

THE WILD, WILD ANYBODY'S GUESS:

ALOHA!

Jayha Leigh

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Dedication

For Robert -- you are so lucky to have me as a wife. For Jeanie...btw, restriction. For Christian -- a brilliant and patient man, thank you and welcome. For Dréa, who stayed up waiting for The Wild, Wild Mess to drop. For RRM -- thank you for looking after my bambini. For S and M -- the kind of parents that every child should be blessed with. For my new brother Tyler, who loves his woman Moira so hard that he's in the loving hall of fame. For the members of the MFP Posse. And, as always, for the inventor of copy, cut, and paste.

The Posse Canon

Always have each other's backs.

Bring it...and bring a lot of it, and theitbetter be something good.

Cater to the best cook in the group.

Don't even think about doing anything on Super Bowl Sunday that will interfere with watching the game.

Exploit all loopholes and technicalities to your advantage.

For the sake of argument, pretend that other posses are equal to you ... never mind that's complete BS.

Go, have fun, and look better than everyone else doing it.

Have a contingency plan that is so kickass that it might be better than the actual plan.

In the event that you run out of cheesecake, it's okay to indulge in another dessert while foraging for more cheesecake.

Just so you know -- there is only oneCarolina , and it's inChapel Hill .

Know when the Hot Now sign is on at Krispy Kreme.

Laugh until you're on the verge of passing out, and then laugh some more.

Mock each other unmercifully, as it builds character.

Never be afraid to answer a question with "Hell no."

On any given day, calling in sick to work is a viable option.

Practice saying "We didn't do it" until it becomes such a natural response that you say it even when no one accuses you of anything.

Quell all thoughts of working overtime.

Remember, nothing says love like a whole bunch of money.

Stock your Posse with people who can be of use to you (e.g., forger, owner of a pro sports team,

pastry chef, Supreme Court justice)

Throw down a drink in each other's names before it's for the last time.

Unless otherwise agreed upon, we will not be doing the following: chasing tornadoes on our off days, jumping into the Grand Canyon to escape justice, or ordering a damn thing from the healthy section of the menu.

Vengeance is a dish best served cold, but then again, so is pudding -- and it probably won't get you executed.

When, in the course of human events, there comes a time when you need to kick some ass, don't hesitate to do so.

Xenophobes will be rehabilitated.

You only live once, so try not to screw that one time up.

Zillionaire kind of has a nice ring to it, so try to amass that much money.

Chapter One

Moaning, Aloha Carrington bit down on her succulent bottom lip as she closed her eyes and leaned over the counter. She needed a fan, and not because it was the hot-ass month of July, but because of the voice on the answering machine. No, not the voice *per se*, but the man attached to it. It totally worked her over. Her breasts ached, her panties were full of cream, and her pussy throbbed in time to the cadence of *his* voice. Yeah, she needed to meet *that* man, and she needed him to fuck her while reciting tips from the Final Fantasy video game strategy guide. Damn, he had a voice that could induce instantaneous orgasms. If she smoked, she would've needed a cigarette factory because that man had it going on like that.

Get a grip, video game champion, Aloha thought as she grabbed a cranberry juice from the fridge and took a seat at the granite-covered kitchen island. She knew she needed to get it together, but she pressed replay on the answering machine so she could hear him again. That voice belonged to Atlanta's second best friend, Imax. She had yet to meet the notorious man in person, as he had spent the last few years in his homeland, but she knew that voice because she'd heard it once a week for the last four years. That rumbling baritone was always on Atlanta's answering machine, which she checked weekly, since Atlanta tended to forget she had a phone, much less an answering machine. Although Aloha complained bitterly about her sidekick's technophobia, checking Atlanta's messages was her secret pleasure. She always saved Imax's messages for last. Regardless of how many times she heard that beautiful voice, she was never prepared for the effects it had on her body. It not only reminded her she was a woman, but it made her glad her father threw an X instead of a Y.

Aloha self-pleasured to it. She'd lost count of the number of fantasies that involved that man. Her favorite dream involved a dark room, a big bed, and that motherfucker in her ear telling her how he was going to fuck her step by hot ass step. She shook herself from her reverie when she finally caught the last line in his message.

"I'm returning to the States. I shall return by December."

Imax was returning? Oh, damn. Finally, she was going to get to meet the man who came with that voice. Closing her eyes, she wondered what the man attached to it would look like. From the pictures Atlanta had tacked to her fridge, Aloha knew he was big and had dark hair, but she wanted to know what he *really* looked like. What did his eyes look like in full passion? Was his bottom lip as full as it appeared? Were his hands ideal for sculpting, bearing long, tapered fingers, or were his hands built for manual labor, sporting big, thick fingers perfect for bringing a woman to a mind-blowing orgasm? That thought made her come again.

* * * * *

Ianikut shut off the engine and metaphorically girded his loins to face the latest challenge. His male pride was the only reason he didn't back down from the challenge. Atlanta had dared him to spend the day kicking it with her Posse, the gaggle of women that posed as her sisters. He would've brought his brothers as backup, if he weren't scared she'd find a way to literally break them, being the master of unintentional destruction that she was. Sighing, he thought of his brothers littering the healing chamber in various states of dismemberment. Better he face this challenge alone. Perhaps he wouldn't have had such an overwhelming feeling of doom if he knew precisely what "kicking it" entailed and if he was ignorant of the fact that Atlanta was slightly insane. He was sure that each of her friends also suffered various degrees of insanity. Over the past four years, he'd had the misfortune of being spoken to by said friends whenever he'd called Atlanta to assure her he was still alive and still realized how lucky he was to have her friendship. He would've said "spoken with" instead of "spoken to," but that particular phrasing implied he had had an opportunity to speak.

Ianikut mentally rolodexed through Atlanta's most unbelievable stories regarding the misadventures of her and her Posse and shuddered at the things they could do to him, get him involved in, or try to sweet-talk him into doing. Things such as cheering for Carolina, which was anathema to him, a Duke alum. He forced himself to exit his beloved Bentley, knowing she was probably peeking out the window and placing bets on how long he would sit out there. The *Jaws* theme music played in his head as he walked to the door.

Ianikut felt the beginnings of a headache as he recalled how he -- the Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich -- had allowed Atlanta -- a mere Carolina alum -- to rope him into this. Sighing, he mentally berated himself for once again allowing her to goad him into participating in her chaos. He chalked up her success to that superior tone she used when extending her dares. *What do you think we'll do to you?* Even considering the myriad possibilities, he found himself ringing the doorbell to Atlanta's house on April Fool's Day -- of all days -- to bemoan the start of baseball season. The day was perfect for anything but this. If he didn't consider her the sister he'd never had, he'd be improving on his five handicap. But he did consider her his sister, and thus he was here. Damn it.

Ianikut rang the bell again and grimaced at the tone. Only Atlanta would have the *Monday Night Football* jingle as the tune for her doorbell. Finally, his nemesis swung open the door.

"About fucking time. Get your ass in here," she yelled over the raucous sound of laughter.

If he hadn't been well acquainted with Atlanta, he might've been surprised she had answered the door riding a scooter and wielding a hockey stick. He snickered, eyeing her rather interesting ensemble, which consisted of protective gear, a North Carolina jersey, and a pair of basketball shorts.

"That's an interesting outfit you have on."

Rolling her eyes at his short-sleeved button-up dress shirt and cuffed dress pants, she asked, "You know this is a cookout, right?"

"You mentioned that."

"And yet, you still show up dressed like you might be called to the golf course at any moment."

"I don't have on golf spikes."

"Yeah, and if you didn't suck at golf, you'd have a pair right next to your spare standard rich guy outfit," she retorted as she directed him to the living room, where she hurriedly introduced him to a beautifully put-together woman.

"Silana, this is Imax. Imax, Silana. Don't piss her off."

"Yeah, or she'll hex your ass and then throw down a party celebrating your demise," a woman, dressed in various shades of neon, piped in.

At the sound of Aloha, Ianikut nearly came, and the beast within him stilled. Ianikut immediately recognized that voice, the one that sounded as if it should be featured on a 1-900 commercial. The man knew that voice, the beast knew it, and his body would've reacted had they been alone. He'd heard it instruct him to leave a message. He'd heard it inform him of the hours at Evil Twins. Now he wanted to hear that voice moan his name over and over until she was hoarse. Had they been alone, he would've reached down and tasted that succulent mouth as he pulled her softness to him.

He might've fantasized about her for the rest of the day had it not been for the rest of her team skating up. There was a mass introduction before they skated off to another room to resume their game. "Time in," someone yelled just as he seated himself in what he guessed was the living room. Atlanta's home looked like a frat house -- an expensive one, but a frat house nonetheless -- and he was shocked and amazed every time he stepped over the threshold.

"So, how did a man of such discriminating taste allow Atlanta to rope you into this?" Silana inquired.

"Thank you for the compliment. I can only surmise that I might've been drugged."

The woman paused to laugh before offering advice. It's what she did -- after all, she was the attorney in the bunch, he recalled. "Better not let Atlanta hear you say that. How could you even suggest you had to be dragged kicking and screaming to her infamous 'Dammit, Baseball Season Is Back' cookout?"

