at Echo Lake. She'd become his woman. If she hadn't accepted that fact, she wouldn't be here tonight.

She reached for her fork. Her hand had barely closed around the metal when he saw what she was doing.

He grabbed her hand to stop her. Rested his hand over hers so she couldn't raise the fork. "Ah-ah-ah."

She blinked at him. "What?" Let his hand lead her way from the handle and go back over to the table in front of her.

"I'm feeding you. You're not feeding me." He took another bite of the cheesecake and placed it on the spoon.

She shook her head, lovely hair falling over one shoulder. "I can feed you, you know..." In went the second bite of cheesecake. She clamped her mouth around it, seduced by the taste of the dessert. She wanted to argue, but she wanted to savor the flavor of the dessert more than she wanted to debate.

He was seduced by her too. Always. Feeding her was another way of showing her what he wanted from her.

Bill glared at them from his position by the kitchen. He had the evil eye down and used it on them.

Roc hadn't moved back to his former seat and probably the other waitstaff had told Bill about their clinch earlier. He hadn't tried to hide the kiss or play it down. Not when he was capturing her cries in his mouth from her orgasm.

His eyes met Bill's, and he nodded to him. Got a glare in return. Regardless, Bill now knew the state of affairs between him and Cheyenne. Not likely they were merely friends as she'd told him earlier. Not with their current actions. A good thing. Bill wouldn't continue to lust after a woman who was taken, so he could move on.

Roc had marked her as his with his kiss for the public. Marked her as his in private with his bringing her to orgasm. It had been a double duty that he hadn't wanted to shirk. Instead he'd reveled in the experience.

She didn't notice his exchange with Bill. Or if she did, she didn't say anything. She opened her mouth for more cheesecake, which he gladly provided. He shoveled in a big piece covered in cherries. Her face lit again with the goodness of the flavor. Her entire expression told him what she thought.

A speck of red rested along her bottom lip. A drip. Nothing more than that. It was an entrancing crumb on her kissable flesh that she wasn't aware of that called for him to take care of it for her. His way.

He leaned down and plastered his lips across hers lengthwise. It was softer than the kiss that had eaten her scream. He nibbled at her lips. Darted his tongue out to lick her before pulling back.

Her eyes looked glazed from his kiss. "What was that for?" Didn't look like she minded being kissed, though. Her gaze had that glorious lost-in-passion look. Her lips trembled as she smiled up at him.

"You had a speck of cherry. Right there." He leaned down and kissed her again to show her where the speck was. Didn't have to. He could have pointed. But he wanted to make that contact again.

"Oh." She blew out a deep breath. "Okay." Opened her mouth again. Sort of like a bird ready for a meal. Only more tantalizing because it was her mouth.

Her pretty pink lips. Her small tongue. He wanted to dip in and kiss her again. Wanted to keep his lips on her for an eternity. Maybe that wouldn't even be enough time.

He shook his head, managing to keep from kissing her again. "I don't want you getting sick. That's probably enough human food for one day." The last thing he needed to do was take her home with an upset stomach. What was he going to do when he got her home? He wouldn't be ready to leave her.

Her lips pulled up into a mock pout, and she batted her eyelashes at him. "But it's so good..."

"I don't want you getting sick." He repeated the same words. "Too much will make you nauseated." He pulled the plate back toward him. "Besides, we probably ought to be going back." Not that he wanted to. But he didn't want them to come looking for him either. They would if he kept her out too long. He played a dangerous game between what he wanted and keeping open alliances he might need later. It better pay off. Because if he played things this way and didn't get on their good sides, he'd be pissed.

She snorted. "We have more time on our curfew." She rolled her eyes at him like she had at Sarah. "A lot more time." She glanced at him as if begging him. "I don't have to go home yet. Do I?"

He glanced toward Bill, trying to tell him with his eyes that he was ready for the check. Now that he needed the bastard, he wasn't coming over. In fact, he ignored Roc and went back into the kitchen. "I want to get you back in plenty of time." Was he going to go back and leave her at her house? To sleep alone? He'd slept alone for so many years. Now that he had her, he didn't want to sleep alone ever again.

"I'm not ready to go home. Not yet." She glanced away from him toward the front door. "I'm not ready to leave you yet."

His heart pumped faster and faster. She did want to be with him. Hearing it somehow made his heart waver. "You're not?"

She shook her head, and her shy gaze met his before she looked down. "Of course, if you're ready..."

He didn't dignify that with an answer. "There's a Canal Walk nearby. Down near the James River. Maybe we could even go on a night river cruise. If they have them. Anyway, we could walk around." It would elongate the night. Extend their time together. He'd do anything for that.

She lowered her head. "I'd like that." Her face turned happier than he'd seen her since her crazy talk.

An unknown waitress came marching over. "Are you two ready for your check?" She looked bored as she rifled through receipts.

"Yes." They both said it at the same time.

"Where's Bill?" Cheyenne scanned around the disinterested waitress, looking to see where he was.

"Oh, Bill? He wasn't feeling well. He stepped out back. Asked me to drop this off for you." She laid the bill on the table. "I can take this up whenever you're ready." She moved away to another table before Roc could offer her payment.

Bill was probably hiding in the kitchen. After seeing what he had, he was obviously disturbed. Oh well, he'd lived next to Cheyenne for years and hadn't taken his chance. Roc would never miss such an opportunity. Not with Cheyenne.

Cheyenne bit her lip. "Do you want me...?"

He pulled out his wallet and credit card. "I got it."

She looked at the card as he laid it on the table. "Marroc Smith?" She giggled to herself quietly.

"Yep." He reached over to take her hand. So warm and smooth in his own rough one. "Guess where I got that last name from?"

The waitress came and snatched up the bill to take it over to the computer.

Cheyenne looked confused about why he would do that. "Uh. Because it's a popular American last name?"

He shook his head. "Not why I chose Marroc Smith."

"Because it's mine? My last name?" Her eyes lit up as she said it. She'd realized why. "Really?" Her delight was cute.

"Yep." He stroked her hand with his fingers. Such a soft woman. Their skin contrasted against each other. "That's exactly why."

Somehow her happiness had become important to him. More so than he'd ever thought possible.

"I did have... Well, I told you the story about the people who died to keep my location secret?" He leaned back in his chair.

"Yes, you did."

"One of them had the last name Smith as well."

The waitress stopped back by and left the receipt for Roc to sign. "Have a good night." She didn't smile but stabbed down a pen onto the table.

Bill peeked from the kitchen and hurriedly ducked back inside. Probably glowering and growling at Roc.

Good. He had gotten the message.

Cheyenne hummed. "Maybe down the line somewhere, they and I are related. Wouldn't that be a hoot?" She laughed.

He shook his head. "With changing names, families, and all that, I doubt that you and he are related. He was"—he hesitated, blowing out a breath—"a human. He was my seer. My psychic. Daly told me of 'the one.' That I'd die if I didn't face Orrick with them." His heart grew heavy. He'd never wanted Daly to

die. Daly hadn't wanted humanity to suffer under Orrick. He'd made Roc promise a great many things.

"We'd better go." Cheyenne jumped to her feet from the chair as though a bug had bitten her ass.

He looked at her. Her face had pinched up. Was no longer relaxed. What was her problem? "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She snapped the words like they were gnats and took off to the door of the restaurant. "Coming?"

No, but he wanted to be after seeing her fine ass sway back and forth in front of him. What had gotten her bee buzzing? He hurriedly signed the slip and followed her. "You sure you're okay?"

Her face softened. "Yes. Let's head for the Canal Walk."

He followed his woman, briefly pausing at the door to look at a local paper.

* * * *

"Yeah. I know the plan." Vegas rolled his eyes. "Once they walk out on the sidewalk, we drive up in the car, hop out, and force her into our car so we can speed off with her and make—" He stopped. "She's out. The guy's behind her." He sounded almost disappointed. Foolish asshole. He should have figured out what would happen.

The woman stood out in front of the door to the local restaurant. The man was behind her. Too far behind her. He was scoping out a paper from some sort of free-magazine rack. This was an event worth taking advantage of. He wouldn't be able to reach her in time. Not before Orrick could pounce and get her in the car. Good. The man needed guilt to go along with being bested. The bastard would finally get his due.

"Move!" Orrick growled as Vegas gunned the engine. They had limited time before the man caught up to her.

The car sped up to the curb. Stopped right in front of the woman, who gave them a dirty look.

Then the woman's eyes widened as Orrick jumped out of the car. Her face was covered in the fear that Orrick craved. He delighted in it. She also lifted her chin stubbornly. She wasn't going without a fight. Good. He liked fights.

Orrick pulled out his gun and a taser. Didn't want to have to use either. "Get in, or I shoot him." Orrick waved the gun at the man in back of her. It wouldn't kill him, and she knew that, but she wouldn't want to draw attention to the situation either. A bullet wound would weaken a vampire. Drain his power so he couldn't protect her. Not to mention, if rescuers were called in, humans would want an explanation for a vampire's fast healing. That she would keep quiet despite being attacked gave Orrick an edge.

Orrick wanted her to get in the car without using any weapons. Not that he cared about keeping humans unaware of his actions, but their interference

might slow him down. They'd never stop him, but they might prolong him long enough for further help to arrive.

She answered Orrick by kicking him in the shin.

The man behind her had turned and saw them accosting the woman. He took off toward them. "Run!" The latter was addressed to the woman, but she didn't run. Instead she hesitated to turn and look back at the man calling her. It was only a second too long of inattention, but it cost her. She paid with her freedom.

Vegas grabbed her from behind and began to stuff her, kicking and screaming, into the backseat of the car. She couldn't fight someone behind her as easily as she could someone in front of her.

Two humans turned at the commotion she was making. One turned back to what he was doing. The other cocked a head and looked concerned. Concern meant they might decide to play hero.

Orrick didn't need that.

Hell, they needed to get out of there without wasting any more time.

Now to deal with the man. Her protector. Orrick turned the gun and fired. It had a silencer. The wound would slow the man down. Orrick fired point-blank at the man's chest, but the man moved at the last second as though he'd anticipated the gunshot. A human would have still been hit. As a vampire, he could get out of the way. Instead of running away, he jumped at the woman and Vegas. He pummeled Vegas, trying to free her from Vegas's hands.

Leave it to this man to muck up everything that Orrick had planned. So many times he'd gotten in Orrick's way without even knowing it.

Orrick pulled out the taser and fired it, shooting the man with electricity in the back. Orrick then pulled him off Vegas and stepped over his supine body. He was not unconscious but was dazed from the current that had rolled through him.

It was the perfect end to the encounter. The man couldn't do anything to stop them from taking her. All he could do was watch as she was loaded into the car.

Of course the more perfect end would have been the man's death. But now that Orrick had the chance to torture him with the known outcome—after all Orrick had the woman—Orrick couldn't resist drawing this out a little. Orrick had waited a thousand years to kill Roc and all his descendants. What were a few more hours?

Orrick sneered down at the man's open eyes. "Tell Henri I'll be in touch, if he wants her back. If you want her back, you'll have to do what I say." For once. He leveled his gun at the supine vampire. "And tell *him* I'm waiting."

Chapter Twelve

Cheyenne was floating on air as she and Roc walked up on the porch. It was as if she were dreaming. What if she were? What if she woke up in a different place? In a different way than she was right now? Maybe the darkness had taken her over. Maybe she'd been kidnapped and her mind was letting her have her daydream.

God, don't let me be dreaming.

If this were a dream, she didn't want to wake up.

Roc's hand tightened on hers. Squeezed her. "I know that they don't trust me. You're the one I want. Forever." He laid a kiss upon her lips.

She tried not to think about how being "the one" was making him do this. Making him be with her. That was hard to do.

She tried to enjoy the moment. Enjoy his lips on hers and revel in the kiss. Taste him and savor his flavor.

His tongue quested with hers gently. Rolled around hers as if they were wrestling for supremacy. He'd always win.

The door to the front porch opened.

Marroc lifted his head from hers and groaned.

"Get in here, you son of a bitch." Nick growled and swung the door wider. "Now." The words came through gritted teeth.

She pulled away from Roc to look at Nick. His face was strained. Not with a typical Nick with the stick-up-his-ass look, but with a strain that came from worry. "What's happened?"

They walked over the threshold, and Nick slammed the door behind them. "Where is she? Where the hell is she?"

Roc looked puzzled. "She's right here."

Nick shook his head. "You're a piece of fucking work."

"Nick." Cheyenne spoke quietly. As she'd often heard Sarah do to him when he was upset. "What's going on?"

"Ask your boyfriend."

What did they think Roc had done?

"Nick." Henri lopez into the room. "We said we would question him and find out what he knows. Not accuse him of anything."

"That's the only fucking reason his head is still on his asshole shoulders." Nick stepped up to Roc. "You tell me where she is, you son of a bitch."

Roc didn't back away. Didn't back down. But he didn't get back in Nick's face. His quiet voice commanded and carried more than if he'd yelled back. "Tell me what you think I've done."

"What I know you did. You didn't like her. You wanted Chey." Nick shook his head. "Doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out you engineered something to take her out of the equation." His gaze turned to Cheyenne. "You know how to pick them."

Cheyenne's stomach plummeted.

Roc's eyes narrowed, and he did step up to Nick this time. Same quiet voice. "Don't talk to her that way."

Nick got closer. "Don't tell me what to do."

Henri blew out a breath. "This isn't helping. Until we can get an answer from Nathan, we shouldn't be speculating."

Cheyenne's gaze went back and forth. "Henri, what's happened?" Whatever it was, it wasn't good.

