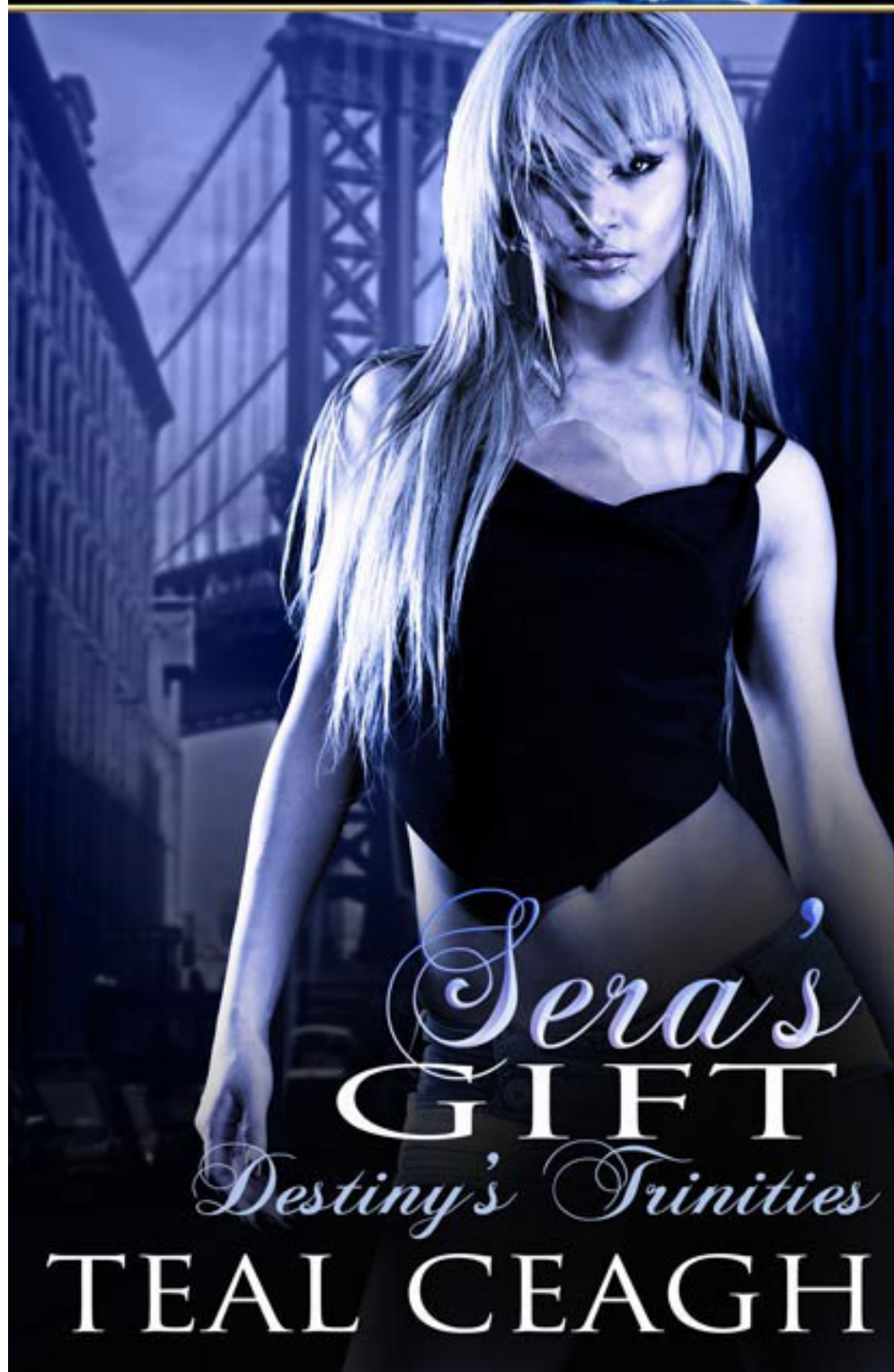


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Sera's Gift

Teal Ceagh

Book 3 in the Destiny's Trinities series.

Sera arrives in New York to help her brother Lindál, but a vampeen attack brings her face-to-face with two men and changes her life forever.

Diego Savage lives up to his name. Cynical, rebellious and a womanizer, he doesn't believe in the trinities. With his scarred heart and terrible past it would take a miracle for him to change—or someone like Sera, with her special gift.

Blake Harvey, dedicated NYC police lieutenant, takes one look at the tall, supple woman with the crystal blue eyes and glowing skin and knows his life is about to change in ways he can't even define, but his body is already responding with a power that is hard to deny.

The bonding has begun...

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Sera's Gift

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SERA'S GIFT

Teal Ceagh

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Chapter One

Beth crept onto the roof just as dawn was breaking. In two years, she had grown far better at sneaking around. Despite her skill, she found she was staring at the sharp end of a crossbow as she emerged onto the open end of the roof and behind it, a pair of cool blue eyes. She let go of her knife and held up her hand. "It's just me," she said.

Lindál put down the crossbow. "Thought so," he said sleepily and lay back down. He patted the quilt he had spread out on the tarred roof. "Join me." He was wearing sweatpants so old they were nearly transparent with wear and washing, and made him look endearingly human...especially as she could see a hint of his tight ass.

"What are you doing up here?" she asked.

"I couldn't sleep. I needed fresh air."

"In New York? There's no such thing, especially in August." She lay next to him on the quilt and put her knife down beside her. She plucked her nightgown away from her sweaty skin.

"You couldn't sleep either," Lindál guessed. He glanced at her, his blue eyes narrowing. "The full assembly today. You feel you have to account for yourself, don't you?"

The Seaveth Prophecies had predicted the coming of the Grimoré and they had indeed arrived. She and the two trinities that had formed, along with the vampires and elves, had spent nearly two years now fighting Grimoré incursions into the human population, while trying to keep humans ignorant of the Grimoré, vampires, elves and the demon world the Grimoré regularly recruited to do their dirty work.

Beth had insisted that a third trinity would form and that the formation of three trinities would spell the doom of the Grimoré. But so far, the final trinity had shown no sign of appearing. It had been over a year since the formation of the second trinity and

everyone's faith in her belief in the power of the three trinities was beginning to wane as they took heavy losses and the power of the Grimoré steadily ground them down.

Lindál was watching her, measuring her expressions as she thought it through. "You owe no explanation, Seaveth," he said quietly, using her formal name to remind her of her rank. Queen of the trinities and therefore commander of the armies of vampires and elves. "The prophecies were made eons ago. No one, not even you, can build a timetable around them."

She slid her hand into his blond locks, tucking them back behind his ears and kissed him. "What would I do without you, Lindál?"

His blue eyes grew stormy and she caught her breath, for she knew that look from long experience. Her clit tingled.

"Without me," Lindál murmured, his long fingers brushing over the thin straps of her nightgown, sliding them off her shoulders, "I imagine you'd still be serving beer in McGinty's, with that vampire pining uselessly after you and never having the courage to touch you."

He flipped her on her back and straddled her and she caught her breath. "Oooh, you know Zack would have a piece of you if he heard you say that."

Lindál gave a wicked smile. "But he's not here and I am." He reached over her head and picked up her knife and spun it on his palm like the hands on a clock face. It was an absentminded movement of a man much used to handling a knife.

"You didn't have the guts to touch me either, Lindál," she reminded him and sucked in a breath as he used the knife blade to shred her gown right down the center and spread it apart. He jabbed the knife into the tarmac by her head.

"But now I do," he said and sucked the tip of her breast into his hot mouth. She grabbed at his head as silvery sparks of explosive pleasure ripped through her, straight to her already throbbing clitoris. Her pussy rippled, squeezing cream and preparing for him. What he was doing to her breast was such a wonderful sensation she would never tire of it. Her breath shortened.

She wound her leg over Lindál's back, her heel pressing into his ass. It opened her up to him and she could feel the slickness between her legs, bathed by the air.

Lindál's lips moved to her other breast and she moaned, her hips lifting. "Fuck me," she begged. "Make me come. You know how hot what you're doing makes me."

"I know," he agreed, his lips brushing against her breast. She could hear the laughter in his voice and the arousal. One of Lindál's personal aphrodisiacs was the sight of her squirming with need.

He kept his attention on her breasts, his hands toying with them when his mouth was not. She really did begin to writhe on the quilt beneath him, her hips bucking under his thighs. She panted and moaned and tugged at his hips, trying to make him fuck her.

Finally, when she thought she could not stand it another second, Lindál stood and quickly stripped his sweats off. She lay panting on the quilt, her body gleaming with a fine sheen of perspiration, her heart racing, watching. He was as glorious as the day she had met him. His skin had the unearthly elven glow, still undimmed despite his exposure to the earth sun and elements, that so often stopped people in their tracks and made them remark about "good health". His muscles were even more well formed, now, after two years of hard work and better training. And his cock was long and hard and ready for her.

"My Beth," he murmured, before spreading her legs, picking up her hips and ramming himself into her with a single thrust that made the tendons on the side of his neck stand out. She gave a groan of deep satisfaction. Good...oh, that was so good.

Lindál wrapped her legs around his waist and bent over her, one hand under her hips and began the slow, steady stroking she loved best. It wouldn't last long. She could already feel her body gathering around his cock in a trembling pillar. Her breathing would stop if she didn't come very soon. Lindál had spared her nothing.

Over his shoulder, she saw movement and her eyes widened. Alarmed, she tried to reach for the knife Lindál had put within her reach but Lindál was quicker. He snatched for the crossbow.

But Zack was quicker, still. His bare foot came down on the crossbow, keeping it pinned to the tarmac. "There's a reason your instincts didn't warn you, Lindál," he said softly. His hand came down on Lindál's shoulder. "I thought you two were sleeping, until I found you weren't."

Lindál smiled. "Too hot." He nuzzled Beth's breast and thrust into her again. She caught her breath and clutched at his shoulders desperately. Even so, she found she was watching Zack. He was studying them, the crotch of his jeans swelling and that made it even more thrilling.

Quickly, Zack stripped off his clothes and strode over to stand behind Lindál, watching his cock thrust into Beth. He caught Beth's eye. "You've no idea how hot that looks from here, Beth. I could come just thinking about it." His voice was thick with lust and his cock was red and flared purple at the head.

She moaned, her climax inching closer.

Zack bent and reached between her legs. She felt his hand stroke against her and Lindál, gathering moisture. Lubricant. God knew there was enough of it.

Zack coated his own cock with her lubricant and she caught her breath, knowing what he intended. Her pussy clenched, making Lindál groan in reaction. Zack positioned himself behind Lindál and pushed his cock up against Lindál's anus. He grabbed a handful of Lindál's hair and slid his cock into the elf's ass, as Lindál pushed back, his eyes closing.

"What's good for the gander..." Zack breathed and began to rock in and out of Lindál's ass, in countertime with Lindál's thrusts into Beth's pussy.

The pure sensuality in their faces was always Beth's undoing and now, with her climax so close, she knew she wasn't going to last long enough. So she did something she didn't do very often, she tapped into their emotions. Lindál had taught her how to

do it but the three-way feedback had proved to be too overwhelming for all of them at once and they used it rarely. Now she sank into the black velvet landscape of emotional profiles in her vicinity and found the two men she loved most in the world and encompassed them. Raw lust, love, trust and eroticism showered her, immersed her, lifted her up and up and up...

Beth screamed, the back of her throat burning with the power of her climax. She could feel herself clench hard like a vise around Lindál, as he came in powerful shooting jerks. Zack choked off his own cry as he exploded into a swift, hard orgasm of his own, triggered by their shared emotional feedback.

Weakened, all three of them lay on the quilt to recover. Lindál curled himself around Beth and Zack fell on the other side of him, on his back, panting.

"I'm glad you don't do that every time, Beth," Zack said. "I feel like my balls are going to explode."

"Crude, vampire. Crude." Lindál shoved his elbow back.

"I feel like my cheekbones are coming out through my face," Beth confessed. "And the back of my throat got ripped out."

"It certainly sounded like it was being ripped out," Zack chuckled.

Thunder rumbled overhead and with no more warning, it began to rain in heavy, stinging drops. Zack groaned. "Oh fuck, I really don't want to *move*!"

Beth curled herself up tighter. "Me, neither."

"It's rain!" Lindál said, rolling onto his back and stretching out his arms. "Stay here. Enjoy it."

"You've got to be fucking kidding me!" Zack said, sitting up and looking at Lindál with mock disbelief. Beth sat up too, the rain forcing her to make a move. She looked at Zack.

"Can you believe him?"

She grinned. Zack took any opportunity to give Lindál shit about his affinity for water, or any of his more elven traits. "Can I take your shirt?" she asked him.

"You're not going to help me out here?" Zack asked.

"You're a big boy. Fight your own fights." She slipped on the shirt he had been wearing over the top of the remnants of the ruined nightgown and picked up her knife. "I've got a full assembly to prepare for and cover stories to concoct for the New York Police Department, who are growing less gullible with each passing week."

* * * * *

"Lieutenant!"

Blake jumped and realized he'd fallen asleep in his chair, the same moment he realized it was morning already. He glanced around at his office door. Anna Maria had her head around the door, looking at him. "You clocking off?" he said, glancing at his watch. Six a.m. Her night shift was over.

"You okay, boss?" she asked.

"Long night," he said, trying to make it sound like he did this all the time. He stood up, stretching carefully, feeling the bones in his neck.

"Kay. Night, boss." She let the door shut itself.

He looked out the window. Daylight was trying to break through thunderclouds outside his windows. A soggy, fetid, miserable August day that matched his mood. He glanced at the three in-trays on his desk, all of them overloaded. They stood next to his computer, which was another two hundred and sixty gigabytes of hell screaming at him for attention.

What was happening in his city? Twelve years in the department and he no longer thought he understood New York and its denizens. He'd spent all night doing basic regression analysis. And the numbers frightened him. If things went on this way, New York would turn into an uncivilized all-out crime zone in about six weeks. The police department was slowly losing ground. It just didn't have the numbers to cope. Rape

and murder were the top two favorites, with decapitations being *numero uno* on the hit parade. But number three on the *New York Times* Best Seller List right now was Missing Persons. People were vanishing without trace in numbers higher than six hundred percent more than any time in the last three centuries...and that included two world wars, famines and plagues.

And the police couldn't do a damn thing about it, except record particulars and wait. They were overtaxed by the murders and rapes already. A missing person was a lesser concern.

Blake pushed his hand through his hair. God, what a fucking nightmare.

The other lieutenants in the other departments across the boroughs made light of it. They were mostly older and had seen tough times before and while they all heard the same unsettling rumors about the cults, the gangs, the animalistic behavior, they were in denial. They didn't want to look at the big picture.

The figures Blake had projected last night didn't lie, though. Something was going on. But right now he couldn't see what it was. Despite all the information flowing into his desk, it eluded him. Sometimes, like now when his energy was low, it felt like there was someone else out there manipulating the information that reached him, so that he *couldn't* see the truth. Not all of it, anyway.

He bumped his forehead against the window and felt the chill spread across his flesh. It reminded him of how hot and tired he was. He'd been in these clothes for over twenty-four hours. He needed a break. So did his mind. He was slipping into paranoid delusions.

He picked up his jacket and logged off the computer. A few hours sleep, a shower and food, then he'd head back here. Things would look different, then. Maybe.

He clocked out and walked home to his apartment, feeling at odds with the day. Manhattan was just firing up for a busy day of commerce, while he was going home to sleep. He glanced up at the skyscrapers as he passed them. It all looked so innocent and normal.

Who'd've thought there was such a time bomb ticking away in her guts?

* * * * *

When Mia came bustling into the boardroom, Alexander felt his heart jump. Even after a year, she still managed to make him pause to catch his breath when she arrived after a small absence. She was here in his life. And she was never going away again.

He kept reminding himself to be thankful to whatever entity or force designed the trinities and chose him to be part of them. Him, Mia and Wyatt. How had he got so lucky? He was careful never to question that good fortune, but to grasp it with both hands and to work his ass off in service of the trinities and Seaveth, in gratitude.

Mia came up to him with the small smile she kept for him and Wyatt alone. "You're brooding," she said.

"Guilty."

"I'll shake you about it later," she said. "Right now, we need to head to the keep for the assembly. The car is waiting." She looked at the huge watch on her wrist. "And Wyatt still hasn't shown up. Did he call you at all?"

"No call. No text. But he knows he has to be here. He'll show, Mia. In a year, has he never not shown up for an assembly?"

"There's always a first time," she said darkly, thumbing through her Palm Pilot. She had become the staffing agency's chief executive officer and completely indispensable, running both the private and public personas of the agency like clockwork and liaising with the Earthwing clan's seniors and Seaveth's portfolio with seamless efficiency.

Wyatt had returned to hunting but even there, Mia had left her mark, organizing and commercializing his ventures and bringing recruits to his doorstep. Now Wyatt's hunting was an organized trade, with tools, equipment, partners and income. Wyatt had been stunned that demon hunting could raise revenue in a human world but Mia had shown him how to bring in profit for himself and make it attractive to other demon

hunter and vampire investors and just like that, Wyatt had found himself an entrepreneur.

Mia glanced at her watch again. "Time to go. I've texted Wyatt and told him to go straight to the keep." She chewed her lip. "I hope he's okay."

Alexander took her face in his hands. "He'll be fine," he said softly. "Stop it, Mia." He kissed her to stop her fretting and slipped his tongue against her lips. He drew back when he tasted blood. "You just fed?"

She blushed. "Sorry, yes. I should have warned you." This was one of the changes he'd had the hardest time accepting. As a result of the bonding, from time to time, Mia had to feed on blood, like a vampire. She ate normal food and excreted it like a human but every few months or so, like a vampire, she hungered for blood. Alexander had been devastated by the knowledge. Instead, Zachariah and the other vampires had taught Mia how to ingest the artificial blood developed by the clan.