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a man who resembled the poster child for the all-American cowboy. "Hi, I'm Iain -- the lucky SOB married to Victorious," he introduced himself. "You might want to fix yourself a drink and get some rest before they come back in here, slinging demands," he advised, pointing to the full-size bar. Ianikut discovered an immediate kinship with this male and soon the three of them lapsed into a refreshing conversation.

Triumphant shouting and the sounds of stuff breaking caught his attention.

"What are they doing?" Ianikut felt compelled to ask.

"My guess is that they're well on their way to destroying some things -- plural -- which requires a plethora of trash-talking and ends with one of them requiring a trip to the ER," Silana answered.

“Are they always like this?”

“Only on days that end in y,” Iain said.

After nearly choking on his drink, he asked, “Did, uh, did Atlanta do any of the cooking?” He didn’t want to offend either Silana or Iain, as they obviously had great affection for Atlanta. However, having witnessed the fallout from Atlanta’s attempts at microwaving, he wasn’t taking any chances.

“Scared?” Silana inquired.

“Frankly, yes. I’ve seen her start fires -- plural -- in the microwave...warming up food, not even cooking it.”

“Ah, so you’re the cretin who banned her from the office kitchen.” Iain laughed.

“I had to. She doesn’t even work for my company and is a hazard all by herself, and I’m on a first-name basis with the entire day shift of all of the emergency services in the metro Atlanta area. I’ve only been back in the U.S. for a few months. My office qualifies for a frequent-buyer discount card.”

“And yet you came over anyway?” Iain said.

“Yeah,” Ianikut said resignedly. “She pronounced that she was the sister I needed and thusly has taken to bossing me around ever since.”

“But aren’t you older?” Iain asked.

“And wiser?” Silana finished.

“Yes and yes. I’ve told her this many times, but reason means nothing to her when it runs contrary to her wants.”

“Sounds like you love her,” Iain said.

“This is where I plead the fifth.”

“What for?” Silana asked. “Everyone here already knows you love her. I bet that child has a postcard from every city in Russia, courtesy of you.”

“If she didn’t get a postcard every week, she’d wait for the most inconvenient time to call and harass me, knowing I was eight hours ahead of her.”

“And yet you not only came back to the U.S., but you moved to the same city?” Iain asked.

Ianikut sighed and bowed his head before mumbling a response.

Iain leaned forward and clinked his beer bottle against Ianikut’s glass. “Welcome to the real world, where women run everything, and we men just do their bidding. I think the Posse is extra special nuts due to the fact that they’re Carolina alums.”

“Watch it, Iain,” Silana teased before turning to Ianikut. “Well, since Atlanta has you so wrapped around

her little finger, are you sure you couldn't be persuaded to partake of one of her culinary endeavors?"

"Not even Atlanta can be persuaded to partake of her own culinary endeavors." Ianikut shuddered. "Just because I've been dragged into mischief with her, doesn't mean I have a death wish. I know her culinary endeavors are chased by a trip to the ER. Hell, I once rushed her to the ER to have her stomach pumped after she attempted to make something she saw on one of those cooking shows."

Indy, an older woman who wore a ready smile and an easygoing disposition, interrupted them when she informed them lunch was ready.

Atlanta sauntered into the room, removing her protective gear. "Dude, come on. We don't have all day. Wash your hands and let's grub."

* * * * *

"Ianikut?" Aloha asked.

"Aloha?"

"Yes. It's nice to finally meet the notorious Imax in person."

"And it's nice to finally meet Atlanta's evil twin," he replied. Seeing her throw him a look that promised retribution, he hurriedly clarified, "Her words, not mine."

"Yeah, that sounds like her, but I'm the good twin; she's the evil one. So now that we've been properly introduced, hopefully you will appease my curiosity. How did you come across such an intriguing nickname?"

Ianikut emitted a long-suffering sigh, admitting, "Atlanta gave it to me."

Aloha laughed at his admission. "She must really like you. Normally when she nicks someone's name, it isn't a compliment."

Ianikut smiled. "Recalling the disproportionate amount of people with a nickname that involves the terms ass, mother, or head, I know I'm lucky. However, I'm her second-best friend, so it's only right I get a decent nickname."

"Yeah, but I'm her best friend, and second place is so far behind first place, there might as well be a continuation symbol because the gap is so large," she threw back with a beautiful smile.

"Your place in Atlanta's hierarchy of best friends is duly noted," Ianikut returned. "Truce?" he inquired because, although there were things he could imagine doing with the cute woman before him, fighting wasn't one of those things unless it was fighting to see who got to be on top.

"Of course. I wouldn't want to offend Atlanta's second-best friend because she has so few of them." She laughed.

"True, although the ones she does have are quite impressive," Ianikut said as he slowly looked her over.

"So, since 'Imax' isn't an insult, how did she come to peg you thusly?"

“Because the many syllables in my legal name make it difficult for her to cuss me out, so she shortened it for her convenience.”

“Well?”

Thinking that perhaps he had missed part of her question, Ianikut asked, “Well, what?”

“What’s your legal name?” She went on when he didn’t answer her fast enough. “Dude, what does your mother call you when you’re in trouble?”

“I was never in trouble. I was and continue to be a perfect son -- the paradigm for all sons everywhere.”

“And apparently I selected the ‘*I’ll take complete bullshit for a thousand, Alex*’ category,” Aloha returned. “Seriously, you have a Y-chromosome; therefore, you were constantly in trouble, so get over yourself and tell me your full name.”

Laughing he answered, “Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich. If you would like, you may simply refer to me as Max.”

“Definitely a lot of syllables, but it sounds impressive. Since you’re the man wearing such a name, it must mean something. What?”

“Ianikut is translated as ‘unconquered,’ and Maksim is translated as ‘great.’”

“Hmm, unconquered and great. Wait until you meet the right woman.” She smiled.

“What happens then?”

He watched Aloha blow an errant braid out of her face before she answered, “She’ll conquer you, of course.”

“Probably so that she can have access to all of my greatness.”

Raising a single brow, she laughed. “You’re modest too. It’s still nice to meet you, Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich.”

“I assure you that the pleasure is all mine, Aloha Carrington.”

“Well, of course it is.” She winked. “By the way, Ianikut is too beautiful a name to be nicked. Therefore that’s what I’ll be calling you.”

Ianikut’s already hard body went harder upon hearing her wrap her voice around his name. “Thank you, Aloha. That’s very kind of you.”

“I didn’t say it to be kind. I said it because it’s true. When you have a daughter, you can name her Iani.”

Is that what we’re going to name our daughter? he wondered. Telling his subconscious to shut the hell up was futile. She didn’t seem to require a response to her proclamation, which was a good thing because it took everything he had to keep his body in check. It was only his ironclad will that allowed him to maintain control when she mentioned him having a daughter. Although he had never considered having children with a particular woman, he had no trouble imagining begetting a daughter with her.

Visions of planting his seed within her almost caused him to lose his grip on his tight control. He ran his tongue over his eyeteeth and looked upon the Carolina blue color scheme that decorated the house in an effort to prevent his fangs from descending.

Aloha interrupted his train of thought. "Come with me, please," she prompted, grabbing his hand and dragging him down the hall. Though he was curious as to what the petite woman was up to, he didn't miss the warning look Iain directed his way. Aloha led him to a bedroom and pushed him onto the bed.

"Ah," he protested. His control was already tenuous, so she didn't need to be near him when they were in the vicinity of a bed.

"Tanikut, be quiet. I'm not about to have my wicked way with you."

No, but all you have to do is ask.

"Geesh," she said as she disappeared into a closet and threw out a handful of T-shirts. "Try these."

"What?"

"Tanikut, try on these shirts."

"But I already have on a shirt."

She blew out a breath before responding. "Yeah, and that's the problem. It sucks and is totally inappropriate for throwing down at a tailgate party."

Looking at her rather petite form, he remarked, "I don't believe we're the same size."

"You're right. You're nowhere near as stacked as I am, but I have this under control. They're all 3XL, so they should fit."

She must have noticed his silence because she paused and asked, "Okay? You've gone quiet on me. Is it shyness, or do you need help?"

Dammit, he wasn't shy, but he was on the verge of... jealousy? Anger? Whose shirts did she just hand him? Noticing the rhythmic foot-tapping and guessing it was from agitation, he answered her. "I don't need help, but I have no desire to wear some other man's clothing."

"Tanikut, did you just go into mom mode on me?"

"And if I did?"

"Well, if you knew anything about me, you'd know going mom on me was futile. After a while, even my mom learned that. Now had you gone grandmom mode on me, I might've been scared. You just need to settle down, pal, being that you're just a man and I'm a grown woman."

Ianikut harrumphed at her assertion. He glanced at her scant form before lifting a brow and asking, "Really?"

"Yeah, really, and I'm not a tramp. I wouldn't bring a man to my room if I was involved with another man. Now think of a suitable way to apologize to me and put on a decent shirt."

“Whose shirts are these?”