"Back off from each other. Now." Henri's voice carried more authority than she'd ever heard. "You sit there." He pointed to Roc and the chair. "You sit there." He pointed to Nick and the couch.

Both slowly went to sit, still shooting each other glares.

"Merde. Mon Dieu." Henri looked toward the ceiling.

"Something happened to Nathan. And Sarah? Didn't it?"

"Yeah, and your boyfriend's responsible." Nick didn't sit back but remained tense on the couch.

She quickly shook her head. "No." There was no way Roc had done anything to Sarah. Or Nathan. He'd been with her.

"He shows up. Wants you. Sarah stands up to him. Now she's gone. That's no coincidence?"

Her heart froze for one horrible second. She'd suspected what had happened but to hear it directly stated out like that was horrible. "She's gone?"

"I didn't do anything to Sarah. I was on a date with Cheyenne."

"Yes, Cheyenne. Sarah's been taken. From a nearby restaurant. Nathan was hurt in the attempt. He managed to call me before he passed out. He's lost a fair amount of blood, been tasered, and hasn't regained consciousness yet." Henri's gaze darted to upstairs. He'd be up there now with his lover if he didn't have to play referee.

"I'm not stupid. You didn't have to take her yourself to take her. You have people working for you. Ones who died for you. They'd think nothing of kidnapping a troublemaker for you."

"I'm not responsible for what happened to Sarah. Or Nathan. I don't work like that." Roc folded his arms in front of his chest.

"Likely story. Where the fuck is she? If she's hurt, I will kill you, you bastard." Nick clenched a fist.

"When did this happen?" Cheyenne sat down in the chair across from all of them. "Roc has been with me for several hours."

"Hello. Minions. It's too much of a coincidence that he shows up, Sarah gets in his way, and now she's gone."

Circumstantially, she could see that and why Nick would think that. Realistically, she didn't see things that way. "There's no way Roc did this."

"Until Nathan wakes up, there's no way we can hash this out one way or another. Nathan was tasered and shot. It's going to take him a while. I did get some blood in him. That will help him to heal." Henri blew out another breath.

"Orrick."

All three heads turned to look at Roc.

"Huh?" Cheyenne folded her hands in her lap. "That's the guy who you went in the ground to avoid?"

"Yes. He's here. In Richmond, I think. I've felt him but had no direct contact with him either in person or in mind."

Nick simmered on the couch. "You were going to tell us that when? I'm not sure I buy you have this enemy. After all, you've been out a thousand years. Wouldn't he give up?"

"Yet you'd buy that I somehow found minions who took Sarah for me, despite my long sleep? I've been in the ground for a thousand years. Why is one so hard to believe, especially when you can believe the other?"

"Because it makes sense."

"I didn't tell you because I didn't sense him until tonight. I didn't think he'd go after you. After all, I just met you."

Cheyenne looked to Henri. "Is Nathan going to be okay?" She needed him to say yes. Especially with Sarah gone.

The two men stopped their discussion.

"Yes. He should be fine. Probably pissed that he got taken down. He'll be fine. I expect him to wake up any minute now."

At least there was that.

"Orrick would do anything to get to me."

Cheyenne frowned. Why take Sarah to get to him? Nick apparently went to the same patch of thought as Cheyenne, only he asked, "Then why Sarah?" He ran a hand over his face. "Why not take Cheyenne? She is 'the one.' The one you dated tonight."

"I don't know why he took Sarah. That does seem odd to me too." Roc frowned, lines etched around his mouth.

That didn't help get Sarah back. Cheyenne twisted her hands up together in front of her.

Henri said, "I may have an answer to that."

Their attention shifted to him.

"I was doing some research tonight. On a vampire network. The one Anna Grace has been working on regarding lineages. She's been working on why there are so many 'special' vampires being created lately. I found it had been hacked. I wasn't sure why, only I followed the trail and where it led."

"And?"

"The group of humans who killed themselves when you went to ground?" Henri sat on the coffee table. "They are mentioned. Briefly. That they were serving a great vampire league, and they all went to ground. Doesn't say why or for whom. No mention of your name or your being the first. In fact, it mentions a supposed group that was killed along with the humans. I only knew the details because I'd talked to you about it at length while we waited for Cheyenne to come down. All the literature regarding Roc doesn't exist. Or has been destroyed, from what I can tell."

Cheyenne's gaze shifted to Roc. So he didn't exist in their databases. Something or rather someone had to have gone in and deleted all pertinent written records. Anna Grace had done extensive research on all the old, dusty records.

"So what does that have to do with Sarah?"

"One of her ancestors was in that group that is supposed to have killed themselves. A Daly Smith. He was an Englishman living in Ireland at the time. Did you know him?"

The last name Smith again. Hadn't Roc mentioned someone by that name? They'd joked she'd been related to them. Maybe she was. But that still didn't answer why Sarah had been taken or what Henri was leading up to.

"Yes. He was my psychic. The man who said that I needed 'the one' to defeat Orrick. He convinced me to go to ground." His voice turned bitter. "He never told me his plans to kill himself. I never knew he had children to carry on his lineage."

Cheyenne wanted to reach over to Roc, but all she could think of was Sarah. This was all well and good, but what did it do to get her back?

"He had a daughter. That lineage can trace down to Sarah." Henri's face shifted grimly. "The system was hacked. So Orrick could know this. Perhaps that is why he's taken her."

Nick shook his head. "That doesn't explain anything about why he took Sarah. So she's a relative of someone who knew Roc? What does that matter?"

For once, Cheyenne and Nick were on the same side.

Henri dropped his hands into his lap. "I don't know. I know that may be why he came here and how he found Roc. You said Orrick knew that you were

awake. The hacking was recent and directed. They went in knowing what they wanted to find.”

“Yeah.”

Cheyenne couldn't stop thinking about Orrick. Couldn't stop thinking about Sarah in his hands. How bad that was. What would he do to her? *Stay strong, my sister.* “That's all well and good trying to figure out motivations. But shouldn't we concentrate on where he took her? I mean, that's what we want to know.”

A noise sounded from upstairs.

Maybe Nathan was awake?

Henri jumped to his feet and ran. She'd never seen him run before. He came down a few minutes later supporting Nathan, who looked almost gray.

Cheyenne's stomach rolled. How could someone have done this to Nathan?

Roc and Nick both jumped up to help and offer seats.

Nathan gritted his teeth. “I'm fine.” He finally sunk into the couch, like he couldn't support his weight anymore. “Fine.”

Henri moved toward the kitchen. “I'm going to go fix you some more blood. Will heat it up the way you like it.”

“No arguments here.” Nathan leaned back into the pillow. Tried to smile, but it was almost a grimace instead.

Henri stopped to look at Roc and Nick. “No killing anyone until I get back.” He hurried to the kitchen.

Roc sat forward. “Do you have any ideas where he took Sarah?”

Now they were on to something. Good for Roc for asking that question. Cheyenne hovered on the edge of her seat, wanting to hear the answer. *Hang on, Sarah. We're coming.*

“I don't.” Nathan sighed. “I'm sorry, Nick. I stopped to look at a goddamn magazine. They jumped her. He tasered me before I knew what was happening.”

Nick sat stiff as a board. He didn't reply. Didn't reassure Nathan. “What do you remember?”

“He grabbed her. Some other guy grabbed her.” Nathan's mouth did curve into a brief smile. “She fought them hard. I saw what was happening and went over. He tried to shoot me. I tried to help Sarah, and he tasered me.”

“What did this man look like?” Roc didn't glance at Cheyenne. His mouth withered into a frown.

This would be the deciding factor if it was Orrick. What if Orrick had changed radically over the years? It had been so long since Roc had seen him, but it was all they had to go on.

"He was short for a man. Shorter than me. Muscular. Dark. Had long, dark hair. A thin face."

"Orrick. Has to be." Roc got to his feet and paced as Henri came back in. "It's Orrick who has Sarah." He didn't look happy. "We need to find him. I can defeat him. With Cheyenne by my side."

Cheyenne didn't comment. She wanted to rescue Sarah. But this was a lot of pressure. What was she supposed to do to help defeat Orrick? The only power she had was craziness. Going schizoid on Orrick's ass wouldn't cut it.

Nathan took the cup and drank. He did so slowly and with little sips. "He challenged us all. Said we'd all have to come. Henri. Me." He took another small sip. "He didn't mention you by name. I think he meant you, though, with the last thing he said. He said 'he.'" He looked to Henri. "How does Orrick know you?"

"I don't know. I've heard of him but never had the pleasure. He's taken out many vampires over the years. No one was ever sure why."

If Henri had ever had the pleasure, Orrick would have been dead. Cheyenne glanced at Nick, who looked furious and frustrated at the same time. At least he wasn't blowing any more accusations Roc's way. That was a good start. Maybe he didn't think Roc was to blame now. This Orrick had taken Sarah, and he was going to pay. With his life, if she had anything to say about it. Even if she did have to go schizoid on his ass to defeat him. Hell, she'd give her own life for Sarah's.

"Or maybe it's someone working with you. You're saying this is Orrick who took Sarah. Maybe this Orrick doesn't even exist." Nick looked around them all. "How do we know this vampire exists? All we have is Roc's word."

Or maybe not. "Nick. We need to focus on getting Sarah back. Focusing on Roc doesn't do anything to help with that." She folded her hands one over the other. This stress was causing changes in her brain. She could feel them. Could feel the darkness seeping back into her head. Could the stress be minimizing the effects of the orgasms? Of course, she hadn't had as many this time as the last time they'd been together.

"Unless he's responsible." Nick rooted stubbornly to his spot. He wouldn't budge until they could show him otherwise.

Henri slammed his hand on the table. "This isn't helping. Nick, I know you, and you want to find someone to blame. First we have to find Orrick. If it is Roc, we can find that out later and deal with him."

Roc sat forward. "We can rescue her when we find his location. Cheyenne is 'the one.' She's supposed to be with me when I defeat Orrick. We have to find out where he is. She and I can go on a rescue mission."

There it went. "The one" talk again. How the hell was she supposed to react to that? Cheyenne looked down at the floor. Was that the only reason she was important to him? She hated not being sure.

"This one. What exactly do you know about her?" Henri looked curious.

She almost groaned. Somehow the scholar had gotten activated in Henri. That wasn't going to help them kick Orrick's ass.

Roc smiled a little. "Daly told me she's supposed to help me defeat Orrick. That I had to wait for her before I could face him. Or I would die."

What was "the one" supposed to do to help him defeat Orrick? Cheyenne didn't ask. Psychics were notoriously vague. Something she knew altogether too well. Her visions had never been complete. Daly probably hadn't said. Probably had left them to figure this shit out on their own. Dammit. Of course, she was a psychic so she knew how they worked. Damn shame.

Nick moved, making the couch creak. "Cheyenne is her?" He scratched across his cheek. "You're sure."

Probably couldn't believe Cheyenne could be "the one" for anyone. Not that she wanted to be. Apparently it had been destined. God, she hated talk of destinies and prophecies. She wanted to be herself. Not anyone else. She wanted Roc to want her for who she was. Not some dumb foretelling.

"Of course. I've dreamed about her for years. She has to be her." Roc looked grim. "All we have to do is find him and defeat him." He sounded more excited than he looked.

He hadn't even looked at her once since this had started. Was she moving from being Cheyenne to simply being "the one" in his eyes? She didn't want that.

"Did Orrick know of this prophecy?" Henri looked to Nathan, who now had much better color. "More blood?" His eyes grew fond and relieved at the same time. Henri would demand his own retribution for the assault of his lover.

Roc shook his head. "Daly told it only to me and those loyal to me. He told no one else about the fact he'd seen me defeat Orrick, though he told others about "the one." His forehead wrinkled. "He did tell them he'd seen me die in the first vision. Which was the reason most thought he was putting me in the ground."

Nathan shook his head. "I'm okay now. Thank you." He blew a kiss to Henri. "Why did Orrick take Sarah, then? If she's not 'the one' nor did he know about the fortune. Not to mention, Sarah's not dating Roc."

"Because he knew I'd been around you all. That I'd come to get Sarah from his clutches. He thinks he can manipulate me this way. He doesn't know about the prophecy or that Daly was sure I'd defeat him. With Cheyenne." He nodded toward Nick. "In a way, this is my fault. Like you said."

Henri's face turned thoughtful. "Sometimes prophecies aren't always what we think they are. They are usually given in such vague terms. He didn't give 'the one's' identity? Because that would be too easy. Did he give clues?"

"Not directly, no. There were some indirect indications." Roc shrugged his shoulders. "He didn't give me an exact identity or even a name of who they would be."

Cheyenne's head came up to watch. They were debating this while all she wanted to do was go find Sarah. "Shouldn't we try to find her? Instead of sitting here talking and doing nothing."

Nick nodded his head. Looked as if he wanted to get up off the couch. Funny how they were on the same side about this.

Henri held up a hand. "Wait a minute. Bear with me. What did Daly tell you? Exact words."

Nick threw up his hands. "This isn't going to help. Nor is depending on Cheyenne to rescue her." He looked to Cheyenne with a contrite look. "Sorry. I know you love Sarah, but what if your mind goes kerfloey during the rescue?" He moved forward. "I won't depend on someone so unstable to rescue Sarah."

"My mind won't." She hesitated only a second. "Orgasming with Roc helps me stay sane." She looked to Roc apologetically. Not the way she'd wanted to tell him. "Really it does. It takes away the craziness. For a while. So I won't go insane before I help Roc get Sarah back from Orrick."