At least she had no incisors. He was spared that.

Alexander hugged her, instead, and let her go. "We were running late, I believe?" he reminded her.

"Damn, yes." She straightened her business skirt back into place and threw him a dirty look. "I wish you would stop kissing me at work. You know I hate that."

"While I can make you look like a cat on catnip, I'll keep kissing you whenever you're within reach," Alexander growled softly as they hurried through the office to the elevator bank. The armored stretch limousine would be waiting for them in the lower basement. Max, the driver and one of the Earthwing clan, would have the engine running and his bolo tucked between the seat and the door, watching the street ramp. "Zack and Diego aren't coming with us?" Alexander asked as they passed the other two partner offices without pausing.

Mia shook her head. "Zack is...he wanted to be with Seaveth today. Diego just didn't show up this morning." She frowned. Diego's dedication to playing the role of a normal human was flaky, at best, despite the combined pressure Alexander and Zack

tried to exert upon him. Diego had spent centuries unfettered. He was taking a longer time adjusting to Seaveth's demands for assimilation than most. But they both knew he would be at the full assembly. Even he would not dare risk Seaveth's wrath by missing that.

"He'll come around," Alexander assured her. "Diego is just..." He tried to find the right world.

"Savage," Mia said succinctly. "I've heard the gossip. There's a reason for his last name."

"There is," Alexander said flatly. "But whatever you've heard, it's wrong."

She glanced up at him, a furrow between her brows but she couldn't ask him a more direct question for they had reached the foyer and were surrounded by strangers for the ride down to the basement.

In the elevator car, Alexander was swamped by memories of the day Mia had reappeared in his life, here in New York. She swiveled her head to look up at him and smiled and he knew she was thinking the same thing. She pressed closer to him in the crowded car.

She was getting many admiring glances from others in the car, who skimmed her high heels, smart skirt and jacket, silk shirt and shoulder-blade-length hair she refused to either cut or wear up in a bun despite the weather, and the hourglass figure that the suit did nothing to hide.

She's with me, Alexander thought. *At last*. And he curled his hand around her hip.

The car was empty by the time they reached the last basement and they looked out cautiously. The limousine was waiting as promised. Mia swapped her briefcase over to her left hand and they stepped out, heading for the limousine.

There was a rattle of metal to their right and Alexander turned, his animal instincts flaring. Max was already leaping from the driver's seat, his bolo in his hand.

But Mia was faster. She had the gun pulled from the holster at the small of her back and out, ready to fire, before Alexander had completed his turn.

Her reactions were faster than his.

She dropped her briefcase and threw her arm out across Alexander's path to prevent him from moving forward. "Stop. It's Wyatt," she said, putting the small caliber gun away again. She ran forward into the shadowy basement and was enfolded by the dark figure there. Alexander could not make out the details but she had been able to. This had been another of her changes. Not only were her reaction times faster than his, she could see and hear better than a vampire.

And Wyatt was stronger than one. She was leading him forward now but he did not look like the strong hunter who had gone off the day before to Quebec to hunt a gargoyle. He was hunched over, an arm to his stomach. Alexander felt his heart seize. He hurried forward.

"What happened?" He and Mia between them bundled Wyatt into the limousine. "The keep, Max."

"Aye." Max climbed in and got the long vehicle rolling with minimum fuss, pulling out into the traffic without delay.

Alexander was grateful for the smoked windows and air-conditioning. He and Mia stretched Wyatt on the seat. "What happened?" he repeated again as he tried to pull aside Wyatt's shirt to see his stomach.

"Demon was working with the gargoyle. The damn things are ganging up together these days." Wyatt rolled his head back.

"Why aren't you healing?" Mia cried.

Alexander winced and leaned over to the back of the driver's seat. "Sorry, family business, Max." And he hit the button for the privacy screen, which slid up behind the driver's seat, a blacked-out window of total privacy between them and Max. It was soundproof and bulletproof.

Alexander turned back to Wyatt and looked at the long crimson gashes on Wyatt's stomach.

"You're supposed to have vampire healing powers now," Mia said, tears rolling down her face.

"He does," Alexander said quietly, studying the wounds. "These were much worse, twelve hours ago."

Wyatt swallowed and nodded. "A friend drove me down from Ontario through the night. I had trouble convincing him not to take me to hospital in Toronto but when I didn't die on him right away and was still talking when we hit the New York border he was starting to put it together. He was happy to get rid of me, I think. I scared the crap out of him. And he hunts demons." He tried to laugh and it turned into a series of coughs that looked painful. He finally took a deep breath and opened his eyes. "God it's good to see you both."

Mia threw herself on his chest and Alexander kissed his forehead. Wyatt held Mia to him and eyed Alexander. "I'm guessing the war ain't over, if the ass-kicking I just took is any measure. No sign of the infamous third trinity?"

He shook his head.

"Fuck." Wyatt sighed. "The elves are going to eat Seaveth for dinner at the assembly."

Chapter Two

"Silence!"

The full-throated roar came not from a vampire but from the most senior of the elves. Amrod had taken the most un-elven extreme of standing upon his chair and expanding his chest and bellowing at the top of his lungs for the attention of all assembled in the great hall.

Aubrey, perhaps the most senior of the vampires in the hall, if reckoned in years, also stood up but that just made him only the second at the table standing on his feet. Beyond the huge banquet table, the rest of the hall was a seething mass of people who had already been on their feet, arguing their point.

Amrod climbed down off his chair and bowed his head toward Seaveth, who sat at the head of the table. "My lady, the hour grows late and we have talked around this point at length. May we ask a direct question and beget a direct answer?"

"You may ask," she said serenely.

"You keep assuring us the formation of the third trinity will hasten our victory over the Grimoré. Very well then, when will the next trinity form? This entire meeting has been nothing but an airing of this single problem. We cannot last much longer without that trinity. The human police force cannot be fooled for much longer and their other authorities grow suspicious. If we are not to make a fatal mistake that reveals us to humans for what we are, or allows the Grimoré to have their way with the humans, then we must have the trinity in place."

"I see that you have come to believe that the third trinity will be our saving, after all, Amrod," Seaveth said.

"When one has no more swords left to fight with, one turns to prayer or prophecy instead," Amrod replied.

"Do you know when the trinity will form, my lady?" Aubrey asked gently. "I do not mean to press the point but it is a critical question the elf asks."

Seaveth rose to her feet. None in the room failed to note that she stood taller than either man already standing. With her hair falling to her hips in fiery red waterfalls and her coat trailing to the ground behind her in blazing green velvet that matched her eyes and made them snap fire, she was the focus of all eyes in the room. "I did not write the prophecy, gentlemen, and don't pretend to know more of its meaning than what is written for all to read than you."

"Then you do not," Amrod said.

"I do not," Seaveth said evenly. "But nor can you tell me when this seemingly endless summer will end, Amrod...merely that it *will* end."

"Then you guarantee that this third trinity is not something you have whipped up out of your imagination?" Amrod pressed. "It will form? It will save us?"

Seaveth looked him in the eye. "It will form," she said.

A wave of emotion swept across the room, with a rustle of movement. Even the dignitaries at the table shuffled uneasily. Diego Savage snorted. "We'll all be eviscerated by then, but sure, it'll form," he whispered to Alexander, next to him. Alex kicked his shin.

Lindál, across the table from Diego, glared at him. Diego snarled back.

Seaveth spread her hands. "Amrod, Aubrey, please be seated."

She waited for the two senior representatives to sit back down again, which left her the only one standing at the table. "The last trinity *will* form," she said firmly.

"Until the trinity forms, we must endure. I know that is becoming a challenge, especially when you have no idea how long you must continue on. But the trinity may form tomorrow, or two years from now. We have no idea. All we do know is that the forces that saw to the writing of the prophecy and the formation of the trinities have been remarkably long-sighted in their arrangements. Some of their scheming has been

almost...kindhearted. And it all seems to be determined to bring balance back to the world in the long term. Keep that in mind. It helps when you're wondering why you're doing what you're doing."

She spread her hands. "The practical details we have been over already today, so until next month, this assembly is dismissed."

Lindál moved quickly around the table, weaving between the assemblage, to grab Diego by the throat. "You owe Seaveth an apology, vampire."

Diego smiled. "I was speaking in a private conversation, *mutant*. It's not my problem if you were eavesdropping."

Zack stepped in next to Lindál. "I'm not even going to pretend I don't know what's going on. Are you being a pain in the ass again, Diego?"

"I was talking to Alexander. It's not my fault the mutant has ears the size of an elephant's."

Alexander sighed. "He was being an asshole," he said quietly.

Diego glanced at him. "Thanks," he said dryly.

Lindál was breathing heavily and Zack's hand on his shoulder was clearly exerting pressure, holding him down. Diego frowned. Would the elf really try to take him out? Vampires were naturally stronger but he did have strength inherited by the bonding and Zack might just take his side...

Diego pushed his hand through his hair. "Okay, okay," he said and sighed. "I'm sorry," he told Lindál. "This fucking war is driving me crazy. And I don't take to behaving like a fucking human all that well, okay? Four centuries of being myself and now I have to be a good little person again? It's stupid."

"You *know* why we do it," Lindál said heavily.

"I know, I *know*. I don't have to like doing it though." Diego grimaced. "You should know what I mean. You're not even human. How do you do it, parading like one? Doesn't it drive you crazy?"

Lindál's smile was serene. "I love two of them so much I'd give my life for theirs, vampire. Parading as one of them is a tiny price to pay. I barely notice the inconvenience. In fact, it's fun."

He brushed past Diego, Zack following him.

It took Diego a moment to be able to look at Alexander. He was shocked to see the tall vampire wore a small smile. "*What?*" Diego said viciously.

Alexander shook his head. "You just got TKO'd and he didn't lift a finger, Diego. After four centuries, don't you know when to throw in the towel?"

* * * * *

Zack unlocked the Maserati with an electronic warble and opened the doors. Seaveth wrapped her arms around Lindál's neck. "Is there any chance I can talk you into taking me home, instead?" she asked.

Lindál looked around the public garage. "We'd better go home with Zack."

Zack glanced up and around the empty, almost deserted area and frowned. "Diego really got to you, didn't he?"

Lindál shook his head. "Beth herself said we're supposed to minimize risks we'll be exposed as nonhuman. Teleportation is a risk. We should drive home with you."

"Bullshit." Zack got into the car and started it.

Lindál eased his long length into the passenger seat, then settled Beth onto his lap and shut the door.

"Teleportation from a deserted basement to a locked apartment is zero risk, my friend," Zack continued, pulling out of the garage with a squeal of rubber. "You're just fuming over what Diego said."

"What did Diego say?" Beth asked.

"Nothing," Lindál said.

"It's the usual mutant crap Diego spouts," Zack said, "But for some reason, today Lindál is choosing to own it. Although Lindál knocked him down verbally before he walked away."

"Wish I'd seen it," Beth said with a sigh.

Zack felt his animal instincts kick in a second before the car slewed to the right, the steering wheel pulling hard, out of his control. He yanked the wheel, trying to gain back the road. "Fuck. Hold on!" he yelled. He heard the tires explode and the steel of the rims hit the road and start to grind. They were being dragged. A net, something had been laid for them. The second the Maserati's wheels had hit the trap they had been reeled in like fish.

He looked over his shoulder. The whole car was being pulled toward an alleyway. Not good. Once they were inside that confined space, there wouldn't be enough room for fighting, or escape.

"Get out of the car!" Zack said, reaching for the door controls. Just as he reached for the controls, the engine cut out. He tugged at the manual override for the lock but it didn't budge. "Shit." They'd used a remote to lock them in.

"They're going to have to open the doors to get at us," Lindál said calmly. "I can't move fast enough with Beth on my lap. It has to be you first."

Zack nodded. "I've got a Glock in the glove box, fully loaded."

"I'll take that," Beth said, pulling it out. "And I have my knife, as usual. But it's in my boot."

"Leave it there, until you've used up all the bullets in the gun," Zack said. "It's a silenced gun."

The Maserati was bumping across the pavement now, to the disbelief of cynical New Yorkers, who watched its passing with open mouths. They were drawn into the deep alleyway past a Dumpster that rolled across the mouth of the alley, cutting off their retreat. "Well, I guess that means I'm not getting the Maserati back," Zack said with a sigh.

"They've planned this well," Lindál said. "For us?"

"For me," Zack said evenly. "I usually come this way after assemblies but you two don't normally come with me. I think if I come out of this alive, it's going to be because Diego was an asshole this morning." He glanced at Lindál and Beth. "Ready?"

Vampeen came at them first, opening the doors with the remote they had used to cut off the engine and lock them. The sound of the unlocking doors was what Zack had been waiting for. He exploded out of the car, moving at vampire speed, using the knives he always carried with him now. His first move was to vault the low nose of the Maserati and clear a space around the passenger door. Beth emerged from that door, next and began to fire the Glock in controlled single rounds, picking her targets carefully. She stepped away from the door to give Lindál room to exit.

Lindál stepped from the car, tripped and sank to his knees. Blood flowed from his mouth. "We forgot...the other door."

He fell over.

Beth screamed.

Zack slammed the door shut, snatched the Glock from her and pushed her up against the car. He straddled Lindál and called over his shoulder. "Beth, call for them. Anyone. Everyone. *Now!*"

She was staring at Lindál, her eyes huge.

"*Seaveth!*" Zack roared.

She blinked and looked at him.

"Call them!"

She closed her eyes briefly. When she opened them, she nodded. "They're coming." She held out her hand. "Give me the gun." The hand trembled but she was calm.

Zack shook his head. "Tend to Lindál. Get something on the wounds. Stop the bleeding. Put pressure on them. Their anatomy is close to ours...that has to work."

She nodded and got down on her knees next to him and rolled Lindál over. Her gasp was half a sob but she worked steadily. Lindál made no sound. Zack kept his eye on the hovering vampeen, who knew his reputation with the Glock and the knife enough not to come any closer than spitting distance.

Suddenly the air was rushing about his ears and the alleyway was filled with elves. Dozens of them, in the black cloaks and muffled head gear that Diego called their “black ops” uniforms. Amrod, with Alexander. More senior elves, carrying vampires. Beth had called out everyone, as promised. The black ops teams were sweeping the alleyway, clearing it of vampeen and any Grimoré that lingered further behind.

The elves were trying to squeeze into the tiny space between the Maserati and the wall, to get at Lindál but Beth would not let them. Zack picked her up around the waist, plucking her away from Lindál and holding her against him. “They’re going to take him to the keep,” he said, as she struggled. He looked at Amrod for confirmation.

The old elf nodded. “Teleportation to the parking garage, as the keep itself is shielded. Then to a safe room inside the keep. We will take you there too. Come.” He held out his arm.

Alexander was studying the steel netting under the car. He looked at Zack. “This is new. They’re studying us, learning about us and trying to pick us off, one by one, to break up the trinities that already exist, not just the new ones as they start.”

Zack felt his heart squeeze. “And they just scored their first victim. Maybe.” Bleak misery seemed to settle over him.

Alexander turned him and pushed him toward the elves. “Remember that Beth can scan your feelings, Zack. You have to hold it together for her.”

The reminder was like a dash of cold water. He drew a deep breath. “Right,” he muttered. Beth and Lindál. He’d hold it together for them. The only two reasons on Earth that mattered.

* * * * *

Seaveth rubbed her forehead. "Okay, so let me get this straight. Lindál's anatomy isn't human, so we can't call in human doctors. He doesn't heal like vampires, so we can't sit around and wait for him to do it on his own. Human drugs don't work on him. And now you're telling me elves don't *have* drugs?" She turned to look at Amrod. "Nothing? Not even painkillers? We're supposed to sit there and watch Lindál writhe in agony?"

Amrod cleared his throat. "We have certain medicines...what you would call folk medicines, or natural remedies. But on the whole, elves don't get sick, you see. And wounds are dealt with topically..."

"What?" Seaveth snapped.

Zack winced.

"The outside of the wound is cleaned and stitched but the internal injury is left to heal on its own," Amrod explained. "It is considered politically incorrect to interfere with the body's natural healing processes."

"You're kidding me," Diego muttered. Zack caught his eye. In this matter, he agreed with him. He couldn't stomach more of this insane conversation and left the room.

"But Lindál is no longer a citizen of your world. He even gave up his title as the crown prince..." Zack could hear Beth verbally rolling up her sleeves, tackling the issue from a political point of view. If anyone could fight to save Lindál's life with politics, she could.

He went back to the room where Lindál lay on the hastily found bed. His wounds had been patched but not stitched and he was covered with a sheet but his still body was alarming. The glow had gone from his skin.

Zack almost fell into the chair beside him.

Lindál was watching him.

"God, you're awake!" Zack leaned forward. "Are you hurting? They can't give you any painkillers. Shit, they don't know what to give you. Beth is down to arguing politics with Amrod, who says it's against religion or some shit to even stitch you up. It's a fucking mess." He took a breath, aware that if he said anything more he was going to lose it completely.

Lindál shook his head. "Need Sera," he whispered.

"Who?"

"My sister. Séreméla. Beth must call her. No one must know." He coughed, paused, then drew a breath that was clearly painful. "Call her," he finished weakly.

"Okay, big guy. No problems," Zack assured him. He took a breath. "Hey."

Lindál opened an eye.

"Love you."

"Know."

Zack hurried off to peel Beth away from the elves and get her to call over the woman who had sworn she would never set foot on the planet that had taken her brother away from his native land and people.