“Being that this is my room and this is my closet, logic would suggest they’re my shirts.”

“And why do you have shirts that big?”

“Are you, like, lead interrogator for the *Men in Black* ? I have these shirts because they completely rock and they’re kickass colors.”

He supposed that made some kind of sense, being that she was friends with Atlanta . “Do you have any shirts in colors other than neon?”

“Yeah, but why would you want to wear something not in neon?”

“It’s a little hard on the eyes.”

“Oh, so am I hard on your eyes?”

Knowing he was dangerously close to walking into a trap, he considered his words and then quickly realized that, regardless of his answer, she had neatly trapped him. Sighing like a martyr, he responded. “No, you’re not hard on the eyes; however, your shirt can stop traffic at fifty yards.”

“I’m impressed you’re being straight up, even after you realized you walked into a trap. But you know I can’t let you get away with dissing my wardrobe.”

“Why not? Aren’t you dissing mine?”

“I’m definitely dissing yours because you don’t rock business casual wear at a tailgate party. And just so you know, it’s not my shirt that can stop traffic at fifty yards -- it’s what’s *in* the shirt,” she replied with a wink before venturing back into her closet and triumphantly reemerging waving a Carolina blue shirt. “It’s only a 2XL, though.”

“But it’s a Carolina shirt,” he whined.

“And the problem would be?” she asked, clearly affronted.

“The problem would be that I’m a Duke alumnus.”

“Eww, gross. My throat just filled with bile. I can’t believe that Atlanta associates with you. Did you disclose this information before she became friends with you?” she asked with an expression that said that if there was a can of bug spray or a bottle of disinfectant around, she would’ve zapped him with it.

“Yes, and she has spent virtually all of our acquaintance trying to reform me.”

“I’ll have Indy pray for you.” She tsk-tsked while shaking her head. “Although I’m not sure holding a masters in both theology and divinity are enough credentials to accomplish much on that front, considering the severity of your affliction.”

“Being a Duke alum is not an affliction,” Ianikut huffed.

“Being a Duke grad gives you the allele for the affliction. However, you’re also a Duke fan, and that is definitely, inarguably, without a doubt, an affliction. Case argued and won -- mostly in intercollegiate play.”

Ianikut sighed at her warped logic. “You’re...”

“Intelligent?”

“Delusional,” he corrected.

“Whatever, dude. The first step is to *admit* you have a problem,” she finished. “Now, go change into a decent shirt.”

Ianikut took the shirt and went into the adjoining bath to change. He thought the shirt was a bit tight, and his suspicions were confirmed when he walked out.

Aloha swallowed several times before she could get a proper sentence out, but she quickly recovered. “Wow. You’re kind of hot -- for a Duke fan. Come on, before we miss kickoff.”

Before he could muster a suitable reply, she grabbed his hand and dragged him out of the room.

As soon as he stepped foot in the dining room, Silana immediately put him to work.

Noticing that neither Aloha nor Atlanta helped, Ianikut felt compelled to ask, “Why aren’t you two helping?”

“We already did our part. We got the ice for today’s shindig.”

“And the napkins,” Atlanta threw in.

“That’s right.” Aloha clapped her hands and instructed, “Now get to work.”

“Did you just demote me to staff?” Ianikut asked disbelievingly.

“Like you were ever above the rankings of staff,” Atlanta threw in.

“Yeah, what she said.” Aloha punctuated this by sticking her tongue out at him.

After carrying in what seemed to be hundreds of platters of food, they finally sat and awaited grace. As soon as Indy said “Amen,” the women began loading up their plates as if they were gearing up for hibernation through an ice age or three.

“You guys, Ianikut’s a Duke fan,” Aloha shared.

Victorious let out a sigh of disgust and resignation. “What is it with the men we know? It’s bad enough that Iain is a Virginia alum, and now this?”

“Yeah, but at least Iain isn’t a Duke alum,” Aloha defended. She liked Iain in spite of his unfortunate choice of universities.

“Gross, and she let him in the house?” Zuri said.

"She lets *you* in the house," Reign said.

"I might be a Duke alum but I'm not a Duke fan. Attending Carolina as an undergrad not only means that I'm already house-trained; it means that my blood is the same Carolina blue as yours. Besides, she knows where my loyalty lies," Zuri said.

"True that. Zuri definitely isn't picky about where she lies," Atlanta said.

"As long as he has all the proper accoutrements," Victorious said.

"Which means that he has to be loaded," Aloha said.

"And packing," Reign said sotto voce, while all of the women smiled and threw suggestive leers at Ianikut.

"So, Ianikut," Silana said. "You're a man who looks like he can withstand a lot of punishment, so why haven't you hooked up with Atlanta?"

Atlantachoked, while the rest of the Posse simply laughed at the look of horror that crossed his face. Ianikut saw more than his share of disgusting things in his life and as yet had never vomited, but the thought of a romantic liaison with Atlanta made him shudder. "Because. That's. Quite. Sickening," he choked out. "No offense."

"None taken. Did the rest of y'all forget the 'no talking about disgusting things at the dinner table' rule?"

"Aloha's the one that brought up the topic of Duke," Silana threw in.

"Is it because he's white?" Iain asked.

"Are you kidding me? It's because he's practically my freaking brother and because he actually thinks golf is a real sport."

"But golf *is* a sport. It meets all three of the criteria. Nike makes shoes for it. It's featured on ESPN. They serve liquor at the event," Iain joked. "So it would be okay if you wanted to date him."

"Excuse me. I'm going to be sick," Atlanta said as she ran from the table.

"See, that's why you shouldn't have married a man that went to school somewhere other than Carolina." Zuri shook her head at Victorious.

"At least I stayed within the conference, so shut up and stop ogling my man. Ogle I max... that's what he's here for."

"I'm not a piece of meat," he protested.

"That's right. Because if you were, you'd be marinating in barbeque sauce and roasting slowly on the grill," Jack threw in.

"Why do I get the feeling that I shouldn't even bother trying to get in a word?"

“Oh, don’t be that way, Imax. You can give your opinion. We’ll mock it, tear it to shreds, and bring it up pretty much forever, but feel free to offer your opinion,” Silana said sweetly.

“Imax, I like you, so I’m going to give you this piece of advice. Just let it go, brother. It’s so much less painful,” Iain said.

“But, what if --” he began.

“Imax, Imax, Imax. Just concede defeat now, and we might let you keep your dignity.” Silana smiled.

“But just to show you how nice we can be, I’ll throw a few compliments your way every now and then,” Zuri promised.

Chapter Two

Ianikut officially suffered from an overdose of sports, food, and trash talking. Not only were the women who composed the Posse all lunatics; they were all Southern to the bone, meaning that they didn’t believe a person was full the first five times they claimed such. You weren’t done eating until you had to unbutton or unzip something, and that meant you had just enough room for dessert. He didn’t understand how they managed to keep those fine forms. Even Jack, the mostly silent woman who wore intimidation like a second skin had a nice shape, not that he’d ever mention it unless he wanted to discover the joys of peeing blood.

At some point, Aloha sweet-talked him into holding a control pad while she executed a series of finishing moves from a new video game that she had purchased. Per the bylaws of the South, she enjoyed sports, but her passion was reserved for video games. Her love of video games became even more apparent when she proceeded to engage the game and completely forgot all about his presence.

He sat quietly holding the control pad and once again wondered how he had gotten roped into yet another ridiculous scenario. While everyone else was sitting in the living room watching sports highlights, he was in the den watching Aloha. Oh, yeah, it was her mouth. It was a good thing that Aloha only expected him to sit quietly and hold the pad, because his mind was occupied with fantasies of her. She was a petite woman, perhaps only five-three, but she looked like she was a handful under that too-large, hideously colored shirt. Her hair was just as odd as her wardrobe. She had masses of braids that were tied up in little balls and accented with blue. Though odd, it only served to accentuate how pretty she was. Though she wasn’t beautiful in the traditional sense, she possessed a vibrant beauty that had nothing to do with her clothes. Aloha was unlike any other woman that he had met, and having met the strange collection of women that comprised the Posse, that said a lot.

Ianikut was intrigued. He enjoyed hearing his name come from her kissable mouth. Perhaps his intrigue was due to the fact that Aloha seemed to be immune to him. Perhaps it was because he was white, or maybe it really was because he was a Duke fan. Either way, she had successfully blocked out his presence, which was a new experience for him. Men tended to mark his presence because he exuded danger; women tended to mark his presence because he exuded wealth and sexuality.

Aloha finally noticed him when he stifled another yawn.

“You’re tired already?” she asked disbelievingly before mumbling something that sounded suspiciously *likewweak-ass rich boy*.

“Yes, my internal clock is still set to a different time zone.”

“Oh, well, I’ll getAtlanta to drive you home.”

“I can drive myself home, though I appreciate the offer.”

“Ianikut,Atlanta isn’t going to let you drive home when you’ve been drinking, so you might as well concede defeat now,” she stated and then yelled forAtlanta .