Nick snorted. "So getting off with him is supposed to help me trust you to rescue my mate?" He sat up straighter. "I don't think so."

Roc looked over at her. "I suspected that. I've been waiting for you to tell me. Thank you." His eyes lit up.

She looked back down at her feet. So he'd been suspicious this whole time. How in tune must they be for him to know this?

"Daly said..." Roc shook his head. "It's hard to remember because it's been such a long time. I think it was this. 'You need "the one" to defeat Orrick. She must be by your side or you'll die.'"

"Pretty straightforward." Henri tapped on his chin. "At least about needing her in on the confrontation."

Great. Just what she needed. A straightforward prophecy that set her up to be what Roc needed. Not that he needed her without her being "the one." "Maybe I can get a handle on where Sarah is. Through our link."

Henri didn't answer.

"We can't seriously be thinking about letting these two go free Sarah. We don't know him at all." Nick's head shook as though he could negate the whole situation. "I've already said why letting her go is a bad idea."

"The prophecy was clear, Nick." Henri glanced to Roc again. "They must be the ones who defeat Orrick. Roc and his one." His head cocked to the side. "Did you get any more information on this person? How were you supposed to tell who it is?"

"All the shared dreams tell me that she's 'the one.' Why would I dream of her, if she's not her?" His face crinkled as though something had been remembered. "Wait a minute. There was more. I asked him about the person meant to help me. He said that she 'was connected not by blood but by mind to the dark one.' That she'd 'faced the blue-eyed beast in the home of abandon.'"

"Mind connected to the dark one?" Henri sounded as if he was puzzling this out. "The dark one."

"I'd forgotten all this. The dark one is probably me." Roc smiled. "I do have dark skin, and Cheyenne and I connected."

Henri tapped his chin again. "Cheyenne is darker than you. Why would that reference come to that conclusion? It doesn't say she's connected to you in mind. Who is the blue-eyed one?"

Roc's face frowned. "Titius?"

"Titius had brown eyes, didn't he? The house wasn't abandoned where we had our showdown..." Nick started. "*The blue-eyed beast*. Sarah faced down Marcus, who had blue eyes. In an abandoned house." She'd taken on Marcus and bested him from what Cheyenne knew about the situation. Sarah didn't like to talk about the ordeal.

Roc started talking before Nick was finished. "No. 'The one' has got to be Cheyenne. We've dreamed of each other." He shook his head. "There's too much with Cheyenne for her not to be 'the one.'"

How disappointed would he be if she wasn't "the one"? Cheyenne wrapped her arms around herself. What would that mean for them?

"What else do you remember about what Daly said?" Henri sounded as if he were casually discussing a fast-food order.

Instead of potentially altering Cheyenne's life forever.

When Titius had been done with her, he'd left her to the wolves. Henri and crew. She'd been lucky it had been them and not someone meaner. Now would Roc abandon her because she didn't suit his purposes anymore? Hell, her own mother had loved her only to suit her own ends.

Cheyenne's heart pounded. She'd been so ambivalent about being "the one," she didn't know how she felt about *not* being "the one" either. That might be all that was between Roc and her. Surely not. Was it? It would prove to her what Roc's intentions were toward her. Give her some fix on his feelings.

Roc rubbed his forehead. "Something about red." He looked as if he was deep in thought. His eyebrows wrinkled. "Or maroon. I always thought he'd meant blood because she was a vampire."

Blood for a vampire was good. She was a vampire.

Henri's mouth pursed. "Or that she had red hair."

That was bad. She didn't have red hair.

Nick's head came up again, but he didn't say anything. She could see it in his eyes; he'd already discounted her as "the one."

Roc suddenly started.

"What did you remember?" Henri probed gently. He looked as if he'd come to his own conclusion as well, which wasn't what she wanted, whatever it was.

Roc looked miserable. He hesitated as though not wanting to say the words. "His line. He mentioned 'through the ages his line would continue. Until

it reached "the one" and the zenith.' Then 'it will end.'" His lips pursed. "I'd forgotten it until now. 'The one' has to be related to Daly." His gaze turned to Cheyenne. "You're not kin to Sarah, are you?" His voice sounded hopeful. As though he held out hope things could be the way he'd wanted them to be.

Henri answered. "No. They aren't related at any point in the last thousand years, according to our databases." He watched Roc carefully as if looking for a reaction. What reaction did he want?

Didn't look like she was getting what she wanted either. From any of them. Sarah was gone. Nick and Henri looked too happy that Cheyenne wasn't "the one." Nathan was incapacitated, though looking better. Roc was unreadable.

So much for "the one" being his end-all.

Roc rubbed the back of his neck. "I know what you're thinking." He frowned as he'd been doing since the conversation started.

"Do you now?" Henri sounded amused as though no one else could know his thoughts.

That Cheyenne believed. He had a strong mind.

"Yes, I do." Did arms crossed mean one was telling the truth? Definitely was aggression at its lowest. Good thing considering the company he was keeping and the mood they were in.

Nick didn't smile. Didn't seem to share Henri's feeling on the subject. "Tell us what we're thinking."

"That Cheyenne isn't 'the one.' But she *has* to be." Roc emphasized the word as though he could make it come true. He definitely believed she was "the one."

Not good.

Because now it looked as though there was no way she could be what he wanted her to be.

"Why?" Henri flicked some lint from his trousers. "Seriously. From what you've told us, it was a gut feeling that Cheyenne was 'the one.' Looking at what your psychic said, it doesn't look like she is. Was there anything else making you think that she is 'the one' Daly was talking about? Is there anything else? Do share."

Nathan laughed. "You trying to do lingo doesn't work. Seriously? Who are you? A valley guy?"

Henri shot him a glare.

Cheyenne tried not to choke on those words. She hadn't wanted this. Had fought an internal war about being "the one." Now it looked like she wasn't her after all. Where did that leave her? Alone? With Roc?

"Because we dreamed of each other. For so many years. Why would I dream of Cheyenne if she weren't 'the one'? What could have precipitated this?" Roc didn't look irked but like he was trying to reason things out.

Yes, why would they dream of each other? For so many years. Her throat closed. Only to have it blow up in their faces.

"If I had to wager"—Henri sighed—"and there is no way to check this, some event in Sarah's life probably pushed this along."

Nick's head jerked up. "When did you start dreaming of each other? When you were fourteen? Sarah's almost the same age as you. Do you remember what month?"

Roc rolled his eyes. "I didn't write that down."

"What does that matter?" Cheyenne pulled on a string on her jeans. If only she could unravel them, like her life was unraveling. Maybe that would make her feel whole. Make her feel sane.

"Because that's the year Sarah started her period. Her latent powers probably took a surge." Nick winced. "Ummm, Cheyenne..."

She leaned back in her chair. "Ugh. I can't believe..." She clucked her tongue. "I was twelve."

Henri scratched his chin. "Go on, Roc, as to why you don't believe that Cheyenne can't be 'the one' you've been looking for."

He swallowed. "Well. Uh. She told you about the orgasms. Which I had figured out."

Maybe she should have told him. Instead of dragging this out. But it had been so personal, she'd wanted it for herself for a while.

"What else is there?" Henri saw what she did. Roc had more to tell. From the look on his face, she wasn't going to like it.

"Not only do the orgasms help her feel sane." They didn't make her *feel* sane. They *made* her sane. She didn't correct the misnomer. "When she orgasms, I get a rush of power like I've never seen. Maybe no one else has either."

"A rush of power?" Her voice sounded hollow. As though the fables of childhood had been revealed to be a fake. Even as her inner voice argued for him, telling her that she hadn't told him until forced on the sanity issues. Of course, her revelation would have been the perfect time to reveal this to her. The power that spilled from her after orgasms had found a home. Him.

"Yes." He nodded. Looked at her. "It's like sticking my finger into an electric circuit. It's strong."

No. It wasn't his finger. It was his dick. Which wouldn't be seeing any action for a long time, sanity or no sanity.

Chapter Thirteen

The phone rang, and they all jumped.

Roc moved to answer it but didn't get to it first. Probably fitting, as he didn't live there. Of course, Orrick was going to want to talk to him, so he'd get his chance.

Nick moved to answer it. "Hello?" He frowned. "Oh, Rojo. Have you found anything out about Orrick? No. Well, gotta..."

Nathan grabbed the phone before he could hang up, still a little slower than usual but much better than when he'd first down. "Don't mind Mr. Grumpy. How are things over there?" Nathan walked off with the cordless.

Roc's gaze shifted to Cheyenne. She hadn't said much. Especially after his revelation about the power she gave off to him. She sat on a chair with her lithe legs pulled up under her. Her hair covered her face. She'd briefly gone to her room and changed clothes, but other than that, had been stationary. Silent. They were waiting for Orrick to call and he was taking his own sweet time.

He wasn't sure what her problem with him was, but he needed to find out. He walked over to her. Tried meeting her gaze.

She wouldn't look at him. Turned her head away.

"Cheyenne?"

She still didn't look at him.

"Cheyenne?"

"Go away." She pushed her hair back from her face. The action didn't reveal any of her features with her head down. "Leave me alone."

He shook his head and took the seat next to her. "I'm not going to do that." He'd not leave her alone until they resolved this.

Her mouth curled up into a sneer. "Yeah. Right. You need my power to rejuvenate yourself. Go right ahead."

He blew out a breath. "I need you."

Her hair came down to cover her face again like a curtain. "No. You need 'the one.' I'm sure you and Sarah will be happy together."

Nick made a noise. He'd heard her statement. "Sarah is mine. We've bonded. Mates. You're not taking her away from me." His voice came low and deadly like the growl of a panther.

"I'm not taking Sarah away from you. Or anyone."

"Why not?" Cheyenne didn't sound anything at all. She sounded flat. As though her emotion had been sucked right out of her.

"I don't give a damn if she is 'the one' for you. Sarah is my...life." Nick looked carefully over at Roc. "I love her."

"I'm not in love with Sarah."

Cheyenne didn't look at him but kept staring out of the window.

"Good." Nick put his hands in his pockets.

"She might help me defeat Orrick, but I'm not... I mean...there's nothing there." For one thing, Sarah loved Nick. For another, there was someone else whom Roc had feelings for. Now to convince her of that.

"Nick, could you leave us alone for a minute?"

He nodded and marched for the kitchen. He went through the door and met Nathan on his way out. "Don't go in there."

Nathan asked, "Why not?"

"Roc and Cheyenne are talking."

They both pushed back through the door into the kitchen.

Cheyenne shifted her weight. "Nothing to talk about."

"Yes, there is." Roc moved forward in front of her chair. "Apparently we have a lot to talk about."

"Oh, that I'm not 'the one.' I'm your electric plug. How convenient." If only he could see her eyes and what they reflected.

He reached over and pushed her hair to the side. "You may not be 'the one' to help me defeat Orrick but you're the woman I want."

Her eyes didn't change expression.

"You are."

"Until Sarah comes back. Then..."

"Then what?"

"You'll want someone who's sane." Her voice grew bitter. "Someone who makes sense. Who doesn't have the darkness chasing them every fucking minute of every day."

"I want you."

"For my energy." She half laughed, half cried. A tear started to fall. "For the power that I give to you."

He rubbed his hand across his face. This wasn't going as he'd planned. None of it. From the identity of "the one," to dealing with Orrick. Especially dealing with Cheyenne. "That's not fair. When we have sex, you get something too."

"Yeah. My sanity. Little different."

"Is it?" He scooted closer to her. "Is it? Being sane gives you more power, right? That's how come I can't get into your head when...after we've had sex

and you've orgasmed? So having sex with me gives you more power. It gives me more power." He lowered his voice. "It gives *us* more power." He could feel her warmth but didn't dare touch her like he wanted to.

She blinked at him as though he were speaking French.

"That's a good thing. I don't see why that's bad."

A tear did fall then. "Because you only want me because of what I can give to you." She grabbed a pillow and threw it. "My whole fucking life people have wanted what they could get from me. My mother. Titius. The only one who doesn't want anything from me is Sarah. I wanted you to be like her."

She'd wanted him not to profit from her. He couldn't blame her for that. "Cheyenne. I want you because you're *you*. All that time I was asleep and dreaming of you, I wanted you. Not because of any other reason than you're Cheyenne."

"You thought I was 'the one.'"

He didn't reply right away.

"See!" She started to get up and walk away.

He grabbed her and pulled her down into his lap. Held on to her. Tried not to think about how slim her body was. How her skin burned him. How good her body felt against him. "When you first started coming to me in dreams, you were a kid. What did we do together? In the dreams we had?"

She struggled, trying to break free. Finally she stopped.

Gritting his teeth, he wasn't about to let her go until they finished this, no matter how much she bucked against him. She was probably feeling the results of that pressed up against her right now. "What did we do?" He stroked her back. Needed to touch her in some way. Have at least that contact.

"We...mainly talked." Her voice didn't have that flat cast to it anymore. Instead she sounded ticked.

"Exactly. We talked. You were a kid. I was attracted to you, but you weren't a woman. I got to know you." He continued stroking in small circles up her back. Tried not to think about the skin underneath her clothes. How smooth and warm it would be. "When you first started coming to me, I didn't know if you were real."

Her head lifted. "You didn't? I didn't know if you were real either. For a long time. Until you showed up, even."

"I could have checked. To see. I could let my mind drift, and because I fed, I could go out of my body." He looked into her beautiful brown eyes. Swam in them like usual. How could he make this right? "I could have checked to make sure that you were reality. I wanted you to be real. More than anything, so it took me a while to want to see. Finally I searched for you."

"And?"