* * * * *

Zack couldn't stop staring at Séreméla. She was beautiful in an incandescent, ethereal way. He could see her relationship to Lindál but she personified elves in all their glory. While Lindál glowed, she emitted radiance. She had the same golden hair and perfect skin and she stood almost six feet tall but slender and supple. Her eyes were twin pools of crystal blue. Her lips were delicate coral bows and she had a fresh glow in each cheek. Her arms were graceful. In the long gown she wore, that swept the floor, every movement was a ballet dancer's precise execution.

And she was as pissed as a bee in a bottle. She crackled energy, as she moved about the apartment. "He got himself chopped up by a bunch of vampeen and wants me to patch him up now? That's really very amusing."

Beth looked not a little confused. "You might have to explain this to us in more words than you've used so far. Amrod gave us the impression that any sort of internal medicine was almost...politically incorrect, there. And none of our drugs will work, so we're reduced to physical therapies."

"So?" Sera said, with a shrug. She was actually slightly taller than Beth.

"He told us to call for you," Zack said. "He gave me the impression that you could help him."

"He did, did he?" Sera said, rounding on him, her robes flaring. "Why would he do that?"

"How the fuck would I know?" Zack said, frustrated.

"Zack," Beth said softly.

He pushed his hand through his hair and sat down again.

Sera seemed unmoved and he wondered if her grasp of English was quite as good as it seemed. She turned back to Beth. "Amrod is right. Stitch him up, let him heal. It's the way of things."

Zack slammed the old tome he had been consulting down on the desk. "You don't get it, do you?" he said. "He's dying!"

Sera stayed very still for a long while. "He can't be," she said at last. "He's immortal."

"Not with these wounds," Beth said softly.

Sera sank onto the kitchen stool, like the strength had suddenly left her legs. She sat there for three minutes in total silence. Zack timed it on the range clock. Then she looked at Zack. "I know what he's asking me to do," she said and he was shocked to see tears in her eyes. "I'll have to go back for a while to collect some things. Then I will need to jump back. But closer to him. Seaveth...can you bring me in closer?" She looked at Beth.

"Yes, but not wearing what you're wearing. You'll need to borrow human clothes. I can help you there." Beth stood up. "Come with me," she said softly.

* * * * *

Zack shook Lindál's shoulder, not at all sure he would respond. "Hey, look who I brought to see you," he whispered in his ear.

Sera leaned over her brother and murmured against his cheek in Elvish—at least Zack assumed it was Elvish. Lindál stirred as Sera lifted the sheet and the bandages. She seemed to recoil at the injuries but bit her lip and continued to explore the wounds with her fingers, growing more confident and absorbed as the minutes wore on.

Finally she turned to Seaveth, pulling off the denim coat she wore and revealing surprisingly full breasts under a perfectly normal tank top and jeans that Zack recognized as Beth's, showing off hips only a little less full than hers, and legs just a little longer. "I need water, very clean and cool. Lavers...what you would call bowls." She picked up a very heavy bag. "And I need a large surface to work on. Platters. Instruments..." She moved her hands to show what she needed. "To mix with, yes?"

Beth nodded. "It will be arranged." She motioned to those still in the room and they left to get what she had asked for.

Sera began to empty the bag of pots and jars, placing them carefully on the seats of the chairs.

"Can you help him?" Zack asked.

She looked up, startled. "I did not realize you were still here, vampire. I apologize."

"Can you help him?"

Sera turned to study him. Her eyes so strongly reminded him of Lindál it made his throat ache.

"I do not confess to understand this bonding of yours that he is part of," she said stiffly. "But that is his concern, I suppose."

"It is," Zack said carefully. "Can you help him?"

"Yes, I can help," she said. The words came reluctantly, as if she did not want to say them. Then she busied herself with her pots again. After a moment, she looked over her shoulder. "I begged him not to come here, you know. I warned him that no good would come of it. And now look at him."

Zack stood up. He couldn't handle this anymore. "Lady, your brother couldn't stomach living in your land anymore. He was *happy* here. And three hours ago, he swore he'd give his life for mine, or Seaveth's if it was asked of him. So lay off on your superior shit, okay? Because he chose his place and it was here."

He caught her startled look as he pushed past her but really didn't give a damn anymore. Screw her.

Chapter Three

Sera found the strength coming back through her hands more quickly than she thought possible and was almost frightened by it. When Seaveth returned with the equipment she needed, Sera thanked her and asked that she be left alone. Then she began to work quickly, trying to dismiss Zachariah's disdain from her mind. She had seen fury and hurt in his eyes and that too, had shocked her.

Had she misunderstood Lindál's role here on Earth? If she had, it was not her fault. He had not shared anything with her after committing himself to a life here. He had cut himself off completely.

Much like she had cut herself off from her own past.

She finished preparing the ointments, turned to Lindál's still body and took a deep breath. It was time.

Barely hesitating, she applied the various creams and pastes to the wounds. The ointments for the internal organs, for healing and to support functioning. The oils that would assist circulation. Stitches to close the wounds behind her. Working quickly now, she let her hands guide her. Unguents for musculature, tissue repairs. More oils for blood vessels near the surface. Then the extensive damage to the stomach and skin structures themselves. The stitch work was extensive but she kept at it, her hands moving swiftly, spreading their power.

At last it was done. She stood, straightening her back, her legs trembling, only then realizing that she was crying. She blotted the tears with her forearms, for her hands were still smeared with ointments.

Carefully, she cleaned her hands and dried them. She was starting to tremble now. She opened the door to the room and beckoned Seaveth and Zachariah into the room, let them enter and shut the door on the others.

They were looking at her oddly. She tried to speak, cleared her throat and tried again. "He will sleep for many hours, then he will be thirsty. Let him sip, that is all. But as many sips as he likes. It must be clean water." She picked up the pot she had prepared. "This must be spread across his wounds each day until they begin to heal themselves. He will know when that begins."

Seaveth tilted her head to one side. "Are you...all right?"

"I am a little tired."

"You're crying."

"Oh." She wiped at her eyes again. "Yes, that." She grimaced. "That is another thing." She straightened. "I understand that as queen of the trinities, Seaveth, you have command of both the vampire and elven armies and therefore have executive control of the vampire political structure here?"

Seaveth blinked. "Well, yes. For the duration of the war against the Grimoré."

"Then it is you whom I must ask for political asylum." She waved a hand toward Lindál. "For what I have done here tonight, I am now an outlaw in my own land."

Zachariah's jaw sagged but she did not want to hear his reaction. He had not understood, earlier. She looked directly at Seaveth. "I can feel that it is raining outside. Could I possibly... I would like to go and stand in it. Could that be arranged?" She needed to feel water on her skin. Running water. Rain would do.

Seaveth nodded, a smile beginning to form. "Yes, that can be arranged."

* * * * *

The vampire who escorted her to the alley off the basement parking garage was obedient to the letter. He did not speak to her and kept three paces away from her, giving her the privacy she had requested. When they reached the basement parking gargage that serviced the underground keep, he strode up the ramp to the alley, stepped out into the rain and looked in both directions for long seconds, to ensure the lane was empty. Then finally he nodded and stepped aside.

She tried to pretend he did not have a knife in his boot, another in his jacket and a Mauser pistol on the other side. And she tried to pretend that this was not Earth.

She stepped into the rain and lifted her face up to it. The humidity was almost overpowering but she stayed where she was and let the water soak her strange clothing and reach through to her skin. She would feel better once she was wet. Maybe.

She heard the soft thud and grunt even through the thundering downpour and turned back toward the ramp down into the garage to check her armed guard. He was folding face downward, like he was tired. A creature was racing toward her, full of teeth jutting at all angles, with eyes bloodshot and staring.

She knew at once this must be a vampeen. Something about the way it moved told her it was neither human nor vampire. She backed up quickly. Why would it be coming after her? Here on Earth she was insignificant. But it was.

She turned and ran. Jumping was out of the question. She could not go home anymore.

It squealed as it came after her and she cried out, for the sound was one of the most terrible noises she had ever heard in her life.

A man halted at the end of the lane, looking toward her and she held out her hand toward him, pleading silently for help. Something must have communicated to him for he turned and took a few steps in her direction despite the pelting rain. He was peering at her, trying to see around her.

"Help me!" she screamed.

That decided him. He ran toward her, reaching for something at his hip, dropping the garment he had been carrying. When Sera cannoned into him he brought his arm up around her and they twisted sideways. His other arm was swinging up and she realized that he had intended this to happen, that he was drawing a gun.

The vampeen was still pursuing her despite the human. She closed her eyes, knowing the human would kill it, that this was a disaster the vampires had struggled to avoid for two years now and she had just created it within minutes.

The gun roared and she jumped, shocked at how loud it was. At the same time there was two more shots...but not from the same gun.

The vampeen squealed again. She turned, to see it on its back, kicking its feet as it clutched as its chest.

"What the hell..." the man said as he moved toward it, his gun lowering. "What is it? I've never seen anything like it."

"Who the fuck are you?" asked another voice, lifting loudly above the rain. Sera looked up from the vampeen. The man was standing on the other side of it, with a gun in each hand. Tall. Black hair and eyes, of the type they called Latino here. He was staring at the man she had cannoned into with anger. "What are you doing here?" he demanded. He put his boot on the head of the vampeen and shot it again. It became still and silent.

Sera found herself backing up a half step until her shoulder bumped up against the man once more. His arm came around her and settled on her hip.

At the same time, the dark-haired man looked at her and her breath caught. Something twisted and turned over, deep in her gut.

"This...*thing* was chasing her," the man holding her said. "You know that as well as I do. Why else did you shoot it?"

"I was called here..." the dark haired man said and trailed off, staring at her. "Called," he repeated to himself, as if he was in deep thought. Then he brought his fists up to his forehead, still gripping the guns. "No, no, no, no, no!" He spun away. "NO!" he shouted, looking up at the black clouds overhead.

A vampeen broke out of cover from the building just ahead of him. He shot it with both guns, then strode up to it, put his boot on its head and fired another bullet in its skull for extra measure. His movements radiated anger. He walked back to where Sera stood with the man.

"I'm assuming you have permits for those guns," the man said mildly.

"Who are you, the fucking chief of police?" the dark-haired man raged, shoving the two guns into holsters at the small of his back, under his jacket.

"Lieutenant Blake Harvey, Manhattan Fifth Precinct." He tapped the shield clipped to his belt.

The dark-haired man paused. "Oh, this is fucking perfect," he said and laughed. He didn't sound amused. He came up to Sera and lifted his hand. "I'm not going to hurt you," he said softly and very gently lifted her hair up to look at her ear. "You're his sister, aren't you?"

She knew what he was asking. "Yes," she breathed. "I'm Séreméla." She realized that this man must be a vampire, if he knew Lindál.

He nodded. He was staring at her, almost like he was drinking her in. "My name is Diego," he told her. "Your brother will have a lot to tell you about me. Most of it not good. I'm glad I'll have a chance to prove otherwise before he recovers enough to tell you some of it."

She shivered and felt Blake Harvey's hand tighten on her hip.

"I'm not sure I understand what you're saying exactly, Diego," she told him.

"She's right," Blake Harvey added. "I haven't a clue what you're talking about either but you do seem to know more about what's happening here than I do, so I've indulged you this far. How about you explain what this thing is at our feet? And how about you give me your last name?"

Abruptly, the rain stopped and all that was left was the sound of water dripping. Diego pulled out his guns, looking around. He looked at Blake Harvey. "Keep your gun out, Lieutenant. You're going to need it."

"Why?"

"You're not in Kansas anymore." He looked at Sera. "Séreméla, I want you to do something that's going to sound weird but trust me. I want you to shout in your mind. Shout for Seaveth. You've met her, yes?"

"Yes. And it doesn't sound weird. I know what you want me to do." She closed her eyes and thought of Seaveth and reached out for her.

Seaveth, we need you!

There was a rattle of sheet iron behind them and Diego turned, alerted.

"What is going on?" Blake demanded.

"More of the vampeen," Diego said coolly, turning on his heels. "Put Séreméla between us. Her call for help will bring the others in a few seconds. We just have to hold them off until then."

"I think I've lost my mind," Blake muttered.

"It really is happening," Sera whispered. "Just hold on a few more seconds." She stepped away from him and between the two men, so that he would have a clear line of fire. Then she saw what Diego had sensed. More vampeen. Approaching over rooftops, through cracks in basement walls and impossibly tight spaces in between buildings. Dozens of them.

"They're taking too long," Diego muttered.

"The keep is shielded," Sera reminded him.

He spun to face her again. "You can jump, like Lindál, can't you?"

"Yes."

"Jump away," he told her. "Take the cop with you."

Fright tore through her. "And leave you here alone? No!"

He smiled and it was a predator's smile. "I can handle this."

"I need somewhere to jump to, Diego. I've been on Earth for about two hours and it was all at Lindál's bedside, in the keep!"

"That's it?" Diego seemed stunned. He glanced over his shoulder at the approaching vampeen, then back at her. "Nowhere else?"

"Well, Seaveth's apartment but that would be —"

"You're going to worry about protocol? Go!" he yelled.

She turned to Blake Harvey and wrapped her arms around him. "This will seem a little odd," she told him as his expression changed to one of surprise and jumped.

The apartment was quite empty and silent.

Blake Harvey gripped the kitchen counter to steady himself and looked around. Sera held him until she knew he was oriented. He looked at her and she realized it was the first time she had properly looked at him. He was taller than her by a few inches and surprisingly young for a human with such responsibilities. About thirty-five years old in human years, with brown hair that had gold highlights and hazel eyes that also had gold highlights.

"I know you have questions but I have to go back and get Diego," she said.

He sank onto a stool and shrugged. "Why not?" he said, sounding shell-shocked.

She jumped again and had to adjust her landing, because the area was full of elves fighting vampire. In the midst of them was Diego. She made a small hop, landing right behind him. He whirled, alerted and the movement brought him hard against her. She had anticipated his reaction and brought her arms around him. "Surprise," she said and jumped.

Sera found towels in the bathroom and brought them back to the kitchen for all of them. Diego ignored the pile. Instead, he stood at the big plate glass floor-to-ceiling windows with his arms crossed, brooding, a still figure in black.

Blake picked up a towel and dried his face and rubbed it through his hair.

Sera patted her own face and arms dry. "We are the final trinity, aren't we, Diego?"

He curled his hand into a fist and pummeled it gently against the glass. "Yes."

"Someone want to clue me in?" Blake asked. "I'm getting really tired of playing catch-up here."

Sera looked at Diego. "Can you?" she asked. "Don't you face execution if you do?"

"I think we've moved beyond that now," Diego said dryly.

"If the bonding is certain."

"Hey, I'm sitting here!" Blake said, banging the counter.

Sera sat on the stool next to him and covered his hand. She looked into his eyes. "We know you are there. But these matters we are speaking of are...well, I am certain you're about to learn for yourself. Bear with us a moment more." She looked at Diego. "You were called. I know the distress I felt at the idea of leaving you when I jumped here with Blake. And I was able to call to Seaveth. What further proof is needed?"

"He's a police lieutenant," Diego hissed. "Seaveth will want incontrovertible proof." He dug in his pocket and pulled out a cell phone. "So do I." He dialed.

"What's he doing?" Blake asked Sera as Diego turned away, speaking into the phone.

"Calling Seaveth."

"Why doesn't he just...yell, like you did?" He pushed the towel around his neck, inside the shirt.

She smiled. "You're being very patient."

Blake shook his head. "I'm being very curious. Something has been tearing up my city for about a year now and I think I'm about to get answers in the next little while. You'd have to use C4 to move me from this apartment now. Those creatures. You called them vampeen."

Sera winced. They had slipped and not realized it.

"Are they...vampires?" He stood and unbuttoned the sodden shirt and pulled it from his trousers.

"No," she said quickly. Firmly.

The sharp answer made him look up. "So certain. Is that because there are vampires somewhere else? I really am stepping into fantasyland after all?" He stripped off his shirt and Sera felt her heart squeeze and her stomach flip.

She had never seen a human male naked before and wondered if they were all this beautiful. Blake Harvey did not have the perfect flesh that elves did but his skin was satiny smooth with good health and a light tan from the long hot summer. He was muscled in a way elves never could be, with rounded caps at his shoulders. When he lifted his arms, the muscles elongated, tendons stretched and she saw the tufts of human hair under his arm. She suddenly wanted to run her fingers along that long line of muscle and tendon. She wanted his arms around her.

She wanted his body against her.

Over her.

Her channel gushed fluid and her tongue seemed glued to the roof of her mouth.

Sera brought a hand to her throat. She could feel her whole body flushing with heat.

"Well, fuck," Diego said.

She dragged her gaze away from Blake to glance at him. He was looking at her and Blake, folding up the cell phone, a resigned expression on his face and the front of his jeans swollen with a huge erection. "I guess we have our proof," he said softly.

Blake straightened up, turning around to look at them both, completely unaware of what had happened. He lowered the towel, reading their body language, confusion filtering across his face. "Okay, someone really *is* going to have to clue me in," he confessed but Sera could see that his own body was reacting, tightening. The flat disks of his nipples were hardening. She hardly dared drop her gaze to his crotch to check.

The front door of the apartment suddenly shuddered under a massive impact, groaning.

They looked at the quivering door.

"Vampeen," Diego said. "They tracked us? Impossible."

"Could they have access to your personal data?" Blake suggested.

"Oh, there's a joyful thought."

The door shuddered again.

Sera opened up her arms. "Quickly, come to me."

"Both of us?" Diego asked.

"We must," she said. "If you both hold each other too and we form a single unit..."

"Where to?" Diego asked. "You don't know anywhere else."

"There's only the keep left," she said. "It's shielded, so that leaves the basement parking garage. Right next to the elevator. Into the elevator and down to the keep. I cannot think what else to do."

He nodded.