Shivering at the thought of the dangerousAtlanta driving him anywhere, he tried to persuade the ladies that he was okay to drive home. That didn’t work. Silana noted his argument, and then Jack took his keys away. He was left with three options, only one of which was palatable. He could haveAtlanta drive him home, or he could spend the night at Aloha’s house, which was, according to her, two hops, a skip, and three-quarters of a jump away. Then there was that third option, which Jack had offered him -- he could have his ass whipped and spend the rest of the night unconscious and in an undignified heap on the floor. He opted for spending the night with Aloha, since it looked likeAtlanta already had a full house. He considered putting his foot down, but something in him wanted to spend more time with Aloha. Being that Aloha andAtlanta were best friends, he was sure that Aloha wouldn’t listen to a damned thing he said either.

* * * * *

After receiving a verbal caveat from Iain, a warning look from Jack, and a wink from Zuri, Ianikut found himself unceremoniously shoved in the direction of the garage, where Aloha directed him to a candy-apple red convertible Ferrari 550 Barchetta that was hidden behind the monstrosity thatAtlanta referred to as a vehicle. When he commented on her car, Aloha merely rubbed her hands together in glee before petting the powerful machine with obvious joy for the lengthy five-mile trip to her digs. An admonition to buckle up was the only warning that he received before Aloha opened her up and tore ass down the street. If he had been drunk, the combination of Aloha belting out “Where the party at?” along with Jermaine Dupree and the zero to sixty in under five seconds would’ve sobered him right up. *Who knew it was possible to hit a speed of sixty miles an hour before reaching the end of the driveway?*

Aloha gave him the two-second tour, which consisted of standing in what she referred to as the control room and pointing out the location of the kitchen and the bathroom. He couldn’t help but smile as he looked around the room. It was appropriately named considering the sheer volume of electronics in the room. Walking into Aloha’s house was like walking into a high-end electronics store. Her home theater boasted a sixty-five-inch LCD television for viewing, another one that had the latest video game console hooked up to it, and a mother lode of high-definition components. The only furniture in the room was a plush leather chair at the computer workstation and a full-size trampoline covered with throw pillows. If anyone other than Aloha inhabited the house, the trampoline would’ve been overkill, but it was Aloha, so it fit right in.

“Make yourself at home, Ianikut, because I’m not your mom and therefore won’t be catering to your whims,” she said before she grabbed a drink from the refrigerator. Kicking her shoes off, she headed to the bedroom. Ianikut took the time to tour her home. It looked like it had originally been a four-bedroom house, but she’d knocked out one of the walls to expand her electronics arena. Every square inch of the second bedroom was decorated inCarolina blue. Though he managed to keep from vomiting, he knew that there was no way in hell he could spend the night in what amounted to a shrine forCarolina . It was obviously a guest room. She used the third bedroom as storage, which left only one bedroom

palatable -- hers. Although every wall was painted a different color, at least none of the colors was neon or Carolina blue.

Ianikut pondered his attraction to Aloha, which could prove problematic for various reasons -- chief among them was the fact that she didn't know that he was alive. Still, his body hungered for her, so after his self-guided tour and a shower, he went in search of her. It was a good thing that he always traveled with an overnight bag so he had all of the necessities.

Ianikut found her sprawled out on her trampoline, getting reacquainted with her video game console. He smiled at her outfit, which consisted of a Carolina T-shirt and gray Carolina sweatpants -- almost a complete one-eighty from his own attire, which consisted of a Duke T-shirt and Duke shorts. He continued to watch her for a full five minutes before he realized that her attention was solely on the game. Making his presence known, he pulled up a leather chair.

Hitting pause, she smiled. "I thought you'd be in bed by now."

Not if you're not in it with me. "I woke right up after I showered. I'm normally a night owl."

"Me, too. Want to watch a movie or something?"

"What if I say, 'or something'?"

"I'd still be better than you at it -- unless it was sucking. On second thought, I'm probably better at that too, if you mean it literally." She smirked, then licked her succulent lips deliberately while holding his gaze.

Ianikut was damn glad that she kept eye contact, else she would've noticed his cock trying to burst through his basketball shorts. "You know, you are humbling. Couldn't you at least pretend to fall all over me like the rest of the female population?"

"Absolutely not. You should, however, be falling all over me. Now, what do you want to do to pass the time, Ianikut?"

"What if I say that I want to get to know you?"

"I'd ask if you were being truthful or flip."

"Truthful," he responded.

"Then I'd say get out the metaphorical cheesecake and pull up a seat."

"Ah, I believe that's a *Golden Girls* reference."

"It is, and I'm impressed that you know that. However, if we're going to have an actual conversation, then you need to grab a blanket and chance the trampoline," she challenged with a raised brow, although Ianikut wasn't sure if her raised brow was because of his attire or his wariness.

Getting comfortable on the trampoline, Ianikut reached for Aloha and pulled her closer to him. He didn't crush her to him like he wanted to because he instinctively knew she wasn't ready for his full passion. As it turned out to be, it wasn't his passion that was offensive to her.

"I know you're not rubbing that Duke paraphernalia against my person," she reprimanded.

"Wouldn't dream of it, but I believe that it's you rubbing your Carolina paraphernalia against me in hopes that my Duke vibe will rub off on you," he teased, knowing that would definitely get a rise out of her.

"Oh, please," she huffed. "In your damn dreams."

Sensing that she was gearing up for an all out cussing out, he switched topics. After all, he didn't really want to fight with her...unless it led to hot sex. "Since I've told you my full name, tell me how you came by your name."

Considering the way she got her name went a long way to calming her down. "My parents are freaks and conceived me en route to Hawaii."

"Good thing they didn't conceive you en route to Texas, because it would be odd calling you Howdy."

"You have no idea how grateful I am for that."

They talked until just before dawn, which was a first for Ianikut. Never had he spent a night just talking with a woman. He enjoyed listening to Aloha's excitable, fast-paced clip. Aloha possessed a wicked sense of humor and a unique way of viewing things.

Aloha had been asleep for half an hour, yet he found himself contemplating this woman that had him so intrigued. A woman of deep passions, she played hard, she worked hard, and she slept hard. One moment she was yelling at him for being such a man, then laughing at him, and the next she was sound asleep, which gave him time to look his fill at the woman who had captured his attention. He liked the way she talked, enjoyed the way she argued, and loved the way she said his name. He couldn't wait to hear her scream it out in passion.

It was obvious from her vehicle and home that she was well-off. And it was also obvious that regardless of her money, she was not a woman concerned with social strictures or a woman who was afraid to get her hands dirty, recalling how much work she and her evil twin had put into making Evil Twins -- the sports bar that she co-owned with Atlanta, successful. Pausing, he took in the subtle aura of don't-fuck-with-me that clung to her neon-encased but delectable body. Before succumbing to sleep, he laughed, considering the irony of them having his and hers don't-fuck-with-me auras.

Upon waking, Ianikut unfolded himself from the trampoline and stretched. He had enjoyed a surprisingly sound sleep in spite of spending an inordinate amount of time gazing at Aloha while she slept. To say that she was a deep sleeper was an understatement; it was more like she fell into a pseudocoma. She didn't move from the spot she fell asleep in. He'd spent half the night talking to her and the other half of the night rearranging her to ensure her comfort. Since she was significantly lighter than he, she'd moved whenever he'd moved. And since the trampoline was made to accommodate movement, she'd ended up in less than desirable positions for comfortable sleep. Ianikut decided that the next time he spent the night, they'd have to sleep in a bed because a trampoline wasn't conducive to making love to Aloha. He shushed his cock and strolled to the kitchen to make his hostess breakfast as a thank-you for sharing her home. It was a good thing his father was a trained chef, else Aloha would be stuck eating the cold cereal that fought the economy-size bags of Skittles for cabinet space. He wondered how she liked waffles.

Chapter Three

Ianikut wanted to dive into bed after a week of endless work. He was tired, hungry, and had had a raging hard-on since spending the night at Aloha's house. He needed to hear that sultry voice and watch her mouth as she said his name. Pressing play on his answering machine, he smiled in spite of his fatigue upon hearing Aloha's voice.

"Hi, Ianikut. It's Aloha. Give me a call when you get a chance."

Ianikut meant to return Aloha's calls, but he'd been swamped with family obligations, and considering who he was, his obligations were many. He, the Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich, was of the law, which meant that he was the total law -- police, attorney, judge, and executioner, if need be. Aside from his vampire job, he was considered the most likely heir of the vampire kingdom.

Though his position and status afforded him many privileges, it also required due diligence. The Aleksandroviches were not a family to be crossed. They bred alpha males and only alpha males. Since the great unification of vampire families, a male from their lineage occupied the kingship -- and for good reason. A proactive family, the Aleksandroviches didn't wait for trouble to come to them; they actively hunted it, judged it, and disposed of it.

Though a son of the most powerful ruler ever to lead, when Ianikut was installed in the circle of the law, it quickly became evident that he was a whole new breed of vampire. His intellect, strength, and will caused the whole vampire nation to take notice. The man was hands down the most brilliant tactician in the glorious and bloody history of the vampire nation. He stood out even amongst the alphas he fought beside. Few fucked with him, not even independent vampires, other paranormal beings, or his father -- the current king. A fair man, Ianikut didn't abuse his privilege, but he didn't leave any doubt why others tiptoed around him. His motto was: just one. Simply put, Ianikut was the kind of motherfucker other motherfuckers crossed countries to avoid.