"You were. I enjoyed every minute spent in the dreams with you. It never occurred to me...until I woke up, that you could be 'the one' that Daly

mentioned." She stiffened at the use of the words "the one." "Hear me out. All that time, I never thought you were to help me. All that time, I was getting to know you. Talking. Loving you when you were finally old enough. All this happened in dreams."

"It was only dreaming. Nothing real."

He shook his head. "Do you like rainbows? That multicolored dress is your favorite, right? Because you got it from a festival with your mom? She rarely took Saturdays off, but she did that one weekend because you wanted to go. Your favorite dessert isn't cheesecake but is a brownie sundae from Magoo's, which was on the corner by your house. Your favorite book is *Julie of the Wolves*, because you liked how she overcame. You'd never tell anyone but Sarah that you enjoyed Shakespeare. Well, Sarah and me."

Her eyes widened.

"Yes, I remember all that stuff. And more. That's stuff about you. Not only in dreams but about your life. The whole time I was dreaming about you, I was finding out about you. Falling in love with you. Not because you're 'the one.' Because you're...you." He trembled. Could she feel him? He'd never said this much to anyone before.

More tears crept from her eyes. Poured over her lashes in numbers that made him want to punch something.

He'd failed. She still didn't see. Still was upset. Damn, but he was lousy at this. "Dammit." He pushed on her, not to get her up but because he needed to feel her under his hands. "I don't know how to make you see this. It's not because of what..."

Two fingers on a small hand came up to press against his lips. Then lips pressed against his but too quickly to catch them. "I get it." She sat up in his lap. "You know everything about me. Why didn't you ever tell me stuff? About you? I didn't know you were the first. Until you came back here."

A fair question. "I don't know. Not used to saying it to anyone, I guess." He shrugged. "Regardless, I know you. I love you. It's not because of power or being 'the one.' If you can't see that..."

"I do see it." Her voice lowered.

Good. He didn't want to have to do this again. Ever. "I'll tell you anything you want to know. My life is an open book."

"How were you made?"

He chuckled. Leave it to her to start now. "A Celtic god. I helped them in a war. My reward was immortality." He sighed. "As with all things from the gods, it came with a price. A heavy price."

"What was it?"

"Blood drinking. Sunshine becoming a source of irritation. All my friends and family dying while I stayed whole." He winced. "Immortality wasn't what I thought it would be at first. There was no taking it back. What was done was done." So many vampires didn't see things that way. They tried to fight the

system. It was why so many who were made didn't make it. Although this society with different ways to extract blood had to be better than those of the past, or at least easier for vampires.

She nodded. "Yeah, that does bite. I miss my mother sometimes."

"I killed a lot of humans to feed. Wasn't entirely comfortable but did what I had to do to survive. When I was lonely...I, well, I wound up figuring out I could make more like me."

"That's where Orrick came in."

"Among others." He'd made a few mistakes like with Orrick. Orrick was one he'd never gotten around to correcting. "I also began to change the way I fed. Until I could do all of it from souls. From life forces."

"How do you do that?"

He shrugged again. "I don't know. I think it has to do with the god who made me. He changed me. Orrick wanted that power. I could never give it to him. That's one reason he wants me dead."

She curled up in his lap, wrapping herself around his body. He liked the contact of her skin with his. Liked holding her like this. His cock reared up between them. He wanted her. Needed to reaffirm this union with physical contact. No one in the house would take kindly to that. Even if they couldn't do anything until Orrick called.

The kitchen phone rang. The cordless was in there too.

"Roc!" Nathan yelled to the living room.

It must be Orrick. Which meant it was Showtime.

* * * *

Cheyenne dashed into the kitchen. Her mind was on Sarah and her alone, instead of focusing on Roc and what had happened between them. What would Orrick demand to get Sarah back? He didn't even know she was "the one" who was supposed to bring about his downfall. If he found that out, Sarah would be in danger. They'd have to use extra caution. It wasn't like Orrick would play straight with them. No, the man would do everything to mislead them and get Roc under his thumb.

Nathan growled into the phone. "Hurt one hair on her head and you won't make it out alive. Oh? Well, either way you're going to die. If you don't hurt her, I'll make it quick for *you*."

Roc grabbed the phone. "Orrick? Where the hell are you? What do you want? Well, besides my head on a damn platter."

Cheyenne took a deep breath. Sarah and she had a connection. A pretty strong link from their early days of being connected when Titius had been in the picture. She hadn't tried to connect to Sarah before. With the phone line open...that opened a conduit of communications between them. Something easy for her to trace down and track back. She would bet that Orrick had

Sarah nearby. If she could find Sarah, then they wouldn't need to meet him. Wouldn't need to play by his rules.

No one would let her do that. They'd all cite dangers. Unpredictability. She could do this, though.

She could give them an edge. Do that for Sarah. To get Sarah back safely.

She closed her eyes. Concentrated.

Used the phone line as a natural boundary. Used the snaking of the lines to follow the trail of the signal. Batted her psyche along the winding lines until she popped up at the other end. The connected end.

"Sarah."

Cheyenne sensed her. Sitting by the jackass. Tied up. They'd also put a gag on her. Probably because she'd challenged them. There was a bruise on her cheek.

Cheyenne frowned. Tried not to think about smacking the one who'd done that. She pushed into Sarah's mind.

"Sarah?"

"Cheyenne?" The surprise was palpable even in the mind talking. Sarah hadn't expected this contact. *"Is that you?"*

"Yeah." She sent calm vibes to Sarah. Trying to ease her mind. *"Roc is on the phone with Orrick. We'll come to get you out."*

"Listen to me. It's a trick. He wants Roc to come alone so he can kill him. There will be no exchange. He wants to kill Henri. Nathan. Nick." Her voice broke a little but then straightened out. *"And me."*

Cheyenne had known all that, of course. Orrick couldn't be trusted. Not in any way. *"Where are you?"*

Sarah blew out a breath. Obviously in real time too, because Orrick glanced her way with suspicious eyes.

Cheyenne had stayed away from him so that he wouldn't sense her. Wouldn't know she'd come in. Some of her psychic energy would have left residuals, no matter how much she shielded herself. *"Careful. If he finds out I'm here, game over for both of us."* Would he be able to sense her? Isolate her from Sarah's psyche? Drive her out or do something even worse to her? *"Tell me where you are. We can use surprise to rescue you."*

"I'm in the West End. I saw Three Chopt Road. Cox Road. I'm in apartments. I didn't see the name of them. I'm in 3123 B."

That should be enough to get them there. *"Hang in there. We'll mount a rescue. Get you out of there."* With Sarah's imprisonment, Orrick had the upper hand. If they could come and surprise Orrick, that would be to their advantage.

"I don't sense the darkness in you. I thought it had disappeared before, but it's evident now that it's gone." Sarah's matter-of-fact words jolted her like an electrical current.

"I... Sex with Roc helps to hold it back." It was actually her orgasm, but Sarah didn't need to know specifics.

A chuckle. *"Must be some good sex."*

"Sarah!" She half laughed in Sarah's mind.

"You'd better get back. He can sense the psychic glimmer in the air. You stay much longer, and he'll figure out someone's here."

"One more thing. Remember how Roc was talking about 'the one,' who was to help him defeat Orrick."

"Yeppers. Sure do." It was almost hard to believe Sarah was a captive. She had such a calm mind. *"That was you."*

"Nope. You're it."

Sarah's mind froze as though it shut down a second. Then she managed to croak out, *"What?"*

"You're 'the one'. To help Roc defeat Orrick."

"No. You're 'the one.' He talked about it..."

"They figured out...it's you. Orrick doesn't know. He can't know. Until the time comes for you to do whatever you're going to do to help defeat him." If only they could touch, but right now metaphysical was the only connection. It would have to do.

Sarah's eyes cut to Orrick.

"Don't look at him. Don't reveal to him you're 'the one.' But you are. You're going to help Roc defeat him. You have to stay alive." It was a little tease but probably not an appropriate one.

"I'm supposed to help with this how?" Sarah wiggled her hands back and forth. *"At the moment, I'm tied up. I don't think I'm going to be much good to Roc. I've tried getting into Orrick's mind. It didn't go well."* Her mind flashed on her cheek.

"Don't try again. Maybe when I come there, I can bolster you. Because the cans need open and so do the duc..." She took a deep breath inside Sarah's head. *"Dammit it to all hell and back."*

Sarah swallowed, cutting her eyes away from Orrick. *"You can't come here if you're chasing the darkness. It is back. I didn't sense it when you first came. It's back now, though. I can feel it. And stronger than ever."*

The energy she'd expended to come this far to find Sarah had depleted her. She'd never used her mind so much. This had made her lack of craziness run out. The power surge from the orgasms were limited.

Which meant that to be in the rescue, she'd have...to sleep with Roc. Not exactly a hardship. They'd mostly made up.

"Yeah, go back and have sex with Roc. While I'm here. Waiting." Sarah's head cocked to the side.

“Sarah...” Cheyenne had to be in on this rescue. She had to. Sarah had given her so much. “*I have...*”

“*I know.*” Sarah thought of puppies and kittens. Must be the same as a hug in her mind. “*I know. I was teasing. Like you did me, telling me stay alive.*”

“Why are you staring off into space like that? Huh? Can you hear me? Have you gone nuts? Sarah? Sarah.”

“*Fuck.*” Cheyenne quivered as Sarah silently thrust with all her might, shoving Cheyenne from her head.

It made her sail past Orrick.

Cheyenne couldn't stick around. She had to leave before Orrick sensed she'd been there. Had to get Roc to have sex with her to clear her head so she could rescue Sarah.

The *thud* behind her as she traveled through the cosmos to find the phone line was troubling. Was it Orrick hitting Sarah?

“*I will be back for you. And I'll kill him.*” Cheyenne didn't think Sarah heard her. It was a vow she made to herself.

Chapter Fourteen

"Cheyenne!" Roc snapped his fingers in front of her face again and again. "Cheyenne." Was panic showing in his voice? It should be.

He'd gotten off the phone a few minutes ago and had started talking to Cheyenne. Only she hadn't talked back.

Her eyes suddenly snapped open. Her head shook back and forth as though she was clearing her mind. "She's in the West End. Three Chopt Road. Cox Road. In apartments on that corner. Didn't see the name. I'm... She's in 3123 B."

Roc blinked. "Huh?"

"Sarah. She's at the place I told you." She leaped to her feet as though she was ready to go.

Roc tried to figure out if she were talking crazy or something else was going on? Good thing Nick had walked out earlier, or he'd have a meltdown session over this, whether it was real or not.

Henri settled down at the kitchen table. "You went to Sarah." He didn't phrase it as a question.

"Yes. I found her. We have to get her out of there." Her eyes flashed around the room, seemingly in a panic. "Have to do one thing...one thing...before we leave." Her gaze fixed on Roc. Warmly.

Roc tingled from his head to his feet. His cock swelled. She looked as though she wanted him. He was ready... Wait a minute? Hadn't she been aggravated with him before the phone call? What had changed? They'd talked, but had they worked it all out? His blood rushing to his cock made it hard for his brain to come up with a reasonable explanation.

"You took a big risk in going to Sarah. If Orrick had sensed you, he...well, he might have used his mind to hurt you." Henri's eyes picked apart at them both.

Roc looked her over to make sure she wasn't hurt. He didn't know whether to kiss her or kill her. It had been a brave thing, but if she'd gotten caught... He shuddered. Orrick would have made her suffer. Yet Roc admired her spunk.

"I had to do this. I had to help rescue her." She swallowed. "I know I took a chance that could have backfired. But it's Sarah." She said the name as if it explained everything. For her, it did.

Henri smiled at her. "You did a good job. It took skill to get in and out under Orrick's radar. Nicely done. Sarah's lessons have paid off."

The beam on her face went supernova in a second. She looked back at Roc as Henri continued. Roc definitely still felt warmth emanating from the woman.

"We'll need to make preparations to get to this place. Also figure out how we're going to attack this problem."

"The hovercraft warrants some cherry pie." Cheyenne paced, looking flustered. "Once we're close, I can help buffer Sarah. She's supposed to be the helper in all this. I think she can take Orrick mentally with a little boost. I can do that for her. That will leave him for the rest of us to defeat physically." Her gaze turned to Roc again. "Henri, it will take you a while to prep?"

Henri nodded. "We'll have to get suited up. Corral Nick so that he doesn't go off without us. Will probably be a half an hour or more."

She seemed to think a minute. "Enough time. Roc, can you help me...get ready for this?" She sashayed in front of him, leading him up a staircase.

Must be the one to her room.

She looked like she had something involving a bed on her mind. His cock tightened again. A sexier sight had never been seen.

Again his mind intervened against his libido. She'd been all over his ass earlier. Now she couldn't wait to jump it? What was that all about?

Not that he minded, except there was probably a way this would come around to bite him in the ass. Even if he was about to get laid, he didn't want his ass chewed later.

Sarah.

The rescue.

Cheyenne had said something crazy while telling Henri and him about her visit to Sarah. She was slipping. Sliding back into the darkness.

If she were crazy, she might not be able to help Sarah. Hell, she might not be allowed to go anyway if Nick had his way. Although the idea of taking her along on this mission made Roc's heart rate rise.

He'd never had so much to lose before. Now he could lose her to Orrick. Even if he defeated Orrick, Cheyenne's life wasn't an option.

There was only one known thing that would bring her back to sanity. One thing that could take the edge of the darkness back from her mind.

Orgasms.

With him.

He followed behind her, watching her ass swaying before him.

He could not sleep with her. Which would result in her not going. He could also sleep with her but not bring her to orgasm. Which would also result in her not going.