The door shuddered and splintered. Blake and Diego wrapped their arms around her waist and about each other and she slid her arms as far about their shoulders as she could reach. It would have to be enough. She took a breath. They were gazing at her. Trusting her.

"Let's go," she said and jumped.

* * * * *

The basement parking garage was shockingly empty and silent. Sera thought of Seaveth and gathered her thoughts. *We're coming*, she warned her and prodded the elevator door open.

There were only buttons for floors above the basement. Diego pulled an electronic security card out of his wallet and slid it into a slot on the panel and out again. The doors slid shut on the three of them and began to descend.

"What the hell?" Blake murmured.

The elevator came to a smooth halt and slid open again and Sera took his arm, knowing how disorienting the first glimpse of the keep could be. "Come," she murmured.

Blake Harvey stepped into the foyer of the keep, shirtless and bewildered, to be greeted by the assembled senior representatives of the vampire and elven races and

human hunters from across North America. Seaveth stood a little in front of them, glowing in the green velvet she favored when she was in her formal role.

Seaveth stepped forward. "Welcome to the home and hearth of the Earthwing Clan, Lieutenant Blake Harvey and headquarters for the war effort to defeat the Grimoré."

Sera held out her hand, palm up, as she had seen humans do. "Lieutenant Blake Harvey, this is Seaveth, queen of the trinities and commander of the vampire and elven armies."

Diego stepped to his other side and leaned in a little. "Relax. She's human. I'm the vampire." And he winked.

Blake licked his lips. "War, huh?" he said to Seaveth.

Seaveth nodded.

He looked at Sera and slowly lifted his hand up to her hair and lifted it to look at her ear, just as Diego had done. "Then...you're an elf?" His chest was lifting as his breath came faster.

"Yes."

He turned back to Seaveth. "There's probably something polite I'm supposed to say but I really need a drink. Is there a single malt scotch around here I could have?"

Chapter Four

"There has been a human in each of the trinities so far and each human has found orientation difficult," Seaveth admitted, as she walked beside him.

Blake glanced at her. "You were one of them," he said.

"I was the first and none of us knew what was happening, then." She smiled. "At least you have a roadmap to follow."

"And the foreknowledge that I have no choice in the matter," he added dryly.

"Oh, you have a choice," Seaveth assured him. "But the other way leads to madness and we believe to eventual death."

"And to choose it means to let these Grimoré things win the war and wipe out New York."

"The human race, Blake. They're not just after your city. They're after the full pot."

He stopped walking and faced her and she turned too, infinitely patient. "This is...blackmail."

"It is what it is, Blake. We're not the ones who set it up. And there are compensations."

"What, sex on a stick?" He grimaced. "I don't sell out that cheap."

"It's a bit more profound than that." She didn't seem upset by his crude dig and he felt embarrassed.

She began walking again and he strode to catch up with her. She had long legs, for a woman. Almost as long as Sera's. She slowed as she approached a closed door and when they reached the door she opened it very quietly and motioned that he look inside.

He saw a man lying on a bed, another on a chair beside it. Then he quickly assembled facts with his new knowledge. The man on the bed was an elf but he was injured...possibly near death, for he didn't have the glow about him that Sera did.

Diego had said something about recovery...this, then, was Sera's brother. The man bent over in the chair beside him must be a vampire. He looked drawn with care and worry. Blake would have described him as tired, except that he'd already learned that vampires simply couldn't get tired.

Blake looked at Seaveth and was startled to see tears welling in her eyes. "I can't go in there," she said. "They both feel my emotions and it would upset them too much."

He put it together with a small gasp. "They...are bonded to you. You three are the first trinity."

She nodded. "Séreméla came to earth to treat Lindál because we do not have the knowledge here to treat elven wounds. And that was why the third trinity did not form until now—it waited for her to arrive here. But Sera is a healer, Blake. Not a hunter. She has sacrificed her place on her own world in order to treat Lindál and is now an outcast. I did not understand that until it was too late but I have researched it and now I believe I do."

She shut the door again and drew him over to a couch pushed up against the passage wall and sat on it as if she were very tired. He had a feeling she had been sleeping on the couch a lot lately.

He lowered himself down next to her.

"Do you know your family origins, Blake?"

"Um...English, I think. Somewhere there. My grandparents came out after the war. Why?"

"'Harvey' is Breton. It means 'battleworthy'." She stretched her legs. "I am the hunter in my trinity and Mia is the hunter in hers. I had assumed the female would be the hunter in the third. But I was wrong. I think you are supposed to be the hunter, Blake. It makes sense. It balances. Two female, one male. The triangle again."

He jumped. "Ma'am, I'm a New York City police lieutenant. I'm still wrapping my head around the fact that vampires and elves actually exist and have been trying to halt an invasion of Grimoré for the last two years from wiping out humanity as we know it. You can't start telling me I'm supposed to lead the charge on top of it."

"That's exactly what I'm telling you, Blake." Her voice was cool. Even.

He stood up, wishing mightily that he'd had the foresight to grab his shirt before they'd jumped to the keep. It stole his authority to stand there arguing in just his trousers. But it didn't seem to bother Seaveth. "You know I should have reported into my desk about three hours ago? They're going to start wondering where I am any moment."

"We called you in," Seaveth said. "You're pulling a rare sick day, Lieutenant."

His jaw descended.

"We have a policy of assimilation here, Blake," she said softly. "I wouldn't jeopardize your career. I made sure your job was covered as soon as I realize what was happening. Mia is superb at administrative detail. I got her to take care of it. I hope you don't mind?"

He found his back pressing against the opposite wall. He let himself slide down it. "Sure," he said stupidly. "So I'm supposed to go back to being a lieutenant *and* hunt down Grimoré in my spare time?"

"We'll figure out the details later but something like that, yes." She gripped her thighs. "I have to admit, Blake, that you may be my life preserver. We couldn't have gone on much longer without the police department cracking our façade somewhere along the line. With you on the inside, it's going to be a little easier to work it now."

"You're speaking like you've already got my agreement," he growled. "I don't remember signing on the dotted line yet."

She smiled. "You forget. I've been through the bonding. I know its power."

* * * * *

Sera watched Diego prowl the length of the guest suite with growing nervousness. Anger seemed to be building inside him toward an explosion she wasn't sure she wanted to witness.

The door to the suite opened and Blake stepped in. She glimpsed the armed guards outside before the door closed.

"So, the cozy love nest is complete," Diego growled.

Blake threw himself into a chair. "It's not like I'm thrilled about it, either, Diego."

Sera gripped her hands together. "I thought the bonding...eased things along."

"I believe it helps if you're willing to give it half a chance," Blake said coolly. He glanced at Diego. "He's not."

Diego snorted and resumed his pacing.

"And you, Blake?"

"If we're not all in this, there's no point, is there?"

Sera got to her feet. "I'll be a few minutes. Oh..." She moved to the tiny kitchenette area. "I have something for you." She opened the cupboard and withdrew a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label and a heavy crystal glass and an ice bucket. "Enjoy," she said.

Diego could feel the tension in his gut like a primed grenade. He didn't know what to do with it. His one abortive conversation with Alexander had gone exactly nowhere because Alex had been distracted by Wyatt's injuries and Mia had been running around organizing stuff for Sera. He'd found no relief there.

He watched Blake pour a belt of scotch into the glass and knock it back and his throat contracted. He moved over to the counter and pulled out another glass from the cupboard.

"Give me some of that."

Blake, in the act of pouring more into his own glass, hesitated. "You can do that? Drink alcohol?"

"Eat, drink, in small amounts, to fool humans. You have to purge afterward, you understand?" He grimaced and shoved the glass forward. "Give me some."

"Are you sure?"

He knew he would pay for it. "No," he growled. "But I want some, damn it."

Blake shrugged and poured two fingers into the glass.

Diego picked up the glass and took a large mouthful. It tasted wonderful. It was ambrosial. He closed his eyes, remembering the subtle, peaty delight of it, letting it coat his tongue and teeth and the back of his throat. Then, finally, he swallowed and enjoyed the burn of it and the aftertaste.

He put the glass down.

"How long since you had scotch?" Blake asked softly.

"About three hundred years. On the one hundredth anniversary of my turning. God, what a night." He laughed. "This stuff nearly killed me. They called it something else back then but it was as fine a drop as it is now." He thumped his chest and looked at Blake and grinned. "You're going to have to stop looking like a deer in the headlights every time someone speaks about something that happened to them a few centuries ago. You'll go into adrenaline overload inside two days."

"So...how old are you?"

Diego shook his head as the scotch fuzzed through it. Vampire metabolism being what it was, the alcohol hit much faster and harder. "'Bout as old as you, *gringo*."

"When were you born, then?"

"Fifteen...forty-three. Seville." He gripped the counter and took a deep breath. "Fuck." The tension had left his chest.

Blake tilted his head, studying him. "Are you drunk?"

"Yup."

"Jesus," Blake breathed.

"But...gimme a minute, 'n I'll be jus' peachy."

"Why bother drinking at all if it only lasts a nanosecond and it makes you feel so bad afterward?" Blake asked. "At least humans get to enjoy it a bit longer."

"So I can get this out," Diego said, clutching the counter. He looked at Blake. "Don't know if I can do this, Blake. Been on my own too long. Y'know? Scared." He leaned on the counter. "Fuck 'em and leave 'em. Safer that way." He knew he had to get the rest of it out, before the last of the Dutch courage deserted him. He took a breath. "Need help," he muttered. He grasped for Blake's arm. "But don't tell the elf, 'kay?"

Blake made no move to shift his grip on his arm. "You're not talking about Sera, are you?"

"Nope."

"Diego, nothing about this trinity is anyone else's business. Not a shred moves beyond the three of us. It has to be that way, or we lose our greatest strength as a bonded unit."

Diego blinked and focused on Blake's face again. His eyes were serious and very sober. The effects of the scotch were already passing through Diego's system, leaving just the scotch itself to swirl in his stomach in unaccustomed movement. He rubbed his eyes, bringing things back into focus.

"And you're sobering up again," Blake marveled.

"Yes." Diego swallowed, feeling his stomach protest. "But I said it." He looked Blake in the eye. "You have to understand. For me, that is an achievement."

Blake considered it. "Something like listening to what people were doing a few centuries ago without flinching?"

Diego straightened up from the counter. "Yeah but I have four centuries of ingrained habit to scrape off, hunter. You're not going to crack my shell so easily." He hurried for the bathroom before his stomach revolted completely.

Sera stepped back out into the main room, feeling beyond nervous. Humans had a name for it. Panic mode.

She walked carefully, for it was her first pair of high heels. And her first pair of nylons. Her first little black dress. Her... There were a lot of firsts on her body and in it. Mia had taken her through a crash course in human female dressing for attention and Seaveth had assured Sera that Mia was the best person to teach her. From the numerous glances males had given Mia as they had walked the halls of the keep, Sera judged Mia knew what she was doing in that regard. And Sera knew she needed that sort of help. She knew nothing of human males and now must bond with one, and a vampire who was once a human and still reacted in similar ways to a human. It was clear that she would need to help ease the process for neither of the men seemed able to move beyond their anger or resentment.

So Sera dressed with care and attention and stepped back out into the main room and sampled the atmosphere and found it surprisingly free of tension. Diego and Blake sat at the table, talking quietly together. Diego looked up first, his instincts alerted to her movement and rose to his feet, his black eyes travelling up and down her body.

"Why?" he asked. "Did you think we would not accept you as elven?"

"I have left that part of me behind today," she said softly. "This is for me, as much as it is for you."

Blake crossed to where she stood by the kitchenette, nervously pressing her hands against the hem of her black velvet dress. "You look stunning," he said simply. "Come and have a drink. Can you drink scotch?"

"I guess we'll find out, won't we?" She smiled at him. "Lindál said the only thing he can't eat here is some takeout foods."

"I suspect that's because they're not really food at all and some people get sick on those, too," Blake said.

Diego held out a chair for her and she sat, aware that most of her legs were on display. She took a deep swallow of the scotch and licked her lips. "Very nice," she said and pushed the glass toward Blake. "I would like another one."

Blake picked up the bottle and poured.

"You've got that deer-in-the-headlights look again," Diego said.

"It's hardly fair...you two have all these abilities and I keep getting caught by surprise. I'm your basic human male. You know all there is to know about me," Blake said.

Sera tossed back her scotch. "Not at all," she said. "Until today I had never met either a vampire or a human. She leaned forward. "You know, I keep looking at your chest. Would you mind...could I touch it?"

For a second, hard throbbing tension touched the room. They all seemed to hold their breaths.

"Sure," Blake said, trying to sound casual but his voice was husky.

Sera got up and moved around to Blake's chair and as she turned her back and he saw the back of her dress, Diego drew in his breath. "Oh, man..."

She smiled. The back of the dress dipped down to just above her buttocks, revealing all of her back and only just covering her...ass. Mia, all the way through her frantic preparations, had given Sera human anatomy and sex lessons in happy, carefree and saucy, peppery language that had left Sera both flustered and aroused but she was grateful for the orientation now.

Sera moved around behind Blake and leaned over his chair, aware that Diego was watching her every move and would see her breasts spill forward in the low-cut dress. She brought her face level with Blake's but didn't quite touch his cheek. She could hear his breath, a little fast, and smell the scotch. His male scent was so much stronger, this close. She breathed it in. Warm, with an underlying spicy smell.

She brought her hands around to rest them on his chest and spread her fingers out. Heat transmitted through her hands. His flesh felt soft at first which surprised her. But there was an unyielding wall beneath that. She felt his muscles flex as she moved her fingers about his flesh. She stroked the nipples and felt them come erect. It was a lovely sensation, this flesh beneath her hands. She could let the flesh run beneath her fingertips for many days. It had a sensualness that made her fingers tingle and her toes curl. Her nipples tightened and her clitoris throbbed.

She moved her hands lower, to the soft flesh of his abdomen, eager to sample the flesh there.

"God, I can *feel* your excitement," Blake said, with a touch of awe in his voice. "How can I be doing that?"

"It's the bonding," Diego said softly. His hand was fisted and resting on the table, his black eyes watching them. "I can feel her too."

Blake's chest rose more quickly. "Diego, come and help me."

Sera gave a little moan and spread her hands across Blake's abdomen, feeling heat, tension and the quiver of his muscles. There was a dusting of fine hair, arrowing down into his trousers. She longed to follow that trail.

Diego's hands rested on her hips, gently to avoid startling her. "Keep doing what you're doing," he told her. "Undo his trousers. You wanted to, didn't you?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Go on," Blake said. "Follow your instincts."

Diego's hands were on her ankles, circling them, stroking them. Fluttering on the inside of her legs and calves. She hadn't realized that her flesh was so sensitive, so responsive. Even through the silk stockings, he was drawing the most exquisite sensations. Slowly, he advanced up her legs, until he reached the hem of her dress and the ultrasensitive skin on the inside of her thighs.

She shuddered. Her breath was almost a pant, as she fumbled with Blake's belt buckle and the unfamiliar fastenings on his pants. But at last she had them undone and lowered.

She swiveled Blake's chair so he was facing her. His breath was also racing now, his chest lifting up and down swiftly, and as he watched her the gold flecks in his eyes seemed to swirl. Sera bent over again and felt Diego press up against her from behind. She moaned at the sensation but continued to work to strip Blake of his trousers and the rest of his clothing, leaving him naked in the chair. She stood up again and Diego's hands curled over her hips and pulled her up against him.

Blake gripped the sides of the chair, watching her. His cock was thick and red, moist with pre-cum, the veins throbbing along the shaft. Sera licked her lips.

Diego whispered in her ear. "You like that, hmmm?"

"Yes."

His hands on her hips were pulling her ass into his pelvis. She could feel Diego's cock, hard and straining for release, pushing against her cheeks.

His hands slid up the front of her dress to cup her breasts and she closed her eyes as the wonderful sensations washed through her.

"Look at me," Blake told her.

She opened her eyes again, gasping. Blake's gaze drilled into her as Diego's hands fondled her breasts, toying with them. She moaned at the erotic thrill of it. Then Diego reached up and untied the lacing at the back of her neck. He may have meant to just expose her breasts but because of the design of the dress, it meant the whole dress slipped to the floor, exposing her breasts completely and everything else she wore beneath it.

Sera's clit began to throb with heavy, pulsing beats and her heart to labor. Her pussy gushed with fluids that soaked through the lacy panties that Mia had insisted she wear.

Blake's eyes became sleepy, hooded. His hand lifted to his cock and began to stroke, in an absentminded way that made his already hard and red cock twitch. The sight of it made Sera's body tremble even more.

Diego turned her gently around so that he could look at her. His black eyes seemed to grow even more velvety black and stormy. "You honor us, *amor*."

The black stockings were stay-ups, stopping at the top of her thighs and remaining there. She wore the little lace panties and no bra because of the design of the dress but Mia had given her a little diamante jewel to sit inside her navel.

Diego slid a hand behind her head and the other under her back and bent her over in a hard, plundering kiss. His tongue swept into her mouth, deep inside and she felt like it was more than just a kiss, that he was trying to somehow leave his mark.

He lifted her back onto her feet and turned her to face Blake once more. Behind her, as she faced Blake, she could hear Diego undressing and shivered.

Blake sat forward. "Come here," he said.

She went to him and he kissed her too and this time she tasted scotch and was left with the impression of conflict and raw, overwhelming lust. She responded to the lust, her heart thundering.

Blake's hands were on her breasts, his fingers playing with the nipples, making her hot.

She leaned forward, to taste the flesh she had found so fascinating to touch with her fingers and swiftly licked her way to his abs, where the skin responded so well to her nibbles and bites and licks. His cock bumped against her chin and she closed her hand upon it.