Trouble in the vampire nation had been relatively nonexistent since he became a member of the law. Someone must've alerted the powers that be that he had free time and a smoking-hot woman he wanted to spend it with, because as soon as he thought about all of the trouble he could get into with Ms. Aloha Carrington, seven kinds of hell broke loose. It was as if Murphy's Law had ordered a hit out on him. Being the don't-fuck-with-me type of vampire he was, he'd quickly righted the chaos and looked forward to getting some rest -- so that he could play with Aloha.

He was tempted to call her right then, but he decided to listen to all of his messages first. Though it was late at night, anything could happen and he hated to shower if he was going to just get all bloodied whilst raining down vengeance. Apparently, Aloha had spent considerable time getting to know his outgoing message, for all of the messages were from her.

"Ianikut, dammit! If you don't call me back, I'm straight kicking your ass. Call me pronto or else!"

The next message was merely an amendment to her previous message. "Screw it; there is no 'or else.' Just freaking call me, dammit!"

He chuckled at the thought of the petite woman trying to kick his ass before wondering what was so pressing that she threatened him. Although she had only called three times, you'd think she'd called twenty. He figured that he could reach her now, being that it was almost midnight. Dialing her number, he undressed so that he could take a quick shower before falling into much needed sleep.

The phone barely finished its initial ring before it was snatched up. "Ianikut?!"

“Aloha? What’s wrong?” he asked as his body went on instant alert.

“What’s wrong is that I need some more of that waffle thing that you made. I’ve tried waffles every damn where, and none come close. I’ve been offered damn near every kind of waffle except the kind that you made.” Taking a deep breath, she listed them. Ianikut laughed so hard that he only caught the last part of the list. He was pleased that she had enjoyed his cooking.

“...waffles and chicken, which is a culinary experience that I still don’t understand. I almost allowed Atlanta to try her hand at making them, except the thought of having my stomach pumped nipped that in the bud. Anyway, you need to bring your fine ass over here bearing waffles.”

“You think I’m fine?”

“Pay attention, Ianikut, or you’ll be looking fine as the authorities draw a chalk outline around your body. I need waffles.”

“I’m glad that you enjoyed them.”

Aloha interrupted him. “To say that I enjoyed them is an outright lie. I enjoyed seeing you play the part of serving boy at the cookout. I enjoyed finishing Final Fantasy. I enjoyed getting a copy of a game before release date. *Ifucking loved* those waffle things. I’m fiending for those waffle things like artists who are featured on VH-1’s *Where Are They Now?* crave another hit. I had a sugar high for, like, three days after eating that. So when are you making more?”

“Can you make waffles?” he asked, laughing as he caught Aloha’s long-suffering sigh.

“Of course I can make waffles. What I can’t make is those waffle things that you made. If you try to give me a recipe for making them, I’ll give it to Atlanta and let her make them. Then I’ll personally bring them over to you, feed them to you, and induce vomiting when you look to be on the brink of death.”

“Just bear with me a minute,” he began. “Look in your refrigerator. I sliced extra fruit and stored it in one of those plastic bowls. There’s extra topping in one of those vacuum-sealed bags in your freezer. Didn’t you see it?” he asked, puzzled, since he had clearly marked and dated it.

“Why the hell would I need to look in my fridge, when my bags of Skittles are in the cabinet? Maybe if you had stuck a note on the TV referring me to the fridge, I would’ve known it was there. Thanks. Bye,” she said as she ended the call.

Okay, so she doesn’t use her refrigerator. He should’ve expected such a revelation from a woman who had little use for most things that didn’t play video games, CDs, DVDs, MPRs, or come with powerful engines. He smiled and headed for the shower.

Chapter Four

Aloha enjoyed every damn bite of the waffle thing, and the sugar high that it induced. That man might be a Duke fan, but he could cook his fine ass off. Each bite produced a whole-body orgasm. She briefly wondered if Ianikut had laced the topping with anything. The only way the dish could’ve been better was if Ianikut fed it to her...from his mouth while wearing nothing but a towel and copious baby oil, or if she

had eaten it directly off of his body. Thinking of licking her way up his body in between bites of food caused her to come. Dipping into the time reserved for gaming, she dropped off a thank-you card and some lunch from what she was told was his favorite eatery.

She would've loved to stay and dine with Ianikut, but she already had a lunch appointment with Atlanta. They had a standing lunch appointment on Wednesdays so that they could talk yang to each other. A good time was always had, and it served to mellow them out, as running their little empire took a lot of energy.

In between snippets of football and conversation about the current rankings on the chili, ribs, and chicken cook-off circuit, a disproportionate amount of Atlanta's conversation revolved around the man she referred to as "the Viking." He was the man that Atlanta had plowed into last December. Aloha remembered that incident because Atlanta had two broken fingers during football playoffs, which had been a collective pain in the ass for everyone involved. And then there was the fact that she continued mentioning the man. Apparently besides having the specs for a damn fine offensive tackle or defensive end, he was totally fucking hot.

Aloha and Atlanta had been best friends for many years, and in those years they had traveled on hundreds of trips, gotten into all kinds of shit, spent countless nights at each other's homes, and shared thousands of lunches, so Aloha knew when something was awry with her friend. A few questions here and there led Aloha to the realization that if Atlanta hadn't already fallen for the Viking, she was well on her way to it. Since Atlanta was her best friend, it was up to her to insure that the Viking was worthy and didn't fall into the psychopath category. She didn't dare ask Jack to verify that he was an okay guy, for fear that Jack would mortally wound him, which left only one other person to ask. Tucking into her lunch, she penciled in "see Ianikut" on her mental PDA while wondering if two days was enough of a heads-up for him.

* * * * *

Ianikut sat in his office, contemplating how smoothly the week had gone. Though he was glad that his week had been crisis-free, he wouldn't celebrate until the weekend officially began. *Five minutes and counting...three minutes and counting...two minutes and counting*. One minute and he could end his week. Forty-five seconds... The buzz of his intercom interrupted his countdown.

"Mr. Aleksandrovich?"

"Yes, Ms. Neal?"

"Ms. Aloha Carrington is here to see you, sir."

Aloha was here. She'd probably eaten her way through the waffles and needed more. Though whipping up another batch of his secret waffle recipe would only take a few minutes and allow him to spend quality time with her, his gut told him that she wasn't here because of the food, which left only one reason why she'd come to his office on a Friday afternoon. That reason was Atlanta. Oh, hell. Regardless of the fact that he felt the beginnings of a headache pondering what kind of hell Atlanta had raised, a part of him was still delirious to be seeing Aloha again. "Send her in, please."

He rose when the door opened. Aloha rushed in, a kaleidoscope of neon and braids. Damn, she was cute -- in a quirky, mad computer scientist sort of way.

Standing as she skidded to a halt in front of his desk, he greeted her. "Hello, Aloha. How might I help

you?"

"Yeah, hey," she threw out as a greeting before launching into her reason for separating herself from her computer and visiting him. "Ianikut, are you a vampire?"

"What!?" *What the hell?*

"Are. You. A. Vampire?" She enunciated slowly, as if his shock was due to an inability to comprehend her English rather than the content of her incredulous question.

Sighing, he asked. "What did Atlanta say about me this time?"

"What she always says about you, which is basically a variation of she doesn't know why you're one of her best friends, being that you're *soyou* -- which apparently involves a whole lot of peculiarities that begin with the letter *p* : pressed, prima donna, particular, prissy... The list goes on. You guys aren't fighting, are you?"

Ianikut knew that Aloha was concerned by the way she chewed her succulent bottom lip. Damn, she was attractive. Still, he had to answer her question. "Not yet."

"Well, it doesn't matter if you're fighting. You're not going to win."

"What makes you think I wouldn't win?"

Aloha closed her eyes and blew out a breath. "Seriously, Ianikut. You're a dude, and you went to Duke instead of Carolina."

"Which means what?" He asked partly out of curiosity and because Aloha was so tempting when riled up. She pouted beautifully with her arms crossed and tapping one of her feet, which were clad in Carolina blue Crocs sandals.

"It means that you should just graciously accept your pending loss. Anyway, are you a vampire?"

"Are you or Atlanta in trouble?"

"No, why do you ask?"

"You just barged in here and inquired if I was a vampire!"

"Yeah, there is that, but I didn't barge. Your executive secretary -- who seems quite nice -- showed me in. I'm surprised that you've managed to keep her, considering the rumors of your infamous temper."

"Aloha, humor me for a moment. What makes you think that I might be a vampire?"

"Ianikut, are you serious? Your family is obviously from Eastern Europe, which is the breeding ground of vampire families. Despite living in the South for several years, you're seriously pale. You could be your own exclusive shade of white on a color swatch: antique white, ecru, eggshell, Ianikut, ivory. Plus, you have that aura of weirdness about you. So, are you a vampire or not?"