Both of those would piss her off greatly. At him.

He became entranced by the curve of one asscheek as she turned to stop before a door. If only he could press into those depths from right here. Right now. He could take her against the door frame.

Yes, he could not take her, but truth was, he wanted her. He wanted to take her and have her under him.

One more time.

He wasn't scared of Orrick. His own death didn't frighten him. It never had. It had terrified his followers because of the hell on earth they'd foreseen under Orrick. That was the only reason he'd gone to ground. Had it only been him, he would have stayed to fight.

The idea of never making love to Cheyenne again did frighten him. He couldn't imagine never being with her again. The idea of her dying? That was even scarier.

He needed to be with her again. One last time before they left. Denying them that did nothing about keeping them safe.

Even if he didn't bring her to orgasm, she'd still find a way to go with them. Sneak out. Better to have her go under their supervision. And at full power. That would be their best chance for everyone coming back home again.

It was important to her to help save Sarah. He'd seen how important it was. She needed to do this just as he needed to be with her again.

However, he did have to know where they stood as far as the argument they'd been having before Orrick's call. He thought they were okay, but he needed verification. That meant he had to point out something unpleasant. Roc followed her through the door, and she shut it behind them. "Do you find it ironic?"

She'd been about to reach for him. She stopped. Her eyebrows crinkled. "What's ironic?"

He blew out a breath. "That you're going to have sex with me to stay sane. After the argument that we just had." Yeah, it might ruin the mood. If they were ever going to move past the problems they'd experienced, this needed to be dealt with. And fast.

At first her eyes glared with anger. She seemed about ready to snap at him. Then she ran a hand through her hair. Her shoulders sagged. "You're right." Her eyes turned weepy. "I have to help..."

There'd never been a doubt of the motivations behind gaining her sanity. He understood that. He needed her to see what he did. There was no difference in their abilities to glean from each other. It benefited them both. Made their bond stronger, not weaker. He pressed a finger against her moving lips. "Don't."

"Don't?"

"Don't. I needed you to see we're the same in what we get from each other during sex. That that power is not the sum total of us. We are more than that could ever make us." He moved his body in against hers. "We're okay about what we talked about earlier? Aren't we?"

She nodded. "Yes. I think we worked some things out." She didn't say everything. He didn't expect her to.

She would still be nervous about him taking Sarah over her. Only Nick's commandeering of Sarah once they had her back would fix that worry. At least she was accepting that he didn't want her only for what she could give to him. Because that was far from the truth.

"As long as we're okay, I don't have a problem with rescuing Sarah being a secondary motivation for our sex." He didn't. He wanted much more than this one time with her. "Long as I'm the primary motivator for why you want sex, I'm okay with that." He pulled her against him. Tightly. Wanted her even closer. "Am I your primary driving factor in having sex with me right now?"

Her gaze was lively and beautiful. He liked the way her eyes sparkled like living jewels. "You are. I want you. Only you."

He needed her. How long had Henri said they had before the group would be ready? Half an hour? Oh, now that would be tricky. Because he could lose track of time in her. Lose himself in her body. Easily.

He wiggled his cock against her. Reached down and plastered his lips against hers. Kissed her thoroughly and deeply. Delved his tongue in to dance with hers. Wrapped it around hers with ease. Broke away. "We don't have much time. We'll have to make this quick." If only he could do everything to her. There would be time later. He'd see to that.

"I know." She wrapped her arms around him and held him. Held him. Didn't ask anything of him. Didn't demand. Her body was warm against him.

As hot as he was, as much of a tinderbox as he felt like, this simple action made him shake. She didn't push him for anything. Simply lay against him. He could linger in her like that all day.

He'd never felt more for a woman than right then and there.

He groaned and kissed her again. Solar flares erupted behind his closed eyes. Her body wiggled closer to his. He wanted to slam her against the door frame. He couldn't make this last. He didn't have the time. He wanted her so badly. He could make this good for her, and that meant some slowness up front. Foreplay would serve them both well.

He backed her up until the backs of her knees hit her bed.

He reached down to yank off her shirt. Fumbled more with buttons than he ever had before. A button pulled off in his rough hands and bounced somewhere under the bed. He ripped off her bra. Tossed it to the floor too. Settled in to look at her.

Her nipples perked up before his eyes. Such tiny treasures. He reached out to cup one in his hand. It barely fit but filled it too. Perfection.

He stroked and then held her.

His other hand went to her pants and maneuvered them open. No underwear again. She was a naughty girl.

Dilemma.

He didn't want to release her breast to get her pants down. He couldn't get her pants down with one hand. Needed two to work this out. He hesitated, trying to figure out which he wanted more at this moment.

She settled it for him by shimmying her pants down herself. They slipped down her legs as she wiggled back and forth, trying to ease them off without having to bend, probably because she didn't want his hand to lose touch with her breast.

The movement of her body made her breast jiggle in his hand.

She was soon naked before him. In all her glory. He particularly liked that hidden place between her thighs, which promised untold riches and loving. He sniffed. Her musk hung prevalent in the air. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. She probably had a few of the same reasons.

Power.

Being with each other once again.

Forget the physical attraction. He understood this woman. From the inside out. As well as he understood himself. They'd been meant to be together. Why else would he have started dreaming about her? Waited for her? And why else would his psyche say "mine" every time she walked in a room?

He needed to have her. Now. No more playing around. They didn't have time for that anyway.

He grasped the back of her neck with his free hand and pulled her back down, while pushing her with his body onto the bed.

She tumbled to the mattress with an undignified sprawl, and he went with her. Came down on top of her. Saw stars at the contact. He was so far gone. Would she always affect him like this? Would they be together a thousand years, and he'd still ache with the wanting of her? The need to be one with her?

She blew out a breath at the contact of their bodies. "You feel good."

"So do you." An understatement. He begged whatever god was listening to not make this their last time. He needed more time with her. He needed forever.

He gently rocked himself against her. Enjoyed both the feel of her against him and the passionate look on her face.

She stroked down his chest and, before he realized what she was doing, began taking his shirt off.

He stayed her hand. "Not yet." He wasn't ready to be naked yet. Needed to pull down his concentration first. Needed her to orgasm first. He didn't trust himself to be naked until he had more control.

"Umm, I'm naked, and you're not." She bit her lip as if trying to understand what he was up to.

That was the way it should be. "I know."

He leaned over to kiss away any further protests about her state of undress and his lack of the same. Then he kissed his way down her neck,

paying careful attention to some sensitive spots. He nipped her, and she shivered.

He tasted her skin. She was like ambrosia. Salty ambrosia. Regardless, he liked it on his tongue.

Her pulse beat a wild tango in her neck. He nipped at the point of her pulse and liked her frazzled reaction. She bucked up against him. Tightly. If only he had stripped. But then he'd be wanting too much. Too quickly. He'd probably be inside of her. Taking her down to the base of his heavy cock...

For the first time in a long time, the blood in her called to him as he became distracted thinking about pushing into her. His teeth were at her pulse point before he realized what he was doing. The closeness made him want to taste her. He could tap into the artery that tempted him so thoroughly.

No. He wasn't sure why the temptation was there now. He leaned back from the force of the attraction of her blood. Needed to get his mind from the bloodlust and into other things. Like making her scream.

He shifted down her body until he came to her breasts. Such rubies among so many other treasures she possessed. He slipped his mouth gently over a nipple. Sucked it into his mouth to draw it down. Rolled his tongue around her. Tasting her. Breathing in her flowery scent. Gardenias? No, mimosa.

He didn't care. Only exulted in the moment of smelling her. Of knowing he was going to have her soon.

He fastened his teeth around the outer edge of her nipple and bit gently. Not enough to cause more than a fraction of pain.

She moaned.

He went to her other breast and shared his mouth with her again.

His cock tightened as he looked up at her face.

She looked relaxed. As though she could recline there all day, giving in to his ministrations. She was gorgeous, as usual.

He wanted to be everywhere on her body at once. Especially inside. He shook at the ripples of arousal. Such a beauty. He couldn't do that yet. Good thing he had kept his pants on or he'd be inside her already. The sensations were that strong.

He moved down her stomach, past her belly button, and reached the apex. The promised land. Nirvana. His mouth drooled, hungering for her taste. Couldn't wait to slip into her sweet pussy.

His head turned, and he felt the pulse of the femoral artery beside his mouth. Throbbing. Beating in time. Quick and raging, like the pulse in her throat. He nipped a spot above where the artery rested under the skin. He could puncture it. Taste her. Never get enough of her sweet blood in his mouth. All warm. Tasty.

He'd not felt bloodlust in centuries. Now it filled him to the core. He opened his mouth and grazed her slightly.

He wanted to sink in his fangs. Make her his. In ways she wasn't already. He could bond them by blood. A growl rocked him back to his senses.

He took a deep breath and sunk his mouth in. To her pussy. Not biting but licking and sucking. He put his bloodlust to work, kissing, tasting, and nipping with abandon. Until she beat at him with flailing hands.

Poured her essence right into his willing mouth.

The power rolled him like a die. Captured him in its wave until the last aftershock had rocked her. He could do little but ride along with it until the power tossed him out like an empty tin can. Ah, but he wasn't empty. He was full of her power.

He trembled against her. Still caught up in the throes of the energy that gripped him in a tight hand. He reeled from her.

She reached down to stroke his head. Ran her fingers through his hair. The touch zinged him like an electric current that ran from her finger to his innards.

He crept up the bed, taking her hand with him. Grabbed something he'd noted on the floor earlier. A scarf. He needed to bind her. He'd always enjoyed an occasional restraining of a lover. Something about having total control over the sex appealed to him. Without asking, he knew she liked to be bound. He'd sensed that in her before.

She blinked as he knotted it around her wrist. Threaded it through the headboard. Wrapped it around her other wrist. Secured her to the wood with quick work of his fingers. He'd not forgotten how to do this.

She didn't protest or resist in any way. She cooperated with him fully. Not to mention, she looked as though anticipation filled her. Her mouth curved up as she watched him. Definitely wasn't unhappy at this turn of events.

"I take it that's okay with you." He already knew but needed the permission. He could have asked before now. Only it seemed natural to do it this way instead.

She nodded. Her voice was scratchy and deep. "Yes. Safe word is eggplant." Her body relaxed. Giving him control.

He laughed. "We won't need a safe word tonight, but that's a good one. I merely wanted to tie you up for a bit." He leered at her. Yes, he was punch-drunk from the power he'd ingested. Since they'd found out about Sarah, he'd been feeding continuously just like he had while he'd been in the ground, to keep his power level up for the fight ahead. This, this power sated him in ways he couldn't even begin to comprehend. "Hopefully you won't ever have to use it." He winked at her.

She smiled and looked up at her bonds. Seemed satisfied with what she saw there. Strained her arms against them and again looked pleased.

He reached up and yanked his shirt from his body. Quickly divested himself of his pants, sliding them from his legs in a hurry. He was ready to bury himself into her comforting depths. No matter what the future held, they had this moment. Nothing could take this away from them. Ever.

He looked at his personal delicacy, wrapped and hung before him. Where to start? Everywhere. If only he had a hundred tongues.

She smiled. Eagerly. "Hi."

"Hi." He was as eager as she was. Wanted to slow down but wasn't sure if he could. Once he parted her sweet flesh, he might lose himself.

He crawled up her body again to poke at her slick entrance. He planned to terrorize her for a few moments with his cock there. Only it didn't work out that way.

Without meaning to, his tip found the right spot and went on in.

She hissed.

He was so incensed, so close to the edge, he almost spilled right there upon penetrating her. He didn't. Instead, he rocked back and forth and shuttled his cock in her willing pussy. In and out, he thrust against her, taking what little time they had and trying to make it last.

She tugged at the bonds that held her.

"Want to be free?" He liked the sight of her under him. Tied. Unable to resist him. He'd let her free in an instant if he didn't think she'd enjoy what he did.

She quickly shook her head even as it rolled back. "I like this." She liked not being in control. Not in her life, obviously, with the sickness. In life, she craved that control. With him and sex, she liked his domination.

So did he.

A second orgasm crept up on her. He could tell from her look of surprise as it hit her. It rolled out from her like some seismic shock wave that didn't stop but barreled her into another climax. She took him over the edge with her despite his attempts to hold his climax back. He couldn't take any more. His climax spilled forth with hers in tandem.

Their powers slapped together like the steel balls of a Newton's cradle. They rapped against the other, sending them both into the stratosphere to recover.

As he came back to himself, he reached up to unwrap one of her wrists. She pulled it free from the headboard.

Nathan's voice came from behind the door. "Boy, I like you two's idea of getting ready a lot better than Henri's. All we did was pack weapons." He blew out a sigh. "Now it's time to fly."

Chapter Fifteen

Cheyenne eyed the building from the seat of the car. “Do you think they know we're coming?” The apartment was on the third floor of a normal residential apartment complex. Looked like every other one there was. Orrick was living near downtown Short Pump, a local joke about a spot that was once country and now wasn't anymore.

That Orrick was living in the middle of the 'burbs was even weird to her, and she lived in a suburban neighborhood with two couples—one of them a gay couple—along with several couples who came and went at the drop of a hat.

“I would prepare for that.” Henri's eyes narrowed as he too stared up at the window. “It will mean fewer surprises for us.”

“All he had to do was sense Cheyenne there.” Nick's voice sounded wooden. Had he been this way about the Titius incident? Probably. He'd barely spoken since Henri had told him that Cheyenne had found out where Sarah was. He didn't agree with their plan and seemed determined to make that fact known. He had every right to be disturbed. It didn't mean she would back down, though. “And he'd know we were coming.”