Blake groaned, his hips jerking.

Sera kneeled and heard Blake's quick indrawn breath. Diego's too. She gripped Blake's cock and slid her tongue up the length of it, from base to tip and tasted salty pre-cum. Blake groaned deeply and his hands dug into her hair.

Diego pushed up against her from behind, his hands on her panty-clad ass. She could feel his fevered heat through his touch and pressed back against him as she enveloped Blake's cock in her mouth.

"Jesus," he whispered. He clenched convulsively at her panties and jerked. They ripped away from her with a dull tearing sound.

He made another small sound in his throat, like a man at the nether ends of his control. "She's wearing a butt plug."

Blake groaned and his cock jerked in Sera's mouth. "Oh fuck," he whispered, as his hands clenched. He came in hard, shooting spasms, hitting the back of her throat and she swallowed automatically, finding the taste interesting. Even arousing.

Even as Blake climaxed, she felt Diego's cock push at her crowded entrance, his hands on her hips. Dizzy excitement gripped her. She pushed back, encouraging him and the thick head spread her pussy open and nudged its way inside. She gasped, letting Blake go, her head rolling back. Diego inched inside her, past the restriction of the butt plug and she began to tremble long before he was fully inside her, as shivery, delicious excitement spread through her. Her clitoris ached for attention. It throbbed, swollen and neglected.

Diego slowly withdrew again.

"Harder," she begged. "Faster."

"Not such a delicate elf maiden, hmm?" he teased and slid his cock back into her.

"Diego, please."

"Please, what?"

She sought for the language Mia had taught her. "Just fuck me, Diego!"

He nipped her shoulder with his teeth. "At once, madam." He took hold of her hips and began to thrust into her more swiftly and she sighed, pressing back, squirming as the pressure began to build.

Blake settled on his knees in front of her. "Look at me," he murmured and she forced her eyes open to meet his tawny gaze.

"Touch yourself," he told her. "Put your hand between your legs. Make yourself come. Let me see you do it. Let Diego see you do it. And we'll both feel you come too."

She moaned. Her clitoris cried out for her touch. And both men would feel it... She brought her hand up to cup her mons and let her finger slip between the wet, swollen lips, gathering moisture.

Blake's gaze followed her movements, his lips parting and his Adam's apple jumping as he swallowed.

At the first touch of her fingers against her clit, she gasped. She was so close to a climax, she knew she would not last. She closed her eyes, shuddering.

"Come for us," Blake whispered. "Let us feel it."

She massaged her clit, running her fingers over it and against it, her movements growing more swift as the climax grew closer. Abruptly she flexed into a taut bow as the orgasm broke over her. It locked all her limbs and muscles and seemed to stop her breathing too.

Her pussy clamped around Diego's cock in a hard, convulsive movement that made him gasp and spilled him over into his own gut-wrenching orgasm. He sagged to one side, gasping.

Sera could barely remain on her knees, for the orgasm was followed by little post-orgasmic flares that shuddered through her.

Diego picked her up and carried her.

"Where are we going?"

"Bedroom," he said.

"Why?"

"To fuck you properly."

Blake couldn't believe that his cock was aching to possess her again, as he watched Diego place Sera on the bed, bend her over his knee and extract the butt plug. "I have better things to put in there," Diego said darkly.

"Me, first," Blake said, his whole body tightening at the idea of her hot little ass gripping him like a glove.

Sera looked at him, her eyes shining, her chest rising and falling. Like Diego had said, for a delicate little elf maid, she had surprising depths. She was excited by the idea of him taking her in the ass. Trembling with it. He could feel it.

And damn but that just made his own cock pound harder with pressure. He picked her up by the waist and hauled her over to his side of the bed. She wiggled her hips eagerly. He sat on the bed and spread her legs on either side of his, then carefully lowered her down onto his cock. She had no trouble taking him into her after the butt plug and she gripped him just as tightly as he had anticipated. He groaned. Sera's own silvery, trembling pleasure was washing over him too,

Diego was watching, his cock already rigid and throbbing. He came right up next to them, his black eyes hooded. "Lean back," he told Blake.

Understanding flared in him. He leaned back on his arms, giving Diego access to Sera's vagina. Sera gasped as she realized what Diego intended too.

He gripped her hips and kissed her lips. "Relax." He pushed his cock into her and Blake could feel the heat of it against his own, separated only by the thin connective tissue. Sera was trembling against him, her breath ragged with arousal and waves of her pleasure kept sweeping over him, making his cock surge. He fought to keep still while Diego slid into her, although the need to fuck her into a screaming climax was almost overwhelming.

At last Diego was completely inside her and Blake could straighten up. Sera was sandwiched between them.

"I feel so utterly full," she whispered and touched their faces. Her touch was strangely endearing.

Diego looked at them both. "We could seal the bond now, if you want," he said. "There's nothing to stop us."

Blake hesitated, then nodded. "We're here for the bond. We should do it now."

"If I don't seal the bond, my brother will die when the Grimoré spread across Earth," Sera said. "So there's no reason for me not to."

Diego lifted his inner forearm to his mouth and bit into it. There was a soft tearing sound and blood began to drip from his arm. He held the arm out to Blake. "You must drink. Just a mouthful."

Blake hesitated again. Now that the moment was here, the unreality of the day washed over him again. How could this possibly be real? Perhaps he was still asleep in his chair and Anna Maria was about to wake him before she went home after the end of her night shift and this was all a very long dream. But the ache in his balls and the tight sheath around his cock was no dream. And the coppery hot smell of the blood dripping from Diego's arm was real enough.

He reached for the man's arm and brought it to his lips.

Don't drink, Daddy! Don't complete the bond yet! I love you but you must kill me first! Find me, please find me...find me and kill me...

And the voice was gone.

Blake threw Diego's arm away from him, lifted Sera from his body, rolled off the bed and staggered to the wall, clutching his temple.

Diego followed him. "What is it?"

Sera was there, touching his chest. "It's something in his head," she said. "Pain. Agony."

He couldn't breathe. It was locked in there.

Sera was touching his face, making him look at her. "I can see the pain, Blake. I can see it. You have to let it out. Let it out." Her hands were on his chest, right over it,

soothing, spreading it and suddenly he could breathe, in great gasping lungfuls. It hurt but he could breathe.

He bent over, trying to control the panic. "My daughter. The Grimoré have my daughter."

Chapter Five

"He has a *daughter*?" Zack sat up. "He didn't bother to mention that to anyone?"

"It was a former lover, an accident but she chose to keep the child and he was helping support her. The girl doesn't even know he's her father—at least he didn't think she did until she suddenly inserted herself into his mind just as they were about to bond and warned him not to seal the bond until they find her." Seaveth pushed her hair back wearily.

"Find her and kill her, to be precise," Alexander finished.

"They must have found her, the Grimoré and made her into some sort of vampeen, like we make a vampire..." Zack shuddered.

Alexander rubbed his temples. "She was how old?"

"Eight," Seaveth said.

"Oh Christ," Alexander whispered. Wyatt, next to him, gripped his shoulder. Silence surrounded the top end of the long table for a moment.

Mia stirred. "What would have happened if they had bonded, Seaveth?"

Seaveth stirred. "With his daughter a Grimoré vampeen, the whole bloodline is tainted. The trinity would have been corrupted and all the trinities exposed and weakened. It's what the Grimoré were counting on."

"They didn't anticipate an eight-year-old child would have the strength to reach out to her father and warn him," Alexander finished.

"Would you?" Seaveth asked sadly. "Somehow, some core of humanity remained in her and she used her newly acquired Grimoré powers to reach him and warn him. He says she faded away, so she clearly used all her strength in this one effort. We can't afford to ignore it."

Amrod spread his hands on the table. "You're really going to kill the child?"

"Diego strongly urges that we do exactly that."

Wyatt opened his mouth, then closed it. Then said flatly, "*Diego* said that?"

* * * * *

Diego had stopped pacing long ago and now sat on the floor, with his back against the wall, his head tilted back to rest against the plaster. His hands were resting on his knees. He'd pulled on his jeans but barely fastened them. Sera lay on the sofa, her tears drying, wrapped in a borrowed bathrobe.

Blake, wearing his trousers once more, threw himself down next to Diego. "You know I have one hundred and fifty of New York's finest at my disposal and twenty detectives? I could have them turning this city upside down right now if they would just let me out of this goddam apartment."

Diego turned his head to look at him. "This is not your kind of hunt, *amigo*. Where would you begin?"

Blake said nothing.

"Besides, the Grimoré took her not only to taint the bloodline. They *want* you to come after her."

"Her name is Emily." Blake's voice was hoarse.

Sera slipped off the sofa, sat on the floor next to Blake and picked up his hand. The pain in his voice was difficult to listen to.

"They want you out there where they can cut you off from us and deal with you before the trinity is bonded," Diego said. "You're the hunter. Your instinct is to go after them. They know that. They're counting on it."

"You speak like a hunter yourself," Blake countered.

"For three centuries, I have been one of the best," Diego agreed. "Diego Savage, they call me." His chest rose and fell on a powerful exhalation. "And it's all completely meaningless," he added with sudden bitterness. He jerked to his feet, as if the

confession had not been intended and walked stiffly into the kitchen area, pushing his hand through his hair.

Blake stared at him. "If you're a hunter, then you could help me. We could be out there looking for her. I know Emily well." He scrambled to his feet. "We could talk to Patricia, find out where they took her, follow the trail. Basic police work." He followed Diego into the kitchen. Sera return to the sofa, sitting anxiously on the edge of it.

Diego turned to face Blake. "Patricia was your daughter's mother?"

"Yes."

"They killed her, Blake." Diego shrugged. "Sorry."

Blake turned to stride for the door. "I have to get out of this fucking apartment!"

Diego followed him, grabbed him and slammed him into the wall. He pinned him up against the wall with his arm against his throat, even though Blake struggled hard. "You're coming into your strength, hunter," Diego said quietly, "But I'm still stronger than you for a while, so don't bother trying to throw me off just yet. I could crush your windpipe with just a bit more pressure, so don't make me do it, because by Christ I will if you don't listen to me."

Blake stilled, although he was breathing hard.

Diego backed off the pressure on his throat a little. "You said your daughter's name was Emily, right?"

Blake nodded with difficulty.

"Here's three more names for you," Diego said. "Caterina Louisa. Rosario Espiridión. Ema Valeria."

"Who are they?" Blake whispered.

"They were my children once," Diego told him and let him go.

* * * * *

The silence around the top table was almost total. Almost everyone was staring at Zachariah in stunned disbelief, if not outright horror.

"Diego was turned without his consent?" Aubrey repeated. "While he was still alive? Still healthy?"

"And still a father of three," Zachariah confirmed evenly. "And yes, the mother was dead. Not one of the children was over seven years of age. The vampire that turned him did not ease his transition. He left Diego to find his own way."

"What happened to the children?" Mia asked, her hands clenched together in tight fists.

"They perished," Zachariah said simply.

The sound that rippled around the room was one of combined anguish and horror.

Wyatt glanced at Alexander, who sat still at the table. "You knew."

Alexander nodded.

"That's why you've been able to put up with all his ways all this time."

"It gives you a different perspective on Diego, once you know," Alexander admitted.

Wyatt pushed his hand through his hair. "It does, doesn't it?"

* * * * *

Sera could not help the tears that flowed. She sat with her hands between her knees, staring at Diego as the awful words came from his mouth. Finally, he stopped speaking.

Even Blake stared at him with horror in his eyes. "How did you come back from that?" he asked. "How is it you're even...normal?"

Diego grinned. "I'm not. There's a reason for my name, you know."

Blake shook his head. "You're sane and moderately balanced. Something bought you back from the madness. What?"

Diego's smile faded. "I didn't want it to be for nothing."

"What?"

"Their deaths. My turning. Any of it. Immortality."

"But after four hundred years, you're still looking for meaning."

Diego growled deep in his throat, an almost animal sound and strode from the apartment, shouldering his way past the guards.

Blake watched the door close behind Diego, his eyes flinty. "He can leave," he said bitterly.

"He won't leave the keep," Sera said. She bit her lip. "They don't know if you will or not."

Blake grimaced. "They're probably right not to trust me. Do you know how much I want to...to break necks or something, Sera?" His hands fisted, the knuckles turning white. "I'm her father. Worse, I'm a cop. And I have to sit here and wait."

She rose and went over to him. Hesitantly, she pressed her hand against his chest and he picked it up in his. She could feel his heart pounding out his fear and the unspoken agony of what lay ahead.

"You're tired," she said.

He gave a low laugh. "I've been tired for a year, seems like. This is just the icing on the cake."

Sera picked up his hand. "I can fix that."

"I can't sleep now," he protested.

"This isn't sleep," she assured him.

She led him into the bedroom and stripped him of his trousers, moving gently and quietly. "Lie down on your back," she told him.

"Massage?"

"I'm not sure what that word means here." She kissed him. "Just listen to my voice and concentrate on what my hands are doing. Ignore anything else."

She began to speak in a low, rhythmic tone. She described elven settings. Rivers, skies, trees. The wind. Sun. Shadows dancing on her hand through leaves. The sound of bugs in tall grass. Flowers nodding in dappled sunshine. Gardens glimpsed through a break in shady trees. Forests carpeting mountainsides. Soaring peaks. Waterfalls. Mountain streams with chilled water so crystal clear the bottom seemed only inches deep but was really deep enough to dive into. Fish flitting through the water. Rocks at the bottom of it. Plant life waving in the running water. Rain on her face. Snow drifting over her hands and feet and upturned face. The first hint of spring, with plants pushing through snowmelt.

And as she spoke, she brushed her hands over Blake's body, sending her power through her hands. Blake had been abusing his body for too long. She could feel the long-term stresses and where they had taken their toll. There were multiple lesions and chemical imbalances that she corrected as she stroked but even as she worked, she became aware of another growing force.

She was becoming aroused. And so was Blake.

Her hand motions gentled, the strokes elongated and grew more languorous. She stopped speaking because her voice had become husky with want.

"How do you feel?" she dared to ask Blake, as she ran her hands over his forearm and up his biceps to his shoulder.

"Wonderful," he confessed. "I wasn't sleeping but I wasn't exactly awake. I was lying next to a river, it felt like."

She smiled and stroked his deltoids and collarbone and slid down to the pectorals. Her clit gave out a throb. She wanted to kiss them, not stroke them. So she leaned over and ran her tongue over his hot flesh.

Blake sighed and her pussy rippled in response. Sera sat up and shrugged off the bathrobe. Her nipples were already sharp peaks and her pussy wet and ready. She straddled Blake's hips and guided his cock into her pussy, gasping as the hard thickness of it spread her and buried deep inside.

Blake grasped her hips, his gaze burning into her. "You're so tight and hot," he murmured.

Sera arched her back, feeling her hips tilt forward and her clit throb as her labia clenched around it. She moaned. Somehow, the healing process had reversed itself. She was feeling way too good. Tingling all over. She lifted herself off his cock nearly all the way and slid back down it again.

Way, way too good.

* * * * *

Diego clutched his head in his hand, staring down at the scratched tabletop, his heart pounding. "Who thought up this stupid, fucking bonding thing, anyway?" he demanded. "It's barbaric!"

He lifted his head to glare at Zachariah, Alexander and Wyatt but all three of them just looked back at him with the same patient expressions they had been showing for the last forty minutes. He swore. "What, cat got your tongues?"

Zack shifted in his chair. "Diego, we know it feels odd –"

"Fucking a total stranger?" Diego snorted. "And don't get me going on the fact that there's a man sharing the bed too –"

"It's nothing you haven't done a thousand times, my friend. Why is this time any different?" Alexander suddenly asked.

Diego looked at him, groping for an answer.

Alexander leaned forward. "Is it because this time it means something?" he said. "Finally, after four hundred years, it's not just a stranger anymore. And it's scaring the crap out of you."

"I don't know her from a bag of salt, man," Diego muttered.

Zachariah shook his head. "We're not talking about Sera and you know it."

Diego could feel his breath coming faster. He shook his head. "I don't...I don't..."

Zachariah glanced at Alexander, then moved his chair closer into the table and leaned in closer to Diego and dropped his voice. "Look, Alexander doesn't agree with me but I think you need a push over the line. So I'm going to push. For the last two years you've had a love-hate relationship with Lindál, Diego. Now you've got Sera there in your arms. Whether you know it or not, you already love her. The bonding is that powerful, Diego. I guarantee that if you look, you'll see it. You just have to open up your eyes and acknowledge it."

Diego stared at him.

Zack spread his hands on the table, as if he were demonstrating a point. "In the moments you first saw her, I guarantee there was an instant, something that made you pause, that made your heart give out. Come *on*, Diego. Drop the savage for just thirty seconds and join the human race once more."

Diego thought back to the first few moments in the alley, when he'd first seen Sera. As soon as he'd realized who she was, there had been a sick drop in his heart for he'd known that Lindál would poison her against him. Why the lurch? People had been speaking ill of him for years.

Because for the first time in centuries, he had wanted someone to think well of him.

Séreméla.

He curled his hand into a fist. An elven woman. He loved an elven princess. He could feel it growing in him as he sat there. Hot, hard and unbreakable.

"She won't go through with the bonding," he whispered. "Not with me. Not now."

"You have to give her a chance," Alexander said quickly. "Don't count yourself out, Diego."

Diego considered Alexander's own personal history. He had left Mia and it was only the coincidence of the bonding that had brought them back together. Alexander nodded, as if he could see Diego's thoughts. "Don't fuck up like I did."

Diego caught his breath as he felt arousal wash over him. It was distant but very real. He realized with a start that Sera and Blake had to be making love back in the apartment and it was affecting him. He deliberately drew in a breath, trying to control his reaction. He swallowed, shifting in his chair.