"What do you mean, I have an aura of weirdness about me?"

Sighing, Aloha answered, "Ianikut, for real. Beneath the privileged man attire and the Duke pedigree, there is something different about you. Either you're on the dark side or you're some kind of paranormal creature."

"Where do you come up with the abridged version of paranormal history?"

"Reign."

"Oh, yes, Reign the conspiracy theorist and raving lunatic of human kind."

"Reign's a genius with a strand of lunatic running through her," Aloha cut in.

"Oh, I stand corrected."

"Like that's new. I understand why Atlanta describes you with all of those p-words. I have one to add: 'pass' -- as in, you could almost pass for human, if you weren't busy acting like a punky little Duke alum. Do you think that you can answer the question -- today?"

Punky little Duke alum? The fact that she threw in Duke assured Ianikut that whatever she'd said wasn't a compliment. "Are you seriously asking me if I'm a vampire?"

"Yeah. Are you going to answer me?"

"Might I ask why you need a vampire?" Man, she looked like she was on the verge of cussing him up one side and down the other, as Southerners are wont to say.

"Because I need someone with superhuman strength, and since I don't have access to a superhero, a vampire will have to do."

"Are you implying that vampires rank below superheroes?"

"What? Are you, like, an advocate for vampire honor?"

"If I was a vampire advocate, I'd have much to say about your complete lack of respect."

"Whatever..." she began.

Ianikut interrupted her before she could get further riled. "I'd think that you would fear me if, hypothetically, I was a vampire."

"No, because whether or not you're a vampire, you're still a gentleman. Actually, being a vampire would be particularly handy as it would counteract your numerous negatives."

"Let me get this straight. If I was vampire, you'd basically want to use my vampire gifts for your own personal gain?"

"Pretty much."

This woman... this small woman was completely serious. She stood before him as casual as you please, inquiring if he was a vampire in the same way one would inquire about the weather. "Well, then, I'm not a vampire."

“Fuck,” she muttered before turning to leave.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to find Jack. I told you that I need someone with superhuman strength.”

“Are you implying that Jack’s stronger than I am?”

“No, I’m just saying that Jack’s a whole lot more badass than you.”

“What makes you think that?”

“The same way you instinctively know that hell is hot,” she stated in disgust.

He caught her before she could get to the door. He casually plucked her up and sat her on his desk. When he picked her up, Ianikut felt the womanly curves concealed by her atrocious getup; however, he would have to appreciate the lush feel of her after he got to the bottom of this crisis. “What’s going on?”

“Atlantis seeing some guy, and I’m going to lunch with him next week to check him out.”

“And?”

“I think that she really likes him, and I need to make sure he’s not some crazy lunatic serial killer.”

“And if you discover that he is?”

“Oh, I’d have to kill him. Atlanta’s my best friend, and despite what people think, she’s quite delicate.”

Ianikut had to choke back his incredulity at that last bit of information. Atlanta could decimate a block of titanium steel...without trying. “Why did you want me to go?”

“Because you’re Atlanta’s second-best friend, and you’re a lot more intimidating than I am.”

“More intimidating than Jack?” his riled ego prompted him to ask.

“Not even in your wildest dreams, dude,” Aloha replied with absolutely zero regard for his fragile ego.

“Why didn’t you ask her first, then?”

“Because Jack doesn’t engage in fights; she engages in death. If this guy turns out to be bad, I need someone with patience so as to inflict a slow death.”

Ianikut was at a loss. Atlanta and her gaggle of friends were all lunatics. Still, the lunatic in front of him was cute. Insane, but cute...and he wanted her...and Atlanta was his adopted sister. Sighing in defeat, he inquired, “When’s lunch?”

“In two days,” she answered and flounced out without a look back.

Chapter Five

“Looks like you’ve had a hell of a day,” his oldest brother, Zhenechka, remarked when Ianikut entered the den where the rest of his brothers -- Antosha, Fyodor, Vyacheslav, and Tosya -- sprawled. He grabbed a bottle of water before settling his large frame into the nearest chair.

“She thinks I’m a vampire.”

“What!?” his brothers inquired in unison.

“She calmly strolled in -- well, actually, she barreled in and inquired if I was a vampire.”

“I guess we don’t have to ask who the ‘she’ is, since Aloha is all that you’ve spoken of these past weeks,” Zhenechka said.

Ianikut continued as if he hadn’t heard Zhenechka. “When I asked her why she thought that I might be a vampire, she informed me that I was so pale that I could be my own shade of white on a color swatch. Do you think I should utilize a tanning bed?”

Tosya, his youngest brother, remarked, “Like she’d be impressed when you emerged with second-degree burns all over your body.”

Ignoring his brothers, Ianikut said. “When I informed her that I wasn’t a vampire, she stalked off in a snit to find Jack -- who, I might add, is more badass than me, according to Aloha.” Relating the rest of the story, he wasn’t surprised when his brothers fell out in uncontrollable laughter.

“Max, we need to meet this Jack fellow.”

“That’s the thing -- Jack isn’t a fellow. She’s six foot two inches of easily pissed-off woman always on the verge of whipping someone’s ass.”

“Though I’m still intrigued with this Jack character, I think the primary issue at stake here is the fact that you’re pining after a woman who has no respect for you as a man or a vampire, which doesn’t bode well for your courtship,” Fyodor remarked.

“Who said that I’m going to court Aloha?”

“Who are you trying to kid, Max? From listening to your descriptions of the lady, I’m tempted to court her,” Antosha remarked.

“And if you become bored with living, try it,” Ianikut replied.

“So are you laying claim, Max?” Vyacheslav asked.

Ianikut didn’t answer, but he didn’t need to. The dangerous glow in his eyes warned his brothers that he had indeed laid claim to Aloha.

Serious matters were handled by seniority, and as Zhenechka was second oldest, it was he who spoke for all of Max’s brothers. “So how long before she tacks Aleksandrovich to the end of her name?”

* * * * *

Atlantawas already through her first dessert by the time Aloha arrived, dragging a reluctant Ianikut with her. She wondered what he, of all people, was doing there, before she smiled inwardly because operation “hook up her absolute best friend and her second-best friend” was proceeding quite nicely, although it was interfering with her personal plans with the hot-ass man seated beside her. Witnessing Steele and Imax eye each other with distrust, she shot both men a glance full of dire promises if they showed their asses, before she grabbed Aloha and dragged her neon-clad carcass outside.

Ianikut sat in the restaurant and engaged in a stare down with the blond man, who was obviously afflicted with some kind of mental illness if he had a romantic interest inAtlanta . Ianikut’s internal radar had gone off as soon as he entered the restaurant. There was a paranormal in attendance, and as soon as he’d seen the man withAtlanta , he’d bristled. The man wasn’t merely Viking; he was berserker. From the way he carried himself, Ianikut knew that regardless of how laid back the guy appeared, the berserker was close to the surface. The man possessed power and the potential to hurt bothAtlanta and Aloha, and that was something Ianikut just couldn’t allow, regardless of the fact that they were alums ofCarolina . Glaring at the blond, he awaited the opportunity to make his position clear. That opportunity came within seconds asAtlanta and Aloha excused themselves.

Though Ianikut had more than made his position clear, so did the berserker. Currently the score was vampire one, berserker one. The only thing that kept them from engaging in battle was the fact that they were so evenly matched that the only way for there to be a clear victor was for one of them to perish. That would be bad for many reasons; chief among them was the fact that they risked being outed as paranormals. Knowing humans, they’d attempt to capture them, and he didn’t think Aloha would date him if he killed a bunch of people, even if they did deserve it.

After making his position clear to the berserker, Ianikut thought that all would go smoothly, but of course, since the evil twins were involved, that was not to be. By the end of the lunch Ianikut was completely thrown for a loop. Not only had Aloha paid for his lunch, she had the nerve to remark upon the blond’s supposed handsomeness moments before threatening the berserker with an ass-whipping that she expected him, the lowly Duke alum to deliver. Aloha was unlike any woman he’d met before. Never had a date gone like the one he’d just experienced.

“I’ve never had a woman pay for my lunch.”

“Well, clearly you’ve been bamboozled, led astray...” she began.

“I’m a well-read man; therefore I get the Malcolm X reference. But that’s not the point. You aren’t supposed to pay when we go out.”

“Ianikut, I asked you out.”

“It doesn’t matter. It simply does something to my manliness to have a woman pay. How about tonight I take you out to dinner?”

“You don’t have to.”

“Oh, but I very much want to. I insist.”

“You can’t just insist,” she said with a hand on her curvy hip. Obviously she had no idea how provocative her stance was. Regardless of the neon shirt, she made him hard...and dangerously possessive.

Grabbing her waist, he yanked her to him and devoured that luscious mouth of hers until he felt her surrender to his passion. When he pulled back from the kiss, both of them were breathing raggedly, and he was almost beyond reason. Releasing her, he expected her to argue so he gave her something to argue about.

“Be ready at eight p.m. I’m coming for you, and you *will* have dinner with me. I’m the man, so *I* will be driving *you*. I’m paying for dinner, and *I* will kiss you good night.”