“Hey, I found out the address.” She'd do anything to go in there and put Orrick down while saving Sarah.

“I know you did.” A rare smile graced his face. “For that I am grateful. I've said that.” His eyes glanced back at Roc. “Just pointing out you may not know if you tipped off Orrick. We'd better be prepared for that.”

Her heart hammered in her chest. She found herself happy he was glad about something. She remained scared to look at Roc because she was so shaky from what they'd shared.

Nathan took off his seat belt. “Not to rain on anyone's parade, but if they are watching for us, shouldn't we do something besides sit here?”

Roc leaned forward from his position by Nick and Nathan in the backseat. “It's still a few hours before Orrick is supposed to meet me. I don't think he'll be looking for us.” His voice sent quivers down her spine. Prickled up her neck hair.

Her mind remained clear. Perfectly clear.

She couldn't get her mind away from what they'd shared. Except for the running thoughts of rescuing Sarah. They bounced back and forth in her mind like a tennis match. If she managed to stay sane for this and helped rescue Sarah, she'd owe Roc for having sex with her and for not making her eat crow

because she'd needed to glean power from him. It was a huge debt. One that might take forever paying off. That could be a good thing.

You shouldn't think like that. Every time you do—heartache.

Not to mention he hasn't seen Sarah in action yet. Once she helps him defeat Orrick, do you think he'll want measly little you?

He'll still want me. He said so. He showed me so. She pulsed between her thighs, remembering the orgasms that had pummeled her.

Yeah, right.

"We still will need to prepare as if he is expecting us." Henri's eyes glittered, and he scratched at his forearm. "That way if we do catch him unaware, we can enjoy the element of being overprepared. Better that than being underprepped."

"I agree with Henri; if he sensed Chey was there, he'll be waiting for us." Nick sounded weary. "I'd rather be too prepped than not enough. This is Sarah we're talking about."

Roc frowned. "Nick..." He'd already argued for Cheyenne more than once about this and about what they had planned. He'd been staunchly on her side. So had Nathan and Henri. "We don't know if they sensed Cheyenne or not." He shot her a slight smile that made her shiver again. "I agree we should prepare for the worst, though."

They'd all agreed on that. Now to do it. She tapped her foot impatiently.

"Why are we attacking in daytime anyway?" Nathan scratched his back, making Roc lean away from him.

"He's meeting Roc after dark. If we are to be a surprise to him, daytime is the best avenue for that." Henri turned toward Cheyenne. He asked in all seriousness, "Do you think you can do this?"

"Henri, I don't like this plan."

"You've made your concerns known, Nick." It was Henri's turn to sound tired. "I know what Sarah is to you."

Nick didn't trust Cheyenne to help Sarah. Even with Henri, Nathan, and Roc's support, it still bit at her. She understood. If the positions were reversed, she wouldn't trust Nick to go after Roc without her. But she was the only one who could do this for them. She'd been in Sarah's mind before with Titius. Now she'd been in with Orrick. What was one more time to make a connection?

"No offense, but she's schizophrenic. This is Sarah's life we're talking about here. From what Roc has said of Orrick, he will kill her. He wants to kill all of us." He tensed up his body. "I think I should be the one to go in. Sarah and I know each other better than anyone else. I can find her."

"Nick, we've been through this. You're too involved. You'd take a risk." Henri's brilliant eyes attempted to calm Nick down. "Remember, *mon étudiant*, I know you almost as well as your lover. I've been in your head too."

"She's not too connected to Sarah?" He jerked forward. "I understand why you're pointing that out about me, but what about her?"

"She won't take the risks you would."

Cheyenne didn't correct Henri. She might. Henri knew that despite what he was saying to the contrary. Nick was liable to lose it if he saw anything going wrong with Sarah. Cheyenne could handle that better than he could because of what they'd been through with Titius. When she was sane at least.

Thanks to Roc. She glanced back at him, and he smiled at her. A go-getting smile that made parts of her perk up. Would the wanting of him ever stop? Probably not. Not if she had anything to say about it.

He didn't like what she was about to do either. He'd argued against the plan at first. He'd realized early on that he didn't have a choice before they'd been done discussing what was to happen. So he had stopped protesting.

"Not to mention Cheyenne and Sarah have some sort of connection the rest of us do not. That was evident with Titius. It will help Cheyenne help her."

"I wish you were doing this, Henri." Nick actually wished it were him, but if not him, then Henri. "You're stronger than Cheyenne. You have a better mind."

Henri put out a wizened smile. "I'm more stable. However, Cheyenne will one day pass me in ultimate power, if she can find her center." He didn't directly state she hadn't already for Nick's benefit. But she knew that. Henri was exceptionally strong. That he thought she might surpass him one day was huge. Her throat warmed up and closed.

"Still..."

"We can argue for hours. Orrick is in there now." Roc pointed. "If we're going to be a surprise, we need to go."

Henri brought her attention back to him. "Are you ready, Cheyenne?" His eyes measured her, and for the first time, she didn't see where he thought she didn't measure up. Maybe that vision had always been hers and had never been his.

All she had to say was no. It would bring everything to a crashing halt. Everything depended on her. She might not be "the one," but she sure as hell was important to this operation. No would think less of her for stepping down. Except her. She nodded. "I'm ready." She resisted the urge to salute.

Nathan didn't. He gave Henri a smart salute from his place in the backseat, which she saw from the corner of her eye. "If she taps her shoes together and calls him 'Sir,' I'm going somewhere else."

Nick didn't laugh, nor did Henri. Henri didn't even shake his head or say, "Mon Dieu," as he sometimes did when Nathan said outlandish things.

She managed to catch her chuckle before it sounded. She didn't want any of them thinking she wasn't taking this seriously enough. "Let's do this."

Henri grasped her hand.

She looked down at their hands together. And looked back up at him. In all the time she'd known him, he'd not taken her hand like this. What was his purpose in doing this now? Did he not trust her after all?

His smile was wry. "If you do hit a spot of trouble, I might be able to jump in and help. The closer I am to you, the more effective help I'll be. I'll be staying here with Cheyenne in case something goes wrong or he pushes back."

She took a deep breath and concentrated. Pushed her weight through glass and concrete, tendrils leaping over the buildings. Seeking. Tasting. To find Sarah. Her mind put out psychic feelers until she reached Sarah's mind.

She snapped into Sarah as she noted the surroundings.

Couch, chair, table, TV. Sarah's hands were bound, and she was still seated in the chair but not gagged anymore. They must have threatened her with something to keep her from screaming for help.

"Cheyenne?"

"Yeah."

"You're close. I can feel you nearby."

Sarah could sense the strength of the psychic signal and pinpoint Cheyenne's location. Another indication of how strong she was, because most vampires couldn't do that. They would sense others but not be able to tell how close they were. Henri had said that once. "*Right outside. We're here to rescue you.*"

Sarah's giggle was tenuous. Tight. Not her usual free-roaming laugh. "*Little short for a rescuer, aren't you?*"

Cheyenne rolled her eyes at the edited *Star Wars* line. She was no Luke Skywalker, and Sarah was no Princess Leia. "*What a geek.*"

"*I heard that.*" Sarah didn't sound one bit perturbed at the inference. In fact, she had a nightgown that stated she was a geek.

"*You were meant to.*" Cheyenne sobered. The teasing had broken the moment. Eased Sarah's fears and tension, not to mention her own, which was one thing Cheyenne was supposed to do too. Another reason she'd come instead of Nick. Sarah would worry over him more than Cheyenne and wouldn't be able to tone down her tension. "*Sarah, do you think I can bolster your psyche? How much?*"

Sarah pondered the question. "*I think so. I'm not sure how much you can step me up. What do you have in mind?*"

Now came the tricky part. Revealing the plan. Sarah wasn't going to like it. It had worked once, and they'd been desperate for something that would help them out. "*Do you remember what happened with Marcus?*"

Sarah froze. Looked like a deer in the headlights. "*Oh God, yes.*" Her mind clenched around Cheyenne so tight, Cheyenne could hardly breathe. Sarah was strangling her without hands. Without meaning to. "*Don't.*" Sarah loosened her grip.

Whether Sarah meant not to ask or not to make her do it again, Cheyenne wasn't sure. Either way she didn't have a choice. This was the plan, and the only one they'd come up with to use Sarah's powers effectively against Orrick. Sarah was the only one of them with that particular power. *"Sarah, Henri suggested it. It would be a way to make him distracted. To take him down without as much of a struggle."*

"I didn't know what I was doing back then. I have no idea if I can do that again. On someone else." She shivered, and the feelings raced across Cheyenne. What had happened had scared her. *"It was an accident."* Guilt flowed freely between them on a chain tainted with the emotion on several levels.

What was she guilty for? Marcus had been a bastard to her and to Nick. *"Don't feel guilty about anything you did."* She'd made Marcus go into his past, see things that weren't there so that Nick could take him down.

"You didn't see what I did to him. What I made him relive. He'd had horrible moments as a child, culminating in an awful experience, and I took him back to all of that."

"Doesn't matter. You did what you had to do to survive. Henri thinks you can do it again. With my help." Metaphysical hands gripped in Cheyenne's and Sarah's minds. The holding of hands gave them strength to pick this plan up and use it as a battering ram. *"We can do this. I'll be with you every step of the way. I'm not going anywhere."*

"You'd better not." The metaphysical hand tightened around her own. *"I can feel Henri."* Sarah frowned. *"How is that possible?"*

"He's touching me. Holding my hand." It shouldn't have been possible for Sarah to sense the man beside her, but Sarah had often done the impossible when it came to matters of the psyche.

That's why she's 'the one.' Cheyenne hushed the voice that she didn't need interfering with anything right now. She needed all her faculties on alert for this. Couldn't afford to screw up.

"Oh." Sarah blew out a breath, and her chest moved up and down. *"Tell me when to start. I'll try to do this. I hope it works."*

She wasn't the only one. *"Nathan, Roc, and Nick are going to get into position."* Her physical self squeezed Henri's hand with her own. She didn't even look around her as she spoke. *"I'm in. She's counting down."* Doors eased shut behind her, but she didn't glance to see what they were doing. Her only focus was Sarah and what she needed to do to boost Sarah's power.

Roc's earlier words echoed through her mind. Fierce words that had brooked no argument from any of the other men. *"Orrick is mine. I will take him down. Myself."* He'd flexed his muscles.

"I bet Nick loved that."

Cheyenne hadn't meant to broadcast that memory to Sarah, but apparently she had let something slip out in her mind. Or Sarah had read

Cheyenne's mind on her own. Sarah definitely had a strong psyche. *"Yeah, he did."*

Cheyenne stared out into the apartment. Typical for a West End place. *"Where is he anyway? Orrick?"*

"He's been in the back bedroom for a while. He and the other vamp. I thought he was feeding, but he's been in there too long."

Cheyenne's head came up, and so did Sarah's, as they must have had the same thought at the same time. *"Trap?"*

"I don't know." Sarah's head cocked to the side, as if trying to see through the walls. She squinted, and Cheyenne saw it through her view of Sarah's mind. She didn't have that ability. At least, not yet. *"Don't think so, though. I'm shielding you, and you have your own shields in place. I don't think he knows you're here."*

Cheyenne felt Sarah's mind drifting. Seeking out. Who was she going out to? Orrick? Surely not yet. *"Nick."* It had to be Nick. Before she could vocalize an objection to this activity, he started in.

Nick's voice entered the fray. *"Ma petite, is that you? Thank God? How are you?"* He fired off questions without waiting for the answers.

"No time to chatter. I need to let you know something before you come up. Orrick has been in the back bedroom..."

The door to the bedroom opened. Slowly. With an eerie creaking sound that made Cheyenne jump.

"It might be a trap."

Orrick and a man whom Cheyenne didn't know exited the room. With weapons. And grinning looks.

It was a trap.

Orrick marched over to Sarah and grabbed her against him from the couch. He put his knife to Sarah's throat as he pulled her back against him like a shield. A Sarah shield that would protect him from anything.

Cheyenne cried out in panic and pain from the feeling of the knife at her own throat. There was nothing she could do to stop this. They had known the group had planned a rescue. How had she been so lax to let them know that they were coming? How had Orrick sensed her in Sarah's mind?

Orrick laughed, leveling the blade against Sarah's throat without digging in to draw blood. For that, he'd probably wait until Nick arrived. Bastard. *"Roc, you stupid piece of shit. Did you think I wouldn't be monitoring you? That I wouldn't know if one of your group of refugees contacted her?"*

Shit. He had known about Cheyenne all along. Nick had been right. She'd been a fuckup. She'd screwed them over. Maybe even killed them. At least they had prepared for this happening. Her head shook back and forth. She might have killed them.

"Did you think I wouldn't hear Nick calling out psychically in my own home? Wouldn't be waiting for him to do something like that? You, Nathan, and Nick come right on in. Better hurry, though. Or Sarah will be leaving the party early." He tightened his grip as Sarah bucked a little against him. "Stop that."

Cheyenne's heart skipped a beat. He didn't know. Not about her, or he would have mentioned her. He didn't sense her presence. Sarah probably hadn't shielded Nick as much as she was helping to shield Cheyenne, causing the problem. Of course, it wasn't that big a problem. The plan could still continue as advertised.

"Sarah, you have to start. Soon as they come in, bombard Orrick." Cheyenne tucked her hand in Sarah's and tucked her mind in around hers so Cheyenne was supporting her.

"This changes the plan...doesn't it?"