"You okay, Diego?" Alexander asked.

"I'm fine," Diego said. He pushed his hand through his hair and realized it was trembling. "I'm just not used to...to..."

"Plain speaking?" Zack suggested.

Diego grimaced. "I've had to do more of it in the last few hours than in the last century. My budget is run out."

Alexander shook his head. "It's not the plain speaking that bothers you, Diego. You speak just fine about lots of things. Sometimes we can't get you to shut up. If Zack wants to push you over the line, let's really push you over the line and be done with it. You can't handle dealing with love anymore. That's what this is about."

Diego flinched. Even the raw word spoken aloud was enough to make him recoil. Alexander was right.

"Lots of guys can't, though," Wyatt pointed out.

"Oh but Diego is a special case," Alexander said. "He's gone four hundred years avoiding it, fucking everything in sight and pretending he doesn't need it. And now it has slapped him about the chest and gut and he can't handle it. That's why he's sitting there looking like he's having a heart attack. Because he can't figure out what's going on."

"I can figure it out," Diego snapped.

Zack shook his head. "If you could, you wouldn't be sitting here with us. You'd be in the apartment with Sera and Blake, holding them. Don't you see? The bonding means you get to love and be loved by two people. And there's not a damn thing you can do about it except take it in and hold on to it, because it's the best damn thing that will ever

happen to you. Two years ago I would have been sitting where you are, wondering how I'm supposed to deal with a goddam elf and a human in my life, supposedly forever. Right now I'm half an inch away from losing one of them." He stood up abruptly and Diego was stunned to see his eyes were glistening with real, human tears. "Take my advice, Diego. Inhale every minute the bonding lets you have them in your life." He walked out of the room, not looking back.

Diego could feel his cock swelling, his balls throbbing. Sera's climax was drawing near. He glanced at Alexander and Wyatt and swallowed. "I'm heading back to the apartment," he said and was appalled at how much of an empty shell his voice was.

He started walking, then began to stride faster. By the time he reached the apartment, he was running.

* * * * *

Sera fought to reach her climax. She trembled on the brink of it but could not seem to tip herself over into that pool of pleasure. Blake was groaning beneath her, his hips thrusting and his body was slick with sweat.

Hands on her hips. Lips on her shoulder. "Let me help, Sera, *mi amor*."

"Diego," she gasped. He was behind her. His cock pressed against her ass, as his hand slid down into her sopping cleft and curled around Blake's shaft as she slid up and down.

Blake groaned. "What are you doing?" he muttered.

"Watch," Diego whispered. He gathered cream from around her pussy and brought it up to her clit, then with his finger and thumb began to milk it in time with her movements on Blake's cock. He cupped her breast with his other hand and squeezed the nipple, rolling it with his fingers.

Sera bucked, moaning and panting and instantly began to climax, her pussy gripping Blake's cock in hard waves, making him groan and clench at the mattress. He

watched with an awed expression, his eyes sleepy with lust, as Sera quivered through a powerful orgasm, Diego's hand tucked in her mons.

She trembled when her climax had passed and Diego lifted her off Blake's cock and laid her next to him, so that her head was resting on Blake's arm. "Rest," he said. "I'll take care of this."

Blake's heart jumped. "What?"

Diego's eyes were black with lust. "You heard me." He was already kneeling between Blake's thighs and now he reached down to stroke his cock, which gleamed with Sera's juices.

Sera caught her breath.

Blake tried to sit up. "Just a minute —"

"No, wait," Sera said, pressing on his shoulder. She sat up and kissed his lips. "Let him," she whispered. "What can it hurt?"

Blake was breathing hard. "I don't... I'm not..." He looked confused.

Diego leaned over and took Blake's cock into his mouth and Blake groaned and fell back onto the pillows. Sera kissed him and he thrust his tongue into her mouth with aroused aggression, moaning into her as Diego's mouth on his cock forced the sound out of him. The sound made Sera's pussy tingle and she pulled back to watch the erotic sight of Diego's mouth working on Blake's cock and her heart began to thunder afresh.

"God I can feel your pleasure," Blake said, looking at her. "You like this. You like watching us."

Sera nodded. "Yes," she whispered. "I'm growing hot and wet just watching you."

Blake closed his eyes and groaned helplessly, his hips bucking and his hands fisting, close to Diego's head.

"Touch his head, if you need to," she murmured.

"Mmmm..." Diego agreed, around Blake's cock.

Blake fought it for a moment, then buried his hands in Diego's hair, clenching his fists around the black locks, his hips thrusting.

Sera thought she was going to burst into a pillar of flames and burn up. She could barely breathe.

Blake climaxed with a shout, the tendons on his neck straining with the effort and his back lifting off the mattress. He remained locked in that position, his cock throbbing as it pumped cum into Diego's mouth in spurt after spurt.

Sera gave a shuddering sigh. She was shaking with unfulfilled arousal. Elves had sexual practices that were poetic and ethereal and almost beautiful. Certainly sensual. But this was raw and erotic and earthy and she had never been so aroused in her life. The carnal lust was overwhelming. She had never felt so...human.

Diego sat up, looking wicked and lusty. His cock was red, flaring to purple at the head.

"Fuck me, Diego," she begged, as Blake lay trembling beside her. Blake gave a gasping groan and rolled onto his side.

Diego turned her so that she was on her side facing Blake and lay behind her. She felt his cock pressing against her ass, seeking entry and his hands spreading her cheeks. She was so wet with arousal there was no barrier to his entry. The head of his cock pushed inside her anus with little difficulty and he pushed all the way. She gasped, her eyes half closing with the sensation.

Diego pillowed her head on his arm, while his other hand anchored her hip. He murmured in her ear, loud enough for Blake to hear. "Yes, let Blake see your face while I fuck you. When he's ready, he can reach over and help himself to what is left of you. If you like watching us, he will like watching us."

She gasped again as Diego withdrew and slow pushed back into her again. Blake watched, his eyes narrowing. His chest was rising and lowering quickly and his cock was already beginning to harden and lift.

"You like what you see?" Diego asked him, sliding back into her.

"Yes," Blake said.

"Want to fuck Sera too, *amigo*?"

"God, yes." His cock was almost fully erect again. Blake licked his lips. He reached over to brush Sera's hair from her face and trailed his hand down to her breast and toyed with the nipple. Then down to her swollen and sensitive clit. She thrust her pelvis into his hand at his touch, moaning and Blake swallowed.

"I have to have you too, Sera," he muttered, his hand coming down over Diego's on her hip.

"Hurry," she whispered.

Diego lifted her upper thigh up over his, giving Blake access as he lay up against her. He pushed his cock into her pussy, sliding up alongside Diego's and separated only by the thin wall of tissue. She could feel their heat, both inside and out and sighed.

Blake kissed her, his mouth hot and hard and urgent, then he turned her face up to Diego, who took her mouth in a blazing kiss that stole her breath and left her panting.

They began to fuck her in slow, deep strokes that made her writhe and her pussy clench. Blake caressed her breasts. Diego nibbled and licked her neck. Sera floated in the pool of pleasure, her sighs and moans building.

"Reach out with your mind...see if you can feel us, *mi amor*," Diego whispered.

Seaveth had mentioned that she could do this, although Mia had been unable to. The sharing of feeling ran both ways in the first trinity but only one way in the second. But Sera was a healer and used to searching out feelings in bodies...

She reached out for them, groping for their emotional presence. And suddenly, they were there and she could feel them. Two males, wrapped in the most powerful lust she had ever felt. It was overwhelming. Lust...and not just lust. There was love too. *Love*. Of the most powerful and primitive kind. But for now the arousal was primary and it took all her attention. Male arousal was different. It was more focused, more driven, more animal-linked...and she was sucked into it and part of it, throbbing with it.

She gasped aloud, her eyes snapping open, as their arousal became hers and she fed it back to them through their mutual link. Her heart clenched, her brain fizzed and her clitoris spasmed as she immediately climaxed with the blinding overload of stimulus.

Blake and Diego cried out and both climaxed at once, the same feedback slamming through their minds and bodies.

Chapter Six

For long minutes they lay motionless, still locked together, their hearts recovering.

Blake was the first to speak. "I could *see* what it felt like to be female and aroused. That was the strangest...the most arousing thing...I've ever felt. I think the top of my head came off."

Diego sighed. "Zachariah mentioned it once in passing. Those three are very quiet about such things. Now I begin to understand why. People would misunderstand if they did not experience it for themselves."

Sera snuggled down between them. "And now I understand what it is like for a man too." She put an arm over Blake's waist. "But let's not do that too often. My head hurts."

Diego stretched his arm across all three of them. "No, not too often," he agreed.

Sera yawned suddenly and her eyes drooped. Just as she was falling asleep, Diego spoke her name softly and she opened her eyes. He was looking down at her. She realized with a start that his cock was still buried in her ass and that she didn't mind at all. And Blake was still in her pussy.

"What, Diego?" she said.

"I'll let you sleep in a moment but I must ask you something first. You come to this bonding because of your brother and only him. Because you want to save him. I want... I would like..." He cleared his throat. "I want you to like me, Sera. Even just a little bit. I've gone a long time in this world not giving a damn about a single other person in it and now that has changed in the space of a few hours and I suddenly find I need...I need someone to give a damn. I want that someone to be you. You and Blake." His gaze shift to Blake.

"And you're not even drunk, Diego," Blake said softly.

Diego swallowed. "Don't, Blake. This is hard enough." His gaze came back to Sera. "It's a shitty deal. You came over here to help Lindál, got outlawed and stuck with us into the bargain. But for what it's worth, Sera, in the last seven hours I fell in love with you. And if Lindál was awake, he'd probably laugh himself into a new set of stitches over that but it's a fact and I'm laying it out for you. I'm poor goods, everyone will tell you that. I'm savage, a hunter, Seaveth regularly curses me out because I won't toe the line but once I'm committed, I'm yours for life." He took a deep breath.

Sera's heart was thundering. "Lindál was right all along," she said wonderingly, staring up at Diego.

He frowned. "Why?"

"He has always said I was more human than I knew and that if I just gave myself half a chance, I would understand. He was always begging me to come to Earth, where I could be myself, instead of staying at home, where I couldn't practice as a healer. We would argue and he would warn me that one day I would end up on Earth, falling in love with some crude man who offended all the elven higher sensibilities and I would remember his warnings."

Diego grinned. "When you tell him it's me, make sure I am between you and him."

"And me," Blake added, his hand resting on Diego's shoulder.

Sera turned her head to look at Blake. "You will protect me from Lindál?" She giggled suddenly. "I'm sorry. I'm very tired."

Blake grinned. "I *was* tired but that thing you did seems to have made it go away."

Diego kissed the corner of her jaw. "Sleep," he murmured.

"Like this?" she said, amazed.

"Why not?" Blake asked.

But she was already drifting...and woke to hear their voices murmuring over her. She let herself come awake gradually, dipping into their conversation in snatches, knowing there would be plenty of time to fill in the blanks later.

"After the French revolution I moved east...swordsman for hire...Russian Tsarina..."

"Emily didn't want braces and I agreed but her mother has this thing about appearances..."

"Shared an apartment with Alexander until he bonded with Wyatt and Mia a year ago. I've been in Soho for the last year. Thought it was good to be on my own again..."

"Wanted to be a cop all my life. Never a moment's doubt. Proudest moment of my life, pinning that badge on..."

"I didn't know anything about being human until about three years later when I seemed to wake up, or start remembering my humanness. But I went back and found their remains. I made myself do it, although it nearly sent me back to madness again..."

"I saw her running toward me and for a moment all I could think of was that she was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. God, Diego, I can't believe I'm holding her right now. That I—that *we*—have our cocks inside her right now. Seaveth said the forces that arranged these trinities sometimes seem almost benevolent, like they're trying to make up for shoving us willy-nilly around the chessboard. We get changed by the bonding and sometimes have special abilities after. And everyone speaks of the bonding being a blessing in their lives. You had the guts to tell her you loved her. I bailed. I couldn't say it aloud. I have no idea how she feels about me. She's a complete mystery. An elf. She landed here on Earth today. *Today*. She has to resent that."

Sera was fully awake now. "I don't resent it," she whispered. "And I think I could love you very easily, Blake Harvey."

"Just not yet, huh?" He grimaced. "So much for falling instantly in love with a princess and living happily ever after."

"I'm probably going to have to give up my inheritance, anyway," she said. "Just as Lindál did."

Blake look startled. "I was speaking metaphorically."

Diego laughed. "I forgot to mention. She really is an elven princess."

Blake rolled on his back, his cock slipping from her pussy and Diego started to laugh harder. That, in turn, dislodged his own softened cock from her ass. She bit back a small cry of regret and smacked Diego's arm. "Stop that," she hissed.

Diego sat up and hauled on Blake's arm, making him sit up too. "I'm sorry," he apologized, sobering. "But your expression was just too much." He sighed and rested his hand on Blake's shoulder. "Blake."

"What?"

"They made Emily a vampeen. You know that."

Blake flinched. After a moment, he nodded.

Sera's heart began to thunder again. She drew up her legs, sitting up.

"The making itself would have been agony for her," Diego said quietly.

Blake tried to shake off Diego's hand.

"No, no, you must listen, *amigo*. You must." Diego caught Blake's face in his hands. "She is no longer human, Blake. She is vampeen and her every moment is a living hell."

"Stop it," Sera moaned.

"Don't," Blake begged. "Why are you saying this?"

Diego was staring into his eyes. "You *must* listen," he said quietly. "As her father you must hear me. As one father to another, yes?"

Blake nodded.

"She is in agony but she spoke to you. She warned you. If you do not take that warning to heart, if you do not listen to every single word she spoke to you and act on them, you will be wasting her last words to you. Do you understand?" Diego said.

Blake swallowed.

"You must hear these words, and I tell you them as a father who knows what it is like to bury his children, Blake. Your daughter will be better off dead."

Sera cried out and Blake moaned but Diego shook his head. "If she asked for release, you must give it to her," he insisted. "Believe me, *amigo*, eternity is not what it's cut out to be."

A tear spilled down Blake's face. "I believe you," he whispered.

Diego groaned and pulled Blake into a rough hug and Sera with his other arm. "I had to do it," he muttered. "It had to be said."

* * * * *

"There has to be food somewhere in this edifice," Diego said. "There's at least three humans here on a regular basis and Zack eats food now too." He was opening cupboard doors, just as Sera and Blake were.

"You're not going to find the food there," came Zack's voice.

They all turned. Zack was standing at the end of the row of cupboards.

"Going to let us in on the secret then?" Diego asked.

"Come on," Zack said. "But first, there's something you should see." He led them down the corridor he had just emerged from, into a small room with a single bed in it. Sera recognized the room and the bed. Seaveth sat in the corner.

Sera pushed forward. "Lindál!" He was propped up pillows and awake.

She rested her hands on his chest and closed her eyes. Yes, there it was. The will. The drive to live. She opened her eyes once more and smiled at him. "You scared me, big brother," she said in Elvish.

"Apparently enough to bring you to Earth," he said, in English. His voice was very weak.

She blushed, realizing she had spoken in a language no one else could understand. "Sorry," she said to everyone else.

"Why are you wearing...that?" he asked.

She looked down at the bathrobe. "Ah..." She glanced at Diego, who moved smoothly to her side.

"I see you didn't do me a favor and die, mutant," he said.

Lindál's eyes rolled.

Blake drifted over to stand next to Diego. It looked casual but the movement protected Diego's unguarded left flank. "So I'm going to have to finish you off myself," Diego finished.

Lindál frowned. "I swear..." he said hoarsely.

"You don't have to sound quite so happy about it, Diego," Zack murmured. "Just spit it out."

"The third trinity has formed," Diego announced.

Lindál's gaze moved from Diego to Zack, to Sera. Then he frowned, as he took in Sera's robe and Diego's lack of a shirt and Blake's. His eyes widened and he tried to sit up. Seaveth and Sera both scrambled to keep him lying down.

"No, you don't," Seaveth said, keeping Lindál pinned down easily.

"Not my fucking sister, you don't," Lindál whispered hoarsely. "Not with that fucking savage."

Seaveth brushed the hair from his forehead. "You know the bonding has a will of its own," she reasoned. She looked over her shoulder at Zack and jerked her head toward the door.

Sera grabbed Diego's and Blake's arms and pushed them toward the door. "Did you enjoy that, Diego?"

"For old time's sake, yes, I did. But I'll make it up to him." He wrapped his arm around her shoulder. "Oh don't worry. I'll let him know I'm a changed man, later." He kissed her forehead and looked at Zack. "Now, where's that food?"

Zack smiled. "Right this way."

"I had no idea this place even existed," Diego said, walking around the canteen, as Sera and Blake gobbled down microwaved meals at one of the long tables.

"Why would you?" Zack asked reasonably. "We only installed it when we had to start catering to so many species that ate actual food, but you aren't one of them." He rubbed his chin. "Although you may end up being one."

Diego blinked. "I could. I hadn't thought of that." He grimaced. "And that means eliminating it too. Delightful."

"You did it for years before becoming a vampire. Stop complaining." Zack laughed.

"Diego!" Sera called, fear in her voice.

He whirled. She was clutching at Blake's arm. The man was holding onto the table with both hands, staring at the tabletop.

Diego ran over to them and heard Zack follow him.

Sera had one hand on Blake's chest. Diego knew she could get a sense of what was happening inside Blake that way and waited.

"His head. Something in his head. Agony. Pain."

Blake's head slowly rolled backward. His eyes were open.

Diego caught his face in his hands, trying to look into his eyes. Distantly, he was aware of Zack pulling food trays out of the way. Diego climbed onto the table to get in front of Blake. "Blake," he called. "Blake, what's happening?"