Aloha was stunned. How dare this motherfucker? It did not matter that Ianikut was all of her favorite things in one delicious package. She was a grown damn woman. Yep, a grown damn woman who could barely stand on her own after being kissed so well she came. She should say something about his handling of her, and she would say something...in a minute or ten. First, she needed to stop her voice from emitting those moans. Then, she needed to convince her fingers to cease tunneling through his decadent locks. *Damn, the man has thick, gorgeous hair*, she thought as she dragged in the scent of this man. Her whole body went supernova and she literally climbed the man to get closer. Grinding into him, she dug her nails into his back and threw her head back in ecstasy.

Before she came down from her pleasure, Ianikut heaped on more. Relinquishing her lips, he paused and licked a path down her throat. He didn’t give her time to come down from her high before capturing her lips again. She was going to tell him off and good...but first she had to regain her voice, and her control. And it would help if she had on another pair of panties because the ones she had on were filled with her cum.

Both of them were breathing hard when he finally pulled back. Luckily, he held onto her because she couldn’t stand on her own. Damn, she’d basically dry-humped him in public. She felt like such a slut, but damn her pussy felt so good.

“Ianikut,” she whispered.

“Shh, Aloha. Don’t move anymore or say anything else. Please.”

Looking up at him, she noted that not only did he look like a walking sexual fantasy come true, but he also looked on edge. She smiled knowing that she wasn’t the only one who’d lost control for a minute. Though she still had something to say about how he handled her, she’d bring it up later because the only thing she wanted to do in this moment was enjoy the orgasm he’d just wrung from her core. Leaning her head against his rock hard chest, she closed her eyes and for the first time in a long time enjoyed the simple pleasure of a man holding her.

It was a few minutes before either of them had the will to do more than hold each other. Pulling apart, he took her hand and walked her to the driver’s side. She was about to get in when she heard his chuckle.

“Obviously, Carolina boys don’t kiss like Duke men.” He smirked. “I know that you may have trouble recalling the last few minutes after sampling the touch of a real man, but remember you are to be ready at eight p.m. so that I can take you on a proper date.”

Infuriated, she so couldn’t let that slide. Rubbing up against him, she grabbed his Adam’s apple and applied pressure.

“Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich, I know you aren’t trying to tell me what to do.” Saying her piece, she slid behind the wheel. When Ianikut got in, she continued her rant. “I might consider going to dinner with

you, if you ask me properly. I don't mind you paying if you are the one to invite me to dinner, and I may even allow you to drive. I will not, however, ever allow you to treat me with disrespect. Think on that while you're over there trying to catch your breath."

Aloha suspected that Ianikut spent the short ride alternately seething and plotting revenge, but she couldn't be bothered to care. Though Ianikut might've been mad, he was also looking too damn fine with those glorious loose locks and those succulent lips swollen from *her* kisses. Regardless of how mad he might be, she wasn't worried about him hurting her. If he gave her lip, she'd simply march off to Jack or Reign and find methods that would shut him up. Then again, it might be better to march off to Zuri and find methods that would make him come so hard he went unconscious.

When they arrived back at Ianikut's building, Aloha cut the engine and calmly waited for him to say his piece. Ianikut was damn intelligent. Hey, he did attend Duke, and it was a school in the Atlantic Coast Conference, and the ACC didn't boast scrub academic institutions or scrub basketball teams. Despite his intellect, Ianikut was still a man and after having an entire half an hour to get over it -- he would use that time to seethe and come up with something to say -- which would most likely be something completely asinine. She almost wished that he'd say something stupid so she'd have an excuse to fuck him into silence.

"Where would you like to have dinner tonight?"

What the fuck?! Ianikut still wanted to take her out? "You still want to have dinner with me?"

"I did say that. Although you graduated from Carolina, I thought that even a Carolina alum could understand simple statements."

Aloha didn't appreciate Ianikut's dig against her alma mater but she managed to keep the disgust out of her voice when she replied. "And I thought a Duke alum should know when a lady isn't impressed."

"I've never happened across a woman who wasn't impressed by me."

And I can see why, her subconscious responded, while her eyes indulged in his beauty. Ianikut was one fine ass man regardless of the fact that he was a Duke alum. She had to stop eating him up with her eyes before her cum overflowed her panties and trickled down her legs. Thoughts of Ianikut got her off quicker than any porn movie ever made. Arching an eyebrow and blowing out a breath, Aloha remarked, "You sound so sure to be so wrong."

"There are two things that I'm certain of. The first is that Duke basketball is superior to Carolina basketball and the second thing that I'm sure of is that you want me. You're a woman, and I have it on good authority that I'm hot -- even for a Duke fan."

"Ianikut, you're such an ass..."

"Perhaps, but the real question is will you draw blood while grabbing my ass for leverage when I make love to you?"

Aloha stopped breathing for a moment, imagining holding on to all of that smoking hot man. Damn, she wanted Ianikut. She'd make love to him later, but right now, she wanted to straight up fuck him. In return, she wanted him to fuck her so hard that she could only lie there and take it. The diva in her

wanted him to wear permanent scratches as a testimony of how much he had pleased her. Yeah, she wanted that; she needed that, but she couldn't let him know that he had such dominion over her. "Whatever, Ianikut. As I was saying earlier -- you're such an ass."

"But that doesn't change the fact that you want me." Ianikut smirked in that annoying way that Duke fans do. "So where would you like to eat?"

Trust Ianikut to be difficult. No wonder he and Atlanta were in a constant state of verbal warfare. "Some place where I don't have to dress up."

"How about dinner at my house?"

"How about dinner at my house instead? You bring the dinner."

"Can't cook?" he taunted.

"Oh, I can cook; I just cook better out of the kitchen," she returned. *Ka-pow. Take that*, her ego chimed in.

"By insisting that we eat at your house you're depriving me of all of the privileges that I'm due as a dominant male."

Oh damn, she got so hot envisioning Ianikut dominating her. It took every effort not to moan at that fantasy. "If you were paying attention, you'd realize that I'm leaving idiocy to you. Is that male enough for you?"

"I don't get to see you in a dress."

No but keep being such tempting eye candy and you might get to see me out of a dress right before you see stars after I fuck you insensible. "You haven't earned the right to see me in a dress yet."

"I don't get to drive you anywhere."

"Ianikut, are you serious? Where the hell are you so anxious to drive me that I can't drive myself?"

Ianikut gently cupped her face and placed a kiss on her temple before whispering in her ear. "To a screaming orgasm, *angel moya*."

Upon hearing Ianikut's declaration the cream overflowed. *Oh damn*, he was lucky it was broad daylight and she had some home training, else Ianikut would've found himself with her fist embedded in his glorious silky mane right before getting a face full of her pussy. It took everything she had to form words when all she wanted to do was have him fuck her so she could scream out her pleasure. "Well be that as it may, you'll have to wait until later to drive me to that screaming orgasm and until tonight to bring me dinner."

Chapter Six

Aloha took considerable pains with her appearance, knowing that Ianikut was spending the evening with

her on a real date. He was hot -- even for a Duke fan. Since he had only seen her in various shades of neon, she decided to surprise him and do a lighter neon. In her book, neons were the only colors worthy of her wardrobe. Smiling, she dressed in delicate ivory lingerie and topped it with a sherbet orange v-neck, a matching sarong, and threw on some low-heeled sandals.

Her sense of fairness spurred her to do something nice for Ianikut, since he was providing the dinner. She trekked to Jeanie's Lounge -- the official bookstore of the Posse -- and researched Russian traditions. Spotting a tome detailing the peculiarities of Southerners, she decided it was just what Ianikut needed, even though she planned another gift for the fine ass Russian. He might be a Duke fan and wealthy as all get out, but she wouldn't treat him with any less respect than she did anyone else. And she damn sure wasn't about to be one of those women who used a man for his money.

* * * * *

Once again Ianikut was sitting in the driveway of one of the Posse members. At least this time he didn't have to metaphorically gird his loins -- as much. Though he was sure Aloha would rag on him, he was reasonably sure that the beautiful woman wouldn't accidentally kill him, unlike his nemesis Atlanta. Still, he was somewhat edgy because he didn't want to mess this up. Aloha did something to him -- without even trying.

Considering that the date was taking place at Aloha's house and taking into account her penchant for wearing neon, Ianikut decided on his usual attire: dark dress slacks and crisp white collarless shirt. Being a gentleman, he stopped en route to purchase a gift for his reluctant date. He briefly considered stopping by the florist before settling on a toy store where he was confident that he could choose something that wouldn't require Aloha's attention to remain alive. Smiling at his selection, he exited his Bentley and walked to the door.

Answering the door, Aloha smiled at Ianikut's reaction.

"You're wearing a skirt."

"I am. And as always, you look impeccable."

"But of course. Would you expect anything less from a man such as myself?" he joked.

"I'm glad to see that your ego hasn't suffered any damage. Tonight, you're impeccably dressed for my benefit, so get over your shock at how cute I am and come feed me. That way you can at the very least live up to the great part of your name."