"Not that much. Start when they come in." It was a call of the situation, and Cheyenne made it. The plan could still work. They'd come in, and Sarah would do her job and distract Orrick enough for Roc to kill him.

She geared herself up to bolster Sarah as much as she could. To give her whatever power she could muster.

Good thing she was sane. Tides of erotic images rushed across her psyche. All the intimate things they'd been doing together lately zipped like some movie. Cheyenne couldn't block Sarah nor shut down that part without shutting down her entire mind.

Sarah gasped but didn't say anything. Her mind warmed as her body must when it was blushing.

The front door opened. Roc strode in as though he weren't facing an enemy but an old friend. "Hello, Orrick. It's been a while."

* * * *

Roc didn't blink as Orrick held the blade too close to Sarah's throat for his liking. He needed to get that blade out of Orrick's hand.

"Too long, Commander." Orrick's face twisted into something different than it had ever been. Hatred had eaten away at him. "Where are the rest? Don't lie to me, Roc. I sensed them. I know they're here." Orrick growled. "Why aren't they with you now? What are you up to? Don't try to pull one over on me."

"You wanted me. You got me." Roc stepped even farther into the room with his hands by his sides. Tried not to think about how this man had betrayed him. Had taken what Roc had given him and made a mockery of it. "Me and me alone. That's what you needed, right? To take me out yourself? That's why no army this time?"

"Oh, I'll take you out all right, Commander. Send you to hell. Where you belong." Orrick shook. Couldn't be from fear. Maybe it was anger?

Roc spread his arms wider. "I gave them my weapons. I'm clean. I want to fight you clean." He nodded his head to Sarah. "Now, you can let her go." Wasn't likely to happen, but Roc had to ask.

Orrick broke out in laughter. "Not likely. She's never going out of here. Except in an urn. I know you're slow, but damn. I want all traces erased of you. Once I get Henri's line off the radar, that's it. Nick and Sarah are fallout. Fodder. They know too much for me to let either of them go."

"Take what you want from me and let her go. She's nothing to you. Not like I am." Roc waited for Sarah to start her distraction or whatever she was going to do. Otherwise he was going to have to act to take Orrick down soon. He'd gambled they wouldn't find the one weapon he'd kept on him at first look. That would only last so long, though. They'd notice, and he wouldn't let this one go.

"Wait until I get that hippie girlfriend of yours. I'll slit her throat. Drink her blood from barrels while you watch, Commander. Then you'll tell me how to get what I want. Souls. Power. All of it. Before you die. Painfully."

Roc bunched his hands into fists. He must not react to threats against Cheyenne, no matter how hard it was. Must not give Orrick the satisfaction. He'd take his own satisfaction when he drained Orrick dry.

The other man tittered next to Orrick. "Shouldn't we check him for weapons more thoroughly? Even though he said he's clean."

"Why, Vegas? Not like they can hurt us with man-made items."

But they could slow them down. Which was Roc's intent.

"My liege, they can impede us. Make us bleed and weaken us." Vegas was clearly smarter than his master. "Stop us..."

Orrick waved a hand. "They can't stop shit." He moved the knife slowly across Sarah's throat. "Long as I got her. I'd love to slit her throat and watch her drain on the carpet. Pawns always were your downfall, Roc."

"Overconfidence was always yours." Whatever Sarah was going to do, she'd better do it fast. Nathan and Nick were outside. Orrick couldn't sense them yet, but if he searched, he'd be able to figure out they were still around. They'd rush the room on Roc's signal.

Orrick's hand suddenly tensed, pressing the knife into Sarah's neck with the point. "What the fuck is this? In my mind?" He bobbed and then let her go along with the knife. She almost tumbled to the floor after his hasty action. "Diona? Diona, is that you?"

Orrick had had a wife by that name as a human.

Time to move. It must be Sarah's play. "Goose!" He grabbed the long knife in the scabbard along his back and thrust it over his head as Nick and Nathan rushed the door.

Orrick clawed at his eyes as if trying to get rid of what he saw, and then straightened up. "What did you do to me, bitch?"

Sarah backed against the wall, hands in a defensive position. "What should have been done to you a long time ago. Comeuppance."

"Sarah, get out of here." Nick and Nathan had double-teamed the other vamp and were fighting him.

Roc briefly glanced at them but kept his main focus on Orrick. After so many years, Orrick was finally his.

Sarah didn't answer, nor did she move to escape. "You try me again. I won't be as easy to take as I was last time with two of you on me at once and one of you taking me from behind like a coward. I can promise you that." She looked ready to do martial arts, and even though she was small, Nick had said she was good.

"He wants me. Not you." Roc walked in front of her, knife drawn. Ready. He needed to get this over with. It wasn't Sarah's fight. She'd done what she needed to do for him. Now it was his turn. "I'm who he's bucking for." Roc would savor this. Orrick had betrayed him. Would threaten Cheyenne. For those things, he had to be eliminated. Whatever Orrick had been to him was over.

Orrick pulled a knife of his own. He leered at Roc.

They were definitely old-school men. Knife fighting was more personal. Intimate. Not to mention, they hadn't had guns back in the days...

Orrick drew a gun in his other hand. So much for old-fashioned. "I'm going to shoot you, Commander. All of you..." He suddenly fell to the ground. "My eyes. My eyes. Diona, what are you doing to me? I didn't mean to!"

Roc didn't hesitate. He fell on Orrick with vengeance while the man was lost in his own memories. Wrapped his jaws around Orrick's neck and held on like a pit bull. Wouldn't allow himself to be dislodged.

So this was what they meant about "the one." Only Sarah had the power to gather memories and bring them forth like this.

Orrick had dropped the gun when he fell, but still had a knife. He stabbed randomly at Roc, trying to dislodge him. The hen pecks hardly fazed him as he focused on his work to drain Orrick dry.

Roc wouldn't be swayed. Not this time. No matter how many wounds he had, he kept his mouth on Orrick.

Orrick screamed as he turned to ash and disintegrated right before their eyes. Ash brushed across Roc's pants.

Roc sat down and put his head in his hands. Blood poured from several knife wounds, including a few deep ones.

It was over.

He blew out a breath. He was free of Orrick. He held his head, felt things slipping away. At least he'd won.

The blackness took him.

* * * *

Roc turned over in a bed, taking the covers with him. Felt too good to open his eyes yet. Instead he squeezed his lids tighter together.

A body went with him too, in addition to the covers.

He cuddled the body closer against him. Touched it to make sure it was real. Inhaled. Gardenias? Or mimosa? Whatever it was, the identity was recognizable by scent. By touch. The feel of the lithe, supple legs against his own.

Cheyenne.

Exactly who he had wanted to be there with him when he'd woken up. He contorted to get closer to her. As if he could get as close as he wanted to. Not likely to happen, but he had to try.

The body rolled more against him, pushing her legs in between his. She wore a shirt. No pants. Her legs were warm against his own.

He opened his eyes to gaze at her. See what she was doing against him. Would it be a contented smile on her face? A satisfied look? What expression would she flash to him today?

She lifted up to look down at him, eyes wide and glowing. Her lips curved into that smile that reminded him of a cat in a sunbeam.

Contented.

He could get used to looking at her every evening when he woke up. Get used to feeling her in bed spooning against him as he drifted off to sleep every morning. Get used to waking up with her. Especially after a hard fight like yesterday's.

How had he gotten here anyway? Assuming he knew where *here* was. "Are we at your place?"

"Yeah."

"How'd you get me back here?" He didn't remember anything beyond Orrick turning to ash. Beyond Orrick stabbing him.

She reached out to stroke his jaw with slinking fingers. His skin tingled wherever she touched. "Nick and Nathan carried you. Nathan said if you want to pass out like a girl, you need to get shorter."

He snorted. "I don't remember any of it. Nothing past Orrick dying." It had been horrendous as usual. The killing of a vampire wasn't pleasant or easy. But it had to be done. It had been him or Orrick. A fight to the death. Orrick wouldn't have hesitated at doing Roc in if the situation had been reversed.

"You were pretty out of it. You'd been stabbed forty-two times." Her brow wrinkled into worry lines. "You bled out. We had to force-feed you blood." She blew out a breath. "We ran out of bags of blood, you took so many."

It had been as bad as he'd suspected. The knife had parted him so many times he'd lost count. The healing sleep had taken him like it had so many

years ago when Daly had put him under. Luckily he hadn't slept for another thousand years this time. "What did you do then?"

She held up her head to display her throat. "I know you feed on souls. That process didn't seem to be kicking in for you. We weren't sure it would heal you like blood. You weren't waking up or rousing. We didn't know what else to do."

He leaned up to give her a gentle kiss. "You did great." Without them, how long would he have slept? He might have gone to ground for another thousand years. Obviously something hadn't been working about his soul feeding. Though he took a taste, and his feeding was working well now. He'd probably been too far gone at first. His feeding might have kicked in after the bags of blood, but he appreciated her efforts for him.

She lay back down with her head on his chest. "Nathan did some looking around, you know. On the vampire lore. While we were waiting to see...if you made it. A lot of things were deleted by Orrick in the records. He admitted that to Sarah. One thing Nathan noticed, lines that branched out from those we suspect came from you are much more stable than ones that we know came from Orrick." She stroked her hand through his hair. "That also explains why more stable and powerful vampires are coming up through the lines these days than there used to be. More vampires with extra talents are being seen. Because of you."

He didn't look down at her. "Why would that explain it?" He might have been the first, but that didn't make him the best.

"Because you were the first." She stroked along his jawline with a finger that trembled slightly.

"That's got nothing to do with it." He didn't see why being the first would have anything to do with any of that. After all, the first of anything was more practice than real.

She looked back up at him as if surprised by his reaction. "Henri had another theory about the lines of vampires becoming more stable and powerful."

"Oh?" He couldn't wait to hear this. Henri was from a powerful line. He'd seen Henri's maker all over Henri from the start. An Egyptian. She'd been easy to make and saner than Roc had been at the time.

"Sarah's lifetime." Cheyenne's face sobered. "The start of her bloodline is what caused vampiredom to pick up more stability. That she was 'the one' is why he thinks such a thing is possible."

"Could be." He kept his voice neutral. He didn't want to have a discussion with her about Sarah. Sarah was not his. Cheyenne was.

"Are you going to ask me about her?"

"No." He had no need to know about Sarah right now. The only one he cared about was Cheyenne.

She didn't say anything about that answer, but it seemed to satisfy her on some level. She snuggled her head against him for a few seconds. "Sarah's fine. She wasn't hurt at all."

That he'd known. He'd made sure they were all fine, even as he'd been falling on the ground.

He lay there listening to her breathe. Her body felt so good up against his. He could lie like this for hours. He liked the way her chest expanded against him. Liked the brush of her breasts as they rose and fell.

"So what now?" She didn't look at him. Didn't meet his gaze with her own. "What do you do now?"

"I don't know." From the time he'd awakened, he'd needed to find "the one" and Orrick. Needed to take care of that before he moved onto the next chapter in his life. What would that next step be?

"Oh."

He hadn't included her in his answer. That had been accidental. He still wasn't all the way back yet. Not a good way to reassure her, though. "Wherever you are. That's all I know about where I'll be."

She looked relieved as her body melted around him. "HMMMM." Her hands continued to stroke him. "Henri knows these vampires, well, actually I do too. Anna Grace and Theo. Anna Grace is trying to organize the vampires into a group that works cohesively. A council of sorts. So that if another Titius or Orrick come around, there is more of a force to deal with them."

It was a good idea. If they were ever found out by humans, that would be the best way to keep themselves out of labs. "I'm sure that's not an easy thing to do. Orrick made vampires to wage war way back then. I can't imagine they get along too well, nor the lines that came from them." Anna Grace must have serious nerve to embark upon that course.

"It's gone okay. Could be better, though." Her hand briefly brushed over his nipple. His breath caught as she twisted her fingers in a circle around the flat part of him. "I bet you could help."

"How?" His body settled down as she stopped playing and sat there with her hand beside his nipple.

"You're the first." She pointed it out as if it were obvious, sounding a bit put out. "Everyone would listen—"

He cut her off. No sense letting that go on. "I don't want to walk around being 'the first vampire,' as if that buys me something. You know what I mean? The people in this house know. That's all that have to know." It wasn't his right to reign. Something that Orrick had never understood. That was why Orrick had had to die. Roc would never repeat the ideals that Orrick had had.

Another pass over his nipple, this time her fingers stayed there. They also pinched the raised part. "I understand your not wanting to be king."

"It's not that. I don't want anyone to feel like they owe me their lives or their wealth simply because I was made first. It doesn't matter." Not to mention

those who might try to take him out simply because he'd been the first. The people in this house were the only people who need know about his status.

A knock sounded on the door.

"Come in." Roc sat up a little bit but kept Cheyenne right beside him so that their bodies overlapped.

"Yeah, come on in." She sounded amused. Not offended.

It had been Cheyenne's room. He should have let her answer. Guess it would be their room now. If they stayed with these people.

"Checking on both of my patients." Sarah stepped cautiously into the room as if she wasn't sure what to expect. "I thought I sensed Roc was awake. How are you both feeling? Better?"

Cheyenne? A patient? He looked over at her. She didn't meet his eyes. Only one thing would make her a patient as well as him. His bloodlust had pushed her too far. "I almost took too much blood, didn't I?"

Cheyenne's voice was hoarse. She waved a hand. "I'm fine. There's nothing to worry about. He's the one you should be concerned with."

Sarah's worried gaze softened.

He had taken too much from her. He hadn't fed on blood in ages. His bloodlust, even unconscious, must have gone through the roof. Dammit. He'd almost hurt the most important person to him. "You're sure you're okay?"