"She's talking to me," Blake whispered. "Emily."

Sera gasped and gripped Diego's thigh with her other hand. Cold dread touched his heart. He licked his lips. "Tell her to let go, Blake," he said carefully. "You have to let her go."

Blake nodded. "She wants to let go," he said.

"Let her go then," Diego told him. "You have to let go, Blake."

Sera kiss his brow. "Let her go, Blake," she whispered. She was crying.

With a long inhalation, Blake closed his eyes. "She's gone."

Sera threw her arms around him. So did Diego.

* * * * *

“Although the bond has not been formally sealed,” Seaveth said, “in many ways, it is probably already stronger than either of our other two trinities. You three have been extraordinarily tested and proven sound.” She paused to smile sadly.

Blake did not stir from his seat at the middle of the table, or look up from his gaze at the table top. Someone had found him a shirt and Seaveth had lent Sera another pair of jeans and a shirt. Diego had returned to all black. It suited his mood.

“The fact that the trinity has formed at all has thrown the Grimoré into deep fear and weakened them. That may be enough for us to win the victory we seek. Sealing the bond at this point may not be necessary. It’s been pointed out that it may, indeed, be a heartless demand.”

The occupants at the table murmured. All except Sera and Blake. Sera looked shell-shocked. Diego wanted to touch her hand but she was sitting too far away for him to reach. Fear was blooming in his chest.

Seaveth stood. “Would everyone but the trinities please leave the room?”

The senior representatives slowly filed from the room, leaving only Zack, Alexander, Wyatt, Seaveth, Mia, Sera and Blake at the big table. For the first time, Blake looked up. The look in his eyes was terrible. Diego gritted his jaw.

Seaveth was looking at them. “It is your choice, you three. I won’t lie and tell you you’re as free as birds, because I know the power of the bonding. But if you want to try to walk away and leave the bond unsealed, you can do that. You’re free to go. No one will stop you.”

Blake stood up. “Under the circumstances, I have to take the offer. I-I have a department to run. I’ll liaise with Mia as we discussed. But if you don’t mind, I’ll keep it via remote channels.” He swallowed and looked around the table and gave a vague nod.

Diego felt a hand on his shoulder, pressing down hard. "Stay silent, my friend," Alexander whispered in his ear, in Spanish. "Keep it together."

Sera stood up. Tears sparkled in her eyes as she looked at Diego. "I suppose that means I must find my own place here too." She glanced at Mia. "I must call on your services, Shamira."

"Yes, of course," Mia said, standing and walking with the tall, slender woman to the door of the assembly room.

The pain in his chest was going to explode outward. Diego didn't know what to do, what to say. How to deal with it.

Alexander was lifting him from his chair. No, it was Wyatt's hands on him. Wyatt's strength, bodily moving him from his chair. Manhandling him from the room. Out into one of the service corridors, Alexander bundling him along, whispering in Spanish. "Hold it together, my friend. I know your pride. A few seconds more. Just a few seconds more, is all. Take a deep breath."

Then blessed darkness.

He couldn't breathe but Alexander and Wyatt were bending him over, letting him clutch at his chest as he wanted to.

"Did you know?" Wyatt asked.

"I could see it in his eyes," Alexander murmured. "We pushed him into this. Now he's committed and it's falling apart around him." Alexander's hands were on his arms, holding him up. "Diego, my friend, stand up."

Diego forced himself up. Forced himself to breathe. "I'm an idiot."

"No, you're just human and you've just learned how to love again. And it comes with risks, that's all." He smiled in the dim light. "I never thought I'd see the day the great Diego would crash and burn but there you go."

Diego took another breath, easier this time. "You're enjoying this."

"Immensely," Alexander said instantly. "You gave me so much shit about my bonding, you surely can't begrudge me a bit of mileage out of yours?"

Wyatt chuckled.

Diego sighed. "Fire away," he said. "I deserve it."

"Every single shot," Alexander said. "Which is why we're going to sneak you out the back entrance and take you back to your apartment and leave you there to brood. Alone."

Diego looked up at him. "Why?"

"It's called moping. A time-honored tradition for broken hearts. You can't get drunk, so that's the next best thing."

* * * * *

Zachariah looked at Seaveth as she shuffled the papers on the table back together. "Are you *crazy*, Beth? *Not* seal the trinity? After waiting over a year for it to show up, I'd have thought you'd keep them locked down in that apartment until they were joined at the hip!"

She shook her head and smiled at him. "Sometimes, Zack, I think you've been a vampire too long." She got up from the table.

"And to let two of 'em just waltz out into the streets!" He strode after her.

"It was a risk but a calculated one," she admitted. "The Grimoré are in disarray after the formation of the trinity. The vampeen are falling back under the ranger sweeps. We haven't seen any in Manhattan in the last seventy-two hours and the state area is showing subsidence too."

He followed her down the corridor. "You've got a plan?" he asked.

"No," she said airily.

* * * * *

Blake sat back in his chair, looking at the three piles of paperwork in the trays, blinking, realizing that he had zoned out yet again.

He had been back at work for three days and couldn't seem to buckle down to it. Even knowing the reason behind the overload of work in the department these days didn't help his concentration.

On the first day back he had done something he had never done before. He had looked up an address on the database for himself and found Diego Savage, in Soho. A legitimate address. A real identity.

"Son of a bitch," he'd muttered.

Since then, the information had burned at the back of his mind.

And Sera's eyes stayed in the front of his mind. He could feel her hand on his chest. When it rained later that day he found himself standing at the window, his hand on the glass, staring at it stupidly, remembering her whispered words and her hands on his body.

He hadn't been able to get any serious work done for the rest of that day. His body had been too aroused, too tight with tension.

It was too bad he couldn't look up Sera. They wouldn't have an identity for her yet.

But then he realized what he was thinking and threw down his pen. He'd walked away from them both. They had caused the death of Emily. He couldn't forgive them for that.

* * * * *

Sera felt a pat on her hand and blinked and looked up. Lindal lifted his brow. "Aren't you supposed to cheer *me* up? You suck at it, by the way." He shifted on the bed and winced.

She tried to smile. "Sorry. I'm distracted."

"I noticed." He lifted a brow. "Want to talk about it?"

"You'll just get mad again."

"Again?" He pursed his lips. "Oh. Diego. What's he done now?"

"I wouldn't know."

Lindál frowned. "What does *that* mean? Aren't you all happily bonded et cetera?"

"No." She felt something hard and achy grab at her chest.

"No?" Lindál tried to sit up again and grunted, clutching at his stomach. "Fuck," he muttered, sounding astonishingly human and pissed. "Zack!" he shouted. He looked at her. "Why *not*?" he demanded breathlessly.

"I walked away," she said. "Seaveth gave us the choice."

"You *walked*?" Lindál shouted. "Are you freaking mad? Zachariah, *get in here!*"

Zack appeared as if by magic and ducked under Lindál's arm, as her brother tried to get up.

"No, you don't," Zack said, pushing him back on the bed.

"That's not a good idea," Sera tried to add, half rising from her chair.

"Then someone please explain to my stupid fucking sister in small words to get her ass back to Diego and Blake as soon as possible and *finish the bonding!*" Lindál roared.

Sera bit her lip, her breath ragged, as she stared at her brother, astonished. He was angry as she had never seen him before. She stared at his stormy blue eyes. "You don't understand," she whispered. "We killed Blake's daughter. It was our fault, because of the bonding. He blames us."

"Then find him and get on your knees and ask him to forgive you and do whatever you have to do to get him to take you back," Lindál told her. "You can't walk away from the bonding, Sera. It'll drive you mad for a start and it'll kill you in the end. That's just the beginning and it's just the superficial stuff."

He had to stop and take a breath. Despite superb recovery powers, Lindál was still weak. He shook his head. "If you turn your back on the bonding, Sera, you're turning your back on more happiness than you'll ever know in any other way. So get your fucking ass out there and find them. Do it now. Don't wait."

She looked from Lindál to Zack, who stood with his hip resting against Lindál's side. Seaveth had come at Lindál's shouting and now stood at the door of the room and heard Lindál's speech. She smiled at Sera. "I happen to have Diego's address," she said.

Chapter Seven

Diego would never have thought being respectable would be such a fucking life-saver. Having a job to go to every day gave him a routine. Something to do. A reason to keep moving—especially since the vampeen and the Grimoré had retreated beyond the state borders and were hovering there, not giving him some carcasses to carve up.

He'd even donned a suit, although he couldn't quite bring himself to wear a tie. Mia had been overjoyed.

But the days had been black ones. Filled with meaningless trivia that he had processed and human protocol to perform. Alexander had steered him through most of it, with Mia gently nagging him for the rest but really...why bother?

At night, when the world slept, he could feel the absence of Sera's long supple body against him and the ache became acute. Blake would have understood this feeling. But he wasn't here, either.

Suddenly, the lack of a roommate that he had celebrated so recently was now a cruel joke. The empty apartment, so recently acquired, was hollow and impersonal.

If only he was human, so he could fill his days with the need to eat, drink, sleep and fill the boredom with the oblivion of booze. He considered his old bolt-hole, women, for a nanosecond. There was zero appeal anymore.

Instead, his body throbbed with memories and his mind ached. "Pandora's box," he whispered as he sat in the dark, wondering what he was going to do between now and the morning when he could go to work again and pretend to be human.

He was almost grateful when the door buzzer sounded, instead of pissed that someone had let the visitor into the foyer. This was supposed to be a secure building, for crissake. But fine. He pulled out one of his knives. He was *just* in the mood to carve up a body. Bring it on, *bastardos*.

He left the lights off and yanked the door right open, instead of just leaving it on the chain, and hauled them inside. He tossed the body against the opposite wall. It hit with a satisfying impact and he slammed the door shut. His night vision was perfect. They'd be blinded.

He pounced, almost happy. Keeping his knife hand free, he grabbed the body by the throat and shook it. Heavy. Male. Good. He could feel his incisors descending, his mouth filling with saliva, preparing for biting and tearing. He growled and threw the body across the room again. It dared intrude on him?

With three bounds, he was on the body again, before it could even begin to lift itself from the heap it had made at the foot of the wall where it had slithered when it landed. He grabbed the vulnerable throat again and slid it up the wall, keeping it pinned and helpless. He leaned in close, smelling the blood pumping in the artery and for a moment was even tempted to take the great bite. *Serves the creature right.*

"Go ahead, Diego. Do it," Blake said tiredly. "Put me out of my misery."

Diego let him go and staggered backward, his heart seizing. His back came up against the other wall and he could go no further. He stared at the man lying on the floor, unable to speak.

The air brushed his face as it moved near him and Sera appeared, standing within a few inches of Blake. She staggered, thrusting a foot out in front of her, because it was dark. But she was an elf and had superior sight. She looked around, taking in her surroundings and the impact of her appearance registered on Diego's stunned mind. She had jumped blind. Called by Blake's pain.

She leaned down to touch his shoulder, to murmur to him. Then she straightened, her eyes blazing and pointed at Diego. No, she was pointing a crossbow at him. At his chest.

At his heart.

"I will shoot, I swear," she said. Her voice was shaking.

Diego moved toward her. "Do it," he told her, knowing it was an echo of Blake's words. "I wish it would solve my problems as easily as Blake's. Go on, Sera. Do it." He pressed the crossbow bolt against his chest, dead center. "You can't miss. All you have to do is pull the trigger. Go ahead."

Blake's hand reached for her thigh. "I don't want you to," he said.

She let the crossbow drop. "All I could feel was Blake's pain," she whispered. "And your fury and despair." A tear rolled down her cheek. "I couldn't stay away."

Diego threw the knife away. It stopped, quivering, point down in the floorboards. He gathered her in his arms and kissed her, pouring all the pent-up tensions of the last few days into the kiss. All the words he had not spoken, all the caresses he had wanted to give her, all the strokes, the moments. He passed them to her in one breath, as they sank down to the floor together.

Blake tried to sit up and Diego let Sera go with a groan. "*Amigo*, I was not myself. This is a secure building and you knock on my door..." He tried to help him sit up but Sera was there first.

"Let me," she said. She rested her hand on Diego's cheek. "It's all right," she said, with a reassuring smile.

"No, I'm fine," Blake said. "Just winded. You think I didn't know what I was risking, Diego?" He finally sat himself up against the wall and winced, his tawny eyes flaring with pain. "I know enough now not to step into a vampire's lair uninvited. I knew what I was doing tonight."

"You...wanted me to hurt you," Diego said slowly.

Blake pushed his hand through his hair. "I think so, yes." He let his hand drop. "Hurt, or worse." His expression was miserable. "Truth is, Diego, I came here tonight because I just can't stay away anymore. I didn't know how to find Sera but I knew you did." He sighed. "Sera and I walked away from you in that assembly hall and I saw your expression, Diego. I know what we did and for the last three days I've felt like I've done more damage to you than you ever handed to me through Emily's death."

Diego could feel the pressure building in his chest again and Alexander's whispered words. "*Breathe, Diego.*" He tried. But it wasn't working.

Blake caught at his arm. "You're shaking. Jesus, Diego."

"It's okay. I'm just falling to pieces here. Pay no mind," Diego said. He gave a short laugh. "Do you know what the last few days have been like for me without the two of you?"

Sera wrapped her arms around his waist. "Don't," she whispered, her tears flowing freely.

Blake caught Diego's face in his hands. "We won't do that to you again," he said. "Ever." And he kissed him, his lips firm and hard and reassuring.

Sera's hands were on his face, as Blake let him go. Her lips pressed against his, the honeyed sweetness he had been dreaming about for three days. Diego groaned and kissed her again, tasting her tears. But he needed more.

Sera turned to Blake. "We hurt you," she whispered, resting her hand on his chest, and bowing her head. "Can you forgive us? Forgive me?"

Blake lifted her face in his hands. "You jumped here blind. You could have slammed into a wall, landed in concrete or something. That was stupid, Sera, how could you?"

"You were in pain," she said. "I had to come."

"But that's going to happen sometimes. You can't just launch yourself into the middle of whatever I'm doing because I happen to be bleeding, Sera! I'm supposed to be the hunter! I'm going to get hurt! If you arrive just when I'm facing off vampeen and Grimoré, you'll...distract me."

"All elves are trained fighters, Blake," Diego said softly. "Even the healers. Sera's crossbow isn't for show."

"It's Lindál's," she confessed. "I'll have to sneak it back before he misses it. But I taught him how to use one."

Blake rested his head against Sera's. "I love you both. I'll die if either of you get hurt. I look at the pain Zack and Beth are going through, and couple it to Emily's death and what I feel for you and it terrifies me."

Diego gripped his wrist. "Then we need to work together to make ourselves strong. To be the best. To defeat the Grimoré once and for all."

Sera gave a small sigh. She kissed Blake lightly and brushed her fingertips over Diego's cheek. "I *do* love you both, but if you don't hurry up and fuck me, I swear I'm going to go find myself a ratty human who can do the job."

Diego grinned. "Will you listen to the delicate elf princess?"

Blake eased himself up off the floor, and helped Sera to her feet. "I don't suppose you have a bed in this lair, Diego?"

"Of course I do," Diego said stiffly. "All self-respecting vampires passing as humans do these days."

Blake looked around the room, scanning every corner. "I can see everything," he said. "Colors. Details."

Sera shrugged. "So can I."

Diego wrapped his arms around her, unable to help himself. "You can because you're an elf. I can because I'm a vampire. Blake shouldn't be able to because it's dark in here."

Blake pointed across the room. "I can even read the fine print on that calendar."

"Bonding changes," Diego said. "Enhancements to your night vision to make you a better hunter."

Blake smiled, and the smile was predatory. "That's a change I'm happy to accept. There's more than one prey that moves on New York streets at night, and I have two jobs."

He came up behind Sera and tucked his hands around her, sliding them between her and Diego. He kissed her neck, then bit into it gently. "Someone mentioned

fucking?" he growled, as she gasped in reaction. He stripped off his jacket and gun harness and dropped them to the kitchen counter, then his shirt very quickly after that.

Sera sighed as he pressed up against her.

"Your speed is faster than human, now," Diego murmured. "Not vampire speed, but not human anymore."

Blake nodded. "I haven't felt human for three days, Diego. That isn't a surprise."

He carefully moved Sera's long hair to one side, making sure he got all the strands out of the way.

"I keep thinking I should cut it all, now," Sera said, as he fought with it.

"No!" both Diego and Blake declared at the same time.

Her nape and shoulder finally exposed, Blake settled to kissing and licking her flesh and nibbling at it. Diego stepped back, releasing her. He stripped off his clothing and dropped it on the counter while watching Blake's mouth and hands work on Sera. She was reacting, her eyes closing, her lips parting as her breath quickened. She was putty in Blake's arms.

Diego's cock was already hard and hurting. He knew he would never tire of watching these two, or of being with them. They kept surprising him.

He reached for the buttons on Sera's sweater, sliding them undone between Blake's hands. Blake saw what he was doing and moved his hands cooperatively, his eyes gleaming. Sera was lost in the pleasure of what Blake was doing to her and he worked to keep the spell going, his tongue sliding up to her ear and plunging inside, making her moan.

Diego and Blake between them removed her sweater and bra, as she writhed under Blake's tongue.

Then Diego nipped at her breast with his teeth and her knees buckled. He held her up, an arm under her back, and sucked her breasts as she moaned and writhed helplessly.

Blake stripped off the last of his clothes and weapons and dropped them on the counter, keeping the weapons separate and in handy reach.

As Diego played with her nipples, Blake removed her jeans, panties and boots. With Sera naked, they stepped together with her between them. Blake drew in a sharp breath. "I missed this. *So much*," he muttered.

"Me, too," Sera murmured.