Oh, damn. If only she knew the images he had conjured up when she demanded that he feed her. He had a pant full of cock he wanted to feed her -- all week long. Groaning, he headed for her kitchen before she saw the glow in his eyes and his fangs.

Washing his hands, Ianikut poured her a flute of cranberry juice and shooed her to her play room with an admonition to stay in there until he called her. Softly kissing her temple, he inhaled her womanly scent and traipsed off to her kitchen knowing that she didn't mind him taking it over as she only had a kitchen because it came with her house.

Ianikut rolled up his sleeves and set the ambiance he was going for. He had pulled out all stops, bringing

a tablecloth, china, crystal, and cutlery, and more importantly, dinner. But the piece de resistance was the centerpiece, which consisted of a mixed arrangement of Skittles and roses. Ianikut laughed at the irony that even her favorite candy was borderline neon. Damn, his woman had no tastes for the finer things in life unless they possessed engines or processors. Still, he wanted her anyway.

As uncultured as she was, Aloha was still amazed and appreciative of Ianikut's efforts. After seating her and brushing her knuckles with his lips, the evening just got better and better. She smiled, eyeing the centerpiece. He had a good eye -- if one overlooked his penchant for wearing Duke trappings. The food was exquisite from the appetizer down to the dessert. Even the music, which she guessed to be Russian classical, was palatable, although she would've chosen something from the Grand Theft Auto San Andreas video game box set.

The conversation was divine. They both possessed kickass debate skills, but they agreed on nothing. Although it wasn't really a problem because she just wanted to hear him talk, even though his ridiculous positions had her metaphorically rolling her eyes. Regardless of him being wrong about pretty much everything, it was a heady experience. His normal speaking voice sent shivers down her spine but hearing his voice infused with passion tripped every damn one of her spots. She could learn to love him if she wasn't careful. *Would that be such a bad thing*, her subconscious inquired?

After sharing the duty of cleaning up their mess, Ianikut and Aloha retreated to her sitting room. Before seating her, Ianikut stilled her progress and brought her flush against his chest. Aloha gasped and then moaned at the intimate contact. *Fuck me. Fuck me. Fuck me*, her body screamed.

"I must beg your forgiveness," he whispered.

"For what?" she asked softly, confused because he had been the epitome of a gentleman. *Damn him*, her pussy exclaimed in frustration.

"I failed to tell you how beautiful you are," he replied just as softly.

Aloha's heart stuttered, and she emitted a soft gasp. "You don't have to be forgiven for that."

"Yes, I do. A man should always let a woman know that she's beautiful."

Aloha knew who and what she was...and what she was not. She knew that she was intelligent as hell, had a great sense of humor, and could've been the Madden champion every year had she bothered to enter the tourneys. Consequently, she also knew that she wasn't good at concealing disgust or boredom, was a certified weirdo, and although attractive, she wasn't beautiful. She had a smoking hot intellect and a great ass, but that didn't make her beautiful. "What if she's not beautiful?" she asked softly.

"All women are beautiful as they are the bearers of life. Sometimes, it just takes seasoned eyes or the right man to see and appreciate a woman's beauty."

If Aloha was the weeping type, she would've already cried rivers, but she wasn't, so only a few tears escaped. "Thank you, Ianikut. And if I wasn't so shallow, I'd tell you something equally beautiful. Since however, I am shallow, I'll merely say that you're one fine-ass man -- and it only takes a glance to see that and a pulse to appreciate it."

Aloha wasn't surprised that she was physically attracted to Ianikut, but she was surprised to discover

that she was mentally and emotionally attracted to the big Russian. In spite of being a Duke alum, Ianikut was sneaking in to the cold spaces in her heart. She decided that now was the perfect time to pull out her surprise. Ordering him to stay put, she prepared tea. Keeping in line with her weird sense of humor, she'd purchased the most absurd set of teacups she could find along with the assortment of teas. She laughed her ass off considering how those cups would look next to what she was sure was a ridiculously expensive tea set from the Lomonosov Porcelain Factory. The cups might not reflect high culture, but she was sure that he would grimace whenever drinking from the neon-colored cups.

* * * * *

Aloha secured a special part in Ianikut's heart when she walked into the room bearing a tray that held all of the items that were present at any Russian tea party worth its name, including bowls of honey and jam. He would later learn how highly she thought of him when he discovered that not only did she despise both condiments, but the idea of tea fixed any way other than sweet and iced was anathema to a Southerner such as herself. Taking the chair next to Ianikut, Aloha informed him, "This concludes my knowledge of Russian tea parties. Forgive me if I've made some hideous *faux pas*."

"Angel, even if you made a hideous *faux pas*, there would be nothing to forgive. The fact that you troubled yourself to do something special for me means more to me than you can know. I would be more than happy to instruct you on any aspect of Russian culture you wish to learn about -- especially Russian men."

"I know all about Russian men. I did watch *Rocky IV*, although your accent isn't as good as Ivan Drago's," she teased. "How about I instruct you on how not to piss off Southern black women?"

"Why Southern black women in particular?"

"Well, I figure with your penchant for pissing people off, if you learn to refrain from pissing off Southern black women, three major bases are covered: women, Black Americans, and Southerners."

"Thanks."

"Consider it a life-saving gesture. For some reason the Posse likes you and I have the feeling that they'd be a little put out if someone killed you. I mean Reign would gladly exact revenge in your name, but still, it wouldn't be as much fun as the drawn out torture we have planned for you."

"So the Posse likes me, but do *you* like me?" he whispered.

"Do you like me?"

"I asked you first."

"Luckily, I'm fluent in man. Answering my question with a question means that you're intimidated by me."

"I will not even dignify that with a response."

"Whatever. Why are you here?"

"Because you're allowing it."

“Mmm hmm.” She rolled her eyes.

“I can see that I shall have to convince you.”

“Why bother? Ianikut, you know that I’m attracted to you. You may want to fuck me, but...”

Ianikut wasn’t sure what happened but before she could finish that ridiculous sentence, Aloha was on her back. Growling low in his throat, he admonished her. “There is no may about it, angel. I want you but not just for tonight. I don’t know what kind of men litter your past, but don’t confuse me with any of those fucks. And don’t confuse any of those fucks with men.”

“How can you be so sure they weren’t men?”

“Because if you’d been with a real man, you’d know that your power as a woman rivaled your intellect, and you’d be a lot more arrogant.”

“Oh.”

“I’m a virile man and I’ve had many beautiful women. Every one of them catered to my pleasure. Everything about them was a calculated move to turn me on. Their dress, their gestures, their voice, even the very content of their conversation was chosen to please me. You on the other hand could fucking care less about what pleases me. Yet, I not only want you, but I crave you. I crave you, even though you wear clothes that could cause seizures; even though most of your gestures bespoke your annoyance at something I’ve said or not done; even though your speech is filled with criticisms. Regardless of all that, today, I almost lost control. It took everything I had to let you leave that parking lot without loving you.”

Ianikut looked down at his angel and knew that she was in shock, even though her eyes were closed. He’d heard her gasp midway through his tirade. Her chest heaved from her erratic breathing, her heart beat fast, and she’d gone soft under him. His angel had no idea what she did to him, how much control she had, how crazy she could drive him if she just pushed a little bit. He wanted her and he knew from her response that she wanted him. Still, he wanted, needed, just had to see her want in her eyes.

“Look at me, angel moya,” he instructed.

Ianikut was pleased to see the mix of desire and pleasure in her eyes, but he wasn’t pleased to witness her tears. A woman’s tears moved him as nothing else did. He threw a Carolina dig in order to tone down the heady emotion in the room as he kissed her tears away. “You know there are other shades of blue,” he said while pointedly looking at the décor.

“Yeah, but what’s the point of that? Carolina blue is even one of God’s favorite colors.”

“Being Russian Orthodox, I may not have had the same church experience as you; however, I believe we read from the same book and I don’t recall reading that anywhere in scripture.”

“It’s not in the text. It’s in creation. Notice that the sky is Carolina blue,” she smiled.

Damn, he hated that line about the sky being Carolina blue. Like the line in the movie *Coming to America*, that was their (Carolina fans) one. “I won’t even dignify that assertion with a response,” he said instead of the snort of disbelief that was on the tip of his tongue.

“Luckily that categorical fact doesn’t need your approval to be true.”

“So beautiful yet so delusional,” he joked as he rolled onto his back and pulled her atop him.

“Tanikut,” she gasped.

“Hush, angel. The floor is too hard for you.”

“We could do something wild and, oh I don’t know, sit on the couch.”

“We could, but I’m already comfortable.”

“The hard floor is comfortable?”

“No, angel moya. Your soft body is.” He distracted her with a question before she decided to voice an objection. “Since you seem to like Russian culture, how did you like the music?”

“It was okay. I’m just glad you didn’t have audio of Dostoyevsky,” she joked. “Although I could stand Tolstoy if it was *The Kingdom of God*.”

“If you like Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God* then perhaps you should give Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov* a read as it discusses issues of faith.”

“But doesn’t it lose something in the Russian-to-English translation?”

“Hmm, perhaps.