"Yeah." She probably wouldn't admit it if she weren't okay. She didn't seem unsteady or dizzy.

"You're both sitting up and talking to me. Coherently. That's a big improvement over earlier. You both need feeds sometime soon. Huge ones. We won't leave either of you in here forever."

The implication wasn't clear, but Roc caught on. They wouldn't be left to screw each other much longer before they were made to take some blood.

"Lots of rest. Both of you." Sarah looked over to Roc with a stern expression. "And, Roc?"

"Yeah?" What did she want besides checking on them? He didn't like the look on her face. Would she still challenge their right to be together? Surely he'd proved his intentions toward Cheyenne.

"I'm 'the one,' so I guess you know what that means." She looked somber. Her voice sounded dramatic. Eyes looked solemn. He'd never seen the younger woman so serious. What hell was she doing?

She winked at him and motioned to Cheyenne.

"Ah yes." Where was she going with this? She seemed to have some sort of plan about what was between them.

"We have to take each other as mates." Another wink from Sarah and a huff from Cheyenne as though she was exasperated. "Have sex."

He nodded, going along with Sarah's gist. "We must cleave together like white on rice. Like grain on bread."

"Yes. Despite our attractions and bonds to others, we must be together at all costs." Sarah nodded as Cheyenne looked back and forth between them. "We must jump each other's bones. Forget all the years we've spent with someone else and make each other say, 'Oh baby. Oh baby,' since I'm 'the one' and only meant to be with you."

Cheyenne thumped his chest. "Roc." She glared over at the door. "Sarah. Cut that out. Both of you."

"We're fated to be together. We can't fight it. Despite every other evidence to the contrary, we must find a way to be together. Isn't that what you said? Thought?" Sarah shook her head. "Sounds ludicrous, doesn't it?"

"When you say it like that, it does." Cheyenne spoke so quietly, he barely heard her. "I guess."

"Her magnetic pull will always draw me to her and away from you. Sorry, but even after dreaming of you for umpteen years, not her, I must be with this woman I barely know." He wanted this over and done with. Wanted Cheyenne satisfied that he was staying with her; not out of what he could take from her, but for the simple act of being with her.

Cheyenne thumped him again. "Stop that."

Sarah broke out in giggles. "All I did was help Roc to defeat Orrick. That's all I did as 'the one.' Probably all my ancestor saw that happened." She laughed more. "You know psychics. They have to speak in code and have a flair for the dramatic."

"You did do a great job." He nodded to Sarah. "Your mind is strong." He'd been amazed so far at what she could do. "I couldn't have held him off as easily without your playing in his mind." She'd made things less messy. He could have defeated Orrick in time. It would have been difficult and cost him too much, not to mention what it would have cost the others. She'd made things run much smoother. Even more than he'd anticipated.

Sarah blushed. "I didn't do anything." One foot toed behind her as she scuffed the floor and almost fell. She wrapped her hands together in front of her as she rebalanced herself. "Well, I better leave you two alone. Get back to Nick." Another red stripe moved across her cheeks. "We've been celebrating *my* safe return. I had to escape to come check on you. I'll be back to bring you blood. Soon."

Roc bet they'd been celebrating. It was about time to do some celebrating of his own. With his mate.

Sarah paused as she was about to shut the door. "We'd love it if you'd stay with us. For good."

He cuddled Cheyenne closer without answering as Sarah eased the door closed behind her. He answered the question that Cheyenne had been asking

before Sarah came in. It was an easy answer for him to make. "I think I want to spend time with you. And your family. That's what I want to be my future."

Cheyenne turned her head to face her lover. "Really? You want to stay with us?" She hadn't known what he would want to do when this was over. After all, he was the first vampire, and he'd been asleep for a thousand years. Maybe he would have wanted to see what was out there in the world. Beyond her.

"Yeah. You still need training. Henri is good at that. Sarah needs training too." He looked down at her and brushed a hand through her wayward hair. "You two need to be close. For now." Probably for always, but he'd hopefully learn to deal with the complexities of their friendship over time.

She almost clapped her hands together. He understood. Her connection to Sarah was strong. What would she do if she weren't close by to her sister? Or at least, if she weren't going to see her soon? "Oh that's wonderful."

"I'll think about this Anna Grace thing, but I don't want to be a participant simply because I came first." His mouth set in a resolute line. He was serious about not becoming the first in everyone's minds. "I want to participate because I can help. There have to be things I can do to help put this council in action."

Wait a minute, he'd called them "her family." She was about to correct him, but it hit her. They were her family. The closest thing she'd ever have to one. It had never occurred to her before. She did have a family. Nathan and Henri. Nick and Sarah. Rojo and Crimson. Bastian and Copper. Theo and Anna Grace. Even ones she'd not met before but had talked to on the phone like Amaretto and Leif. They were all her family in varying degrees.

A grin popped up on his face as he moved closer. Something else popped up too, against her leg. "You're still weak from blood loss, and you want that? You have enough blood to do that?" All she could think about was going to sleep.

Until he slowly rubbed against her, and other matters became stronger in her mind than resting.

"As all the blood went from my head down to there, and now my poor brain cells are dying, apparently yes to your question." He laughed and flipped her over onto her stomach. "Kidding, of course. Yes, I'm thinking about that. And you. Celebrating this victory with you. In you."

He wanted the power surge to restore himself. Doesn't have a thing to do with wanting you. She shook that thought away. Roc had proven himself time and time again. She wasn't going to question him anymore. Or herself.

"I don't want a power surge. I'd turn it off if I could. I'm fine and don't need that. I do need to feel you against me. Feel myself inside of you. Make you mine for an eternity and a day. Even that won't be long enough."

Had he heard her thoughts? Was she slipping that much again? She hadn't been aware of broadcasting herself. The darkness was back inside of her head. She'd felt its encroachment all morning as she'd drifted in and out of slumber. She'd managed to keep it at bay so far. Didn't know how long that would last before she started speaking gibberish. If she'd broadcast those thoughts, it would probably be happening soon.

"I didn't hear your thoughts. I know you and what you're thinking." He stroked along her spine. His fingers pressed on her vertebrae. "Like right now you're thinking you want me to dip you in chocolate and eat you up..."

She turned around to lightly smack his chest like she had before with Sarah. God, she loved playing with him. Teasing him. There would always be humor in their dealings. "Stop that." Did he know her that well? Only time would tell if he did have her so ingrained that he knew what she was thinking. Chocolate or no chocolate.

He leaned down to plant a blistering kiss on her lips. "Okay." His tongue toyed and played with hers. Gently. Then wilder. He encircled her tongue, trapping hers under his before he broke away from her mouth. "What do you do to me, woman? No one has ever done this to me before." His voice had turned rough. Hoarse. His hands tightened on her. His cock had gotten noticeably stiffer.

No one had ever made her feel what she felt with him either. She kissed him back for all she was worth. Needed to feel his mouth on hers. To remind her of what she hadn't lost. For once, she'd won.

He leaped to his feet and removed her clothes and his in short actions that seemed jerky. Tense. Clumsy. As though he couldn't control himself as well as usual. Was he that eager to be inside her?

She was as anxious for him as he was for her. The knowledge that she'd affected him this much was endearing. Desirable.

Back on the bed, he flopped down and pulled her back against him again. Rubbed his chest up against her front. His crisp chest hair rubbed against her nipples. Teased them to fine points with the roughness. They became so sensitive with all his rubbing that she gasped from the feelings coursing through her.

His cock, hard and ready, poked her thigh. He pulled his mouth away from hers. "Have you ever...done it up the ass?"

She shivered, hair standing up as she thought about what he might do to her. "I have. It's been a while, though." As the rest of her sex life before Roc had been a while ago, so was this. It had hurt that first time. Also felt good in ways she couldn't explain but hadn't been explored again.

His eyes slid almost shut. He reached over to the nightstand and pulled out a scarf. One that he'd used before to tie her up to her headboard. Her heart pounded. Was he going to do that again? She loved the sensation of being

helpless against him. "Turn over." His gravelly voice made her stomach do jumping jacks.

She flipped onto her stomach. Felt the first juices trickle down from her pussy. "Same safe word?"

"Yeah." He set about tying her up while she rested on her stomach. He left a lot of slack in the rope so she could prop up on her knees. "I'm going to tie you this way. Then take you anally. It may have been a while since you've done that. However, you've never done it with me." He waited.

For objections? Negatives? She gave him none.

From the moment of their meeting in person, she'd trusted him. They'd been through so much in dreams, they'd gotten to know each other. However, doing this with someone was a big step. A step that required trust. She'd done him in the park because she'd wanted him. She never would have let him tie her up at that point. That had been reserved for when they'd gotten to know each other better in person. She'd trusted him enough last time to do that with him. Now she was ready for this step. To let him do this required an enormous amount of trust. He could hurt her if he weren't careful.

But he wouldn't.

She shivered. Would it hurt? He was so big. There had been delicious sensations along with the pain. The only reason she'd consider this position again. Maybe with him, it would all be delicious?

He smacked her ass, warming it a little, probably making it pink, but not moving her sensations into pain. "Where's the lube?"

"Top drawer." Good thing she had some. Good thing Nathan hadn't known, or he would have stolen it.

She wiggled her ass around, showing him her moves as best she could while tied up on her stomach. It felt weird to be naked, hands tied and her butt in the air. While she waited for him to take her anally.

"Ohhh." He opened the drawer. She heard it bang shut, then open again. "Stop that. You're too tempting when you wiggle like that." He didn't sound angry. "You've got some toys to try out next time."

Just a few. Maybe with Roc in her life, she'd get more. "I like being tempting. For you. And only for you."

The drawer slammed shut again, and Roc came up against her, his breathing shallow and erratic. Another stinging smack crossed over to her behind. "Woman."

She didn't answer. Instead she retreated to someplace deep inside herself. God, how she loved this. The place inside was peaceful. Her body hummed with everything going on around her. She tugged on her bindings. Just tight enough.

He worked her up into a position where she rested on her knees. Her ass was even more in the air than it had been before. She tensed her butt cheeks.

He stroked them with his hands. "Relax."

Easy for him to say, but she tried to do what he asked. "Yes, Roc." Kept herself less tense down there as she waited for his next move.

He worked lube down in her back hole by holding it open and pouring. One lone finger went down to probe her depths. It wiggled around, making her quake with her desires. Making her mouth dry.

He moved farther up to thrust against her, pressing her down a bit to make the angle right. His cock poked one cheek. Then the other.

She drifted into a space where she was content and free. This wasn't going to hurt like last time. This time, she had lube. And Roc. He would make sure it didn't hurt. He always did. He looked out for her.

His hands held her ass as he separated her cheeks. Probed her with the tip of his cock. He slipped in one centimeter. Then another.

Slowly he widened her with his hands and thrust down with his hard cock. Stretching her in ways she'd never been stretched before. Taking her in a way that was intimate and foreign at the same time. Even though she'd been taken this way once, it hadn't felt like this. Hadn't gone like this.

He finally dipped down to seat himself fluidly within her depths. "Oh God." His voice sounded strained. Like she felt.

Her orgasm zipped across her like a running back. Her body gripped in the hand of a flying climax.

Power poured from her into him. She felt it and saw it happen this time. Her psyche rained down on him and pricked him like a thousand little tongues licking him.

Her mind was sucked clear of the darkness inside of her. She felt the darkness poof from her brain.

She barely registered when his orgasm started to take him, but as she realized it, she slammed back against him to catch it all. Wanted every bit of him that he might give to her. No matter what it was.

Coated in sweat. Breathing erratic. Heart pounding. She couldn't tell who was whom, their bodies were so close.

Panting, he released her from her bonds. Kissed the wrists that had been held by the scarf. He left her, and she heard water running. Couldn't get up to check to see what he was doing. Soon he came back and lay down beside her, smelling of soap and cleanness.

She drifted off to sleep in his arms, held tight against his heart while her mind surrounded his soul.

He might be the first for everyone else. But for her, he was the end of the line.

THE END

Other Loose Id(R) Titles by Mechele Armstrong

Dinah's Dark Desire
Dinah's Christmas Desire
I Heart That City: Body Shots
Solstice Spell
The Collector 1: Magical Chances
Veterans: Nothing to Lose

The BLOOD LINES Series

Currents
Blood Kiss
Conduit
Crimson's Rose
Night's Journey
Bitter Love

The SETTLER'S MINE Series

The Rivals
The Lovers
The Woman
The Wolf

The SIX CURSES Series

Six Curses of Christmas
The Sixth Curse of Spring
The Sixth Cursed Halloween

Mechele Armstrong

Have you ever wondered, "What if crayons have a kingdom?" Mechele Armstrong did at age five. Now, turning the imagination of a wide-eyed child into intense spellbinding stories for adults, she is winning over new fans every day.

Writing stories and poetry as a hobby, she graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in Religious Studies and Social Welfare. Although there were challenges with work and family, the need to write and be published, to share her passion for books was always there.

During a rainy weekend at the beach reading several romance novels she fell in love, not with the hero, but with the genre again. So began a two-year adventure of doing what she loved most, creating worlds with strong heroines and enchanting heroes that will keep you turning pages until the end.

Using the Internet and the local Romance Writer's Association, she learned and refined her craft. Living in Virginia with a husband, kids, dog, and fish, she finds time to share her vivid imagination and ability to tell stories of adventure, love, lust, and everything in between.

Visit Mechele on the Web at <http://www.mechelearnstrong.com>, or email her at mechele@mechelearnstrong.com.