Diego didn't speak. He knew how much the black hole had eaten up his life. He grasped Sera's waist, determined never to let go. Her hard, erect nipples scraped over his chest, making his cock jump and by the coiling tension in his balls, he knew he was already wound up far too tight and close to coming.

He picked up Sera's hand. "Come with me," he said. "Blake, come."

He led them into the little-used bedroom with its grand bed, once the scene of endless conquests.

Sera climbed onto the bed without hesitation and tugged on his hand. "Come here, Diego."

Blake sat on the bed next to her, watching him. "He's reluctant because of all the woman he's had here."

Diego took a breath. "How well you know me already."

Sera sank onto the bed, both legs curled under her, slightly to one side. "You think we don't know about your history, Diego? Lindál made sure we had lots of juicy details."

Diego winced. "Ah...he got his revenge."

Blake reached around Sera's hip and caught at Diego's arm and pulled him onto the bed. "We've also had a long talk with Alexander, Diego. So you've got a past? So what. You've been around for four hundred years. A past tends to accumulate if you've been around for that long. Lindál should know better. He's been around for a while and he's

not exactly squeaky-clean himself. You need to sit down and talk to Sera about that when you have a moment. She has some stories she can tell you."

Diego felt a smile forming all by itself as he looked at Sera. "God, I love you."

"I know," she said serenely, her crystal blue eyes twinkling. She patted the sheet. "Get your ass over here, Diego."

He slid over the sheet to where she was kneeling and squeezed her in a bear hug. As he let her go, her hand curled around his cock and stroked, adding fiery pleasure to his already heated body. He groaned.

"Fuck me, Diego," she begged.

"Me first," Blake said. "And I have the perfect position here." He pushed on Sera's shoulder so that she was on her hands and knees, facing Diego. Her face tightened and flushed with excitement and her hips pressed back toward Blake. "Yes," she said, her voice low.

"Diego, do you have lubricant?" Blake asked softly.

"Drawer on the right," Diego told him.

Blake reached into the drawer and pulled out the tube. He applied the lube to his cock, then let drops of it spill down Sera's ass. She hissed at the touch of the cool gel and her hips bucked. Blake spread the lubricant between her ass cheeks and Sera moaned, her hands wadding the sheet. Finally, he pushed the lubricant into her anus and she sucked in a wobbly breath. As he pushed in a second and a third finger, she held it, closing her eyes.

Diego could feel her pleasure building, a tight spiral of sharp throbbing excitement that was showering over him like summer rain, leaving him hot and steaming.

Blake settled behind Sera. His body was gleaming with sweat as he reached for her hips and pushed his glistening cock into her anus. Slowly, so slowly, he sank into her, as she moaned and wriggled around him.

"Christ, you're so hot!" Blake said when he was at last resting completely inside her. He wrapped his arm around her waist, the other about her chest, and carefully sat them both down on the bed. He draped Sera's legs over his own thighs.

Sera gasped. "Oh...yes, Diego, please...come." She held her arms out to him, beckoning.

Diego allowed himself to be drawn into her arms. He settled himself before her and slid his cock into her pussy, feeling the heat from Blake's possession of her, separated only by the thin tissue. Sera sighed as Diego inched his way inside her.

Blake caught at Diego's shoulder. "Wait," he murmured.

"I can't!" Sera protested. "I have to move." She rolled her head back against Blake's shoulder and closed her eyes, and he kissed her cheek gently.

"We have to do this," he told her. He lifted his wrist up to Diego's mouth. "Bite it, Diego. Feed on my blood. It's time."

Diego eyed the vein pulsing in Blake's wrist. "Sera, you know what to do?"

"I'm watching, Diego," she said softly.

The throbbing beat was calling him. Diego could hear the swish of blood in the vessel, rushing past. He lifted the wrist, his mouth already filled with saliva, his teeth, already lowered. He bit, the teeth tearing precisely into the flesh, exactly into the vein. Blood gushed into his mouth, hot and luscious.

It had been so long.

Unlike Zachariah and the others, Diego walked the earth at a time when vampires still preyed upon humans, before they began to form their alternative philosophies, and this, he remembered, this hot human taste.

He remembered it with shame, even as his animal instincts rose to dominance, delighting in it.

"Diego, no. Stop." Blake's voice.

A hand in his hair. Pulling.

He opened his eyes. It was Sera's hand in his hair. Blake's wrist was open and bloody at his mouth. He had been drinking. How much? How long?

"It's all right," Sera told him. "You only took a mouthful."

Blake shuddered. "I think I almost came, just from that. Is that possible?"

Diego tried to smile. "I'm glad someone did. There's a substance in my saliva that makes it pleasurable for humans, to mask the pain of the puncture." He grimaced.

Blake rested his other hand on Diego's shoulder. "Don't look so miserable, Diego. You are what you are. A vampire. I'm a cop. Some people find that just as objectionable, if not more so."

Sera took Blake's wrist from Diego's grip, and lifted it to her mouth. "Lindál says human blood tastes bitter." She rested her lips over the small wound and sucked, and Blake hissed.

"No analgesic, huh?" Diego said.

Blake laughed.

Sera pursed her bloodied lips, looking at the pair of them, then manfully swallowed. "Very bitter," she declared, with a deep furrow between her brows. She held her wrist up to Diego. "You shouldn't have any problems with me. Zachariah says elf blood tastes neutral, like cooking oil."

Diego ran his thumb over her fine flesh. "Sera..."

She put her fingers on his lips, stopping him. "Don't, Diego. I know what you want. You're not sure of me, are you?"

The small hairs on the back of his neck tried to stand up. He stared at her. "How did you..."

She smiled. "We're joined, Diego." Her hand caressed the base of his cock briefly, where it penetrated her. "I can see into you because of it. And every time I touch you, I can see many other things. Shadows on your heart, in your mind. Doubts, fears, worries. Joys, lusts..." Her smile became smoky with her own arousal. She leaned back

against Blake, and he put his arms around her waist. "I can feel Blake the same way, too, Diego. I don't need the bonding to feel what you feel. I've been able to feel both of you all along. That was the reason I came to Earth. I was the only one who could help Lindál – see inside him and see what was wrong, what needed repairing."

"That is why you can't go back," Blake said. "They fear your ability."

She nodded. "But even if I could go back, I wouldn't. Why would I? I have acceptance here in a way I never found there. Lindál is right. There is more happiness to be found by accepting this bonding than by fighting it. Diego, I love you, and have since you stood in the rain and despaired over the fact that I was Lindál's sister and would not accept you for who you were. I just didn't know it, and have fought it since then. And Blake..." She lifted her chin up to look at him. "I began to fall in love with you the moment you turned to help me...about thirty seconds before that. You could have kept walking like any normal New Yorker would have. But you didn't."

Blake tried to shrug. "You looked pretty. I was just trying to impress you and get your number."

Diego snorted. "It was pouring with rain, my friend. You couldn't even see her properly through all that water." He lifted Sera's wrist to his mouth. "I don't know if the masking drug will work on you," he warned.

"It does on Lindál," Sera replied coolly. "Do you want me to climax right now?"

"You go first, Diego," Blake said.

Diego lifted his wrist to his mouth and opened it up. The minor wound barely registered as pain. He held it out to Blake. "Quickly, before it heals," he said.

Blake took a breath. "This is harder than I thought," he muttered.

"Blake," Diego said.

He looked up.

"We're both here. We're not going anywhere."

Blake nodded. He fastened his lips over the wound and sucked. Diego could feel the blood leaving his body and it was explosively arousing, like the rush of cum leaving him. He curled his fingers into a loose fist. Blake barely took a small mouthful before Diego jerked his wrist away with a hiss. "Enough," he said. "It's symbolic only."

Blake swallowed and licked his lips. His eyes were dilated and he was breathing hard. "Dear God," he muttered. "The movies miss a few details, don't they?"

"Just a few," Diego agreed dryly. He reopened the healed wound for Sera. She had been watching and now she didn't hesitate. She sucked on the wound, drawing in blood. Diego could feel the arousal tearing through him like a shooting star, and saw her eyes dilate.

"Oh..." Blake breathed as her pleasure reached him.

"Swallow it," Diego told her, his other hand sliding into her hair.

She swallowed, her throat working, and moaned. Diego forced himself to pull his wrist away from her mouth and pick up her own slender arm and bite into the white flesh, opening the vein.

Sera arched between them, gasping, as the masking drug flooded her system.

Diego pushed her wrist to Blake. This time, Blake barely paused. He was breathing heavily, caught by the cloud of arousal surrounding them. He licked the trail of blood running down Sera's arm, then sucked on the small wound, taking in her blood.

She sighed, undulating between them. Her climax was welling up large and potentially overwhelming and her pussy and anus were clamping around their cocks, milking them.

Sera held her wrist out to Diego. "Now," she begged.

His mouth was already flooding with saliva, his cock throbbing with the caresses of her pussy. He lifted her wrist and saw over the top of it Blake's tawny gaze, watching him. "Ready?" he asked.

Blake nodded.

He opened his mouth, his incisors scraping over her wrist, batted onto her wrist, and sucked. Blood rushed into his mouth. She was right. It was not human blood. Because it was not precisely human, the old animal instincts were not triggered, which allowed the sexual ones to remain dominant. He could feed – a small mouthful only – and let her go.

Sera instantly began to buck under the influence of the drug in his saliva. It sent her over the top into an unrestrained climax that sent convulsions of pleasure through her body. She squeezed around their cocks, and Diego clutched at her, his own climax searing through him by the force of her own, and the influence of her bonding connection.

Blake cried out as he came and Diego felt Blake's cock pulsing as it spilled its seed, so close to his own.

They held Sera between them until she was still once more and they could withdraw from her body and lay her on the bed. She sighed as Blake lay next to her, and caught Diego's hand. "Wait. Don't go."

"You need to sleep," he said. "Both of you."

"I have it now," she said. "I can feel it."

"What?"

"Before, we three were all broken people. We're not anymore."

Chapter Eight

Sera kept her hands clenched together under the table, until Blake reached under and separated them and took one in his. She took a deep breath and smiled at him. He didn't smile back but one eye closed in a half wink. Through the touch of their hands, she could feel his calm spreading through her. He was happy, confident. He was looking forward to the outcome of this meeting.

She tried to relax.

"Diego, this really needed to be a closed session?" Seaveth asked again.

"Yes," Diego said calmly, although Sera already knew his expressions well enough now to know that the calm was a façade. He was looking forward to breaking the news as much as Blake was.

Seaveth straightened in her chair. "Very well then. This is a closed session of the trinities only. You have our attention, Diego and the floor. When you are ready..."

Diego looked around the table. He had insisted that even Lindál be brought to the table and her brother had been shifted from his sick bed into a chair and now sat looking pale but interested, next to Seaveth, with Zack hovering close by him.

"As Sera and Blake are both sitting at the table, you've possibly figured out that we have reformed the trinity. It's also probably a relief to you all to know that we've also sealed the bond."

Sera smoothed her thumb over the tiny wound in her wrist. Even the reminder made her clitoris throb.

Seaveth smiled. "That is welcome news, Diego but not as startling to me as it may be to others here. Blake, I'm very glad to see you back in the keep in person."

"Thank you, my lady." He inclined his head.

"I didn't want to tell you the first day we met, as you were looking a little overwhelmed as it was," Seaveth continued, pulling out a sheet of paper from the leather-bound notebook that accompanied her to all trinity meetings, "but the prophecies speak of you by name, so I'm very glad you have chosen to stay with us."

Blake jumped a little and Sera pressed her hand against his thigh. "They do?" he said. She could feel his heart rate climb.

"Remember I said that 'Harvey' is Breton for 'battleworthy'? There was a reason I was researching the meaning of your name that day, Blake. There is a peculiarly phrased sentence in the prophecy that has always bothered me. Every version of the translation, even the literal word-for-word translation, comes out the same way. It says 'a battleworthy human will be the hero of that race'."

Sera squeezed his hand. "My hero," she murmured.

"I'm just New York City cop..." Blake muttered.

Seaveth nodded. "And I was just a barmaid, Blake," she said softly. "It's the times we're in that make us what we are." Her eyes were kind. She glanced around the table and her gaze landed on Diego. "As welcome as the news of the sealing of the bond is, Diego, it's also not news that deserves a closed session of the trinities, no matter —"

Diego held up his hand. "There's something else," he said.

Seaveth paused. "And that would be?" she said coolly, ever the political commander.

"All of us here are bonded and understand about the changes that come with bonding. The abilities that arrive with it. Blake, Sera and I are still learning about ours but Blake has already discovered that he has a vampire's ability to see in the dark and his hearing is enhanced. Sera has enhanced reactions. I have other changes too."

Sera pursed her lips together as she recalled Diego's indignation over the discovery of at least one of his changes. "I must *shave again*?"

Diego glanced around the table as everyone was nodding. "We've all had changes...except for Alexander."

Eyes widened and mouths opened, as everyone turned to look at the tall, redheaded vampire.

Alexander responded calmly. "So I didn't have any enhanced abilities afterward. I don't mind. I consider I got the best out of the deal as it is anyway. I'm not complaining."

Mia curled her hand over his forearm.

Sera could see that Diego was starting to enjoy himself now. "But the forces that arrange these trinities don't miss *anything*. They've found Blake, the human race's new hero, they found Seaveth, out of all the people in the world, to lead the trinities. They waited until Sera arrived to form the third trinity, because that's the only way it would work. They wanted Sera only, not just any elf woman. They're unerringly accurate about everything so far. Wouldn't you agree? So why deprive Alexander of changes and enhanced abilities?"

Alexander shifted in his seat, finally showing a sign of discomfort.

"Make your point, vampire," Wyatt muttered.

"Yes, I think you've lingered on this one long enough," Lindál added.

Diego nodded. "Very well. Séreméla had a natural ability before the bonding. She was a healer. She was forbidden from practicing her art on her home world, because on the elven world, in elven culture, being able to feel and see inside another person's body was considered an invasion of privacy. So the practice was outlawed. As elves are basically immortal anyway and rarely fall ill, her abilities were little needed and so Sera shut that part of her personality down and agreed that she would not use her abilities."

Diego stood up, his energy crackling, making him unable to stay in the chair. Sera could feel it from where she sat, although she knew none of the others could sense it. It was a result of the bonding but she could see that he was feeling a dull fury over the

stunted half-life she had lived before coming to Earth and she smiled at his championship of her, even in hindsight.

Blake spoke up. "Humans, though, would consider this ability a miracle. They spend millions of dollars on equipment and facilities, trying to peer into the human body, to analyze diseases, to identify them at earlier and earlier stages. What takes a roomful of equipment for humans, Sera can do by simply laying her hand on your chest, or your arm."

"We're still waiting for your point, Diego," Lindál said.

Diego looked at her, giving Sera her cue. Sera cleared her throat. "Mia is pregnant. I felt and saw it when I was with her the first day I landed on Earth."

Mia's hand on Alexander's arm slowly slid away, as she stared at Sera. Her eyes got very large. She looked at Wyatt.

Wyatt was shaking his head. "That's not possible," he said slowly. "After Sarah, my first wife died, I had a vasectomy. And vampires can't breed."

Sera shook her head. "You're not the father, Wyatt, I'm sorry. Alexander is."

This time, the shock on Alexander's face was plain for all to see. He seemed to grow even paler than usual. And the shock travelled around the table, gripping all of them. Sera tabulated the results. Wyatt, looking fiercely happy, overwhelmed, sad and proud all at once. Mia, looking utterly stunned and the first signs of quiet joy. Zack showing worry mixed with happy exuberance. Lindál's flesh displaying the first signs of a returning glow and his face one of contented peace. And Seaveth, who was staring at the tabletop, her mind ferociously chewing over this piece of news and what it really meant.

And abruptly, everyone began to speak at once.

Blake, Diego and she had the benefit of time to think it out beforehand, so Sera let the roar of emotions and talk bubble over her instead, soaking them in.

Blake leaned into her. "I think if Alexander could shed tears, he would."

"Do you blame him?" Sera whispered back.

"Not one little bit," Blake returned.

"Silence!" Seaveth called. "Silence, a moment, please!"

The talk stuttered to a reluctant stop.

Seaveth was smiling. "This is the very best of news. Not because it's babies and I'm baby mad, or anything close to that."

She stood up. "This is the timetable that Amrod has been asking us for. Now we can give it to him. Diego said it best. The forces that arranged the trinities don't miss *anything*. They wouldn't arrange to bring a newborn into the middle of a war with the Grimoré. They've proved, so far, to be anything but unfeeling. No, this is their way of signaling the end of the war. They have arranged Shamira's pregnancy because they know that by the time she delivers, it will be safe. It puts a term on the length of the war. Sera, when will the baby be born? Could you tell that much?"

"If human gestation is the same as elven, then I would say eight months."

Diego moved around the table to stand behind their chairs and she felt his hand on her shoulder. She glanced over at Blake and saw that Diego's hand was on his shoulder too. Warm happiness spilled through her. How could she have denied herself this for so long? She looked up and saw that Lindál was watching her. He smiled when she glanced at him and she couldn't help smiling back. Finally, she understood what he had been trying to tell her all these years.

Seaveth considered for moment. "We'll use eight months for now but human analysis will have to serve as confirmation later. Eight months, ladies and gentlemen. In eight months time, we will win against the Grimoré and it will be time to start rebuilding the races. That's what the forces that built the trinities are signaling with Mia's pregnancy. They intend us to begin again. Humans, vampires and elves together."

About the Author

Teal Ceagh is a multi-published, award-winning author who still finds it a deep privilege that she's allowed to spend all day telling stories, and that readers are willing to listen. Romance stories are her favorite. She lives in northern America with her husband and several hundred "keeper" books.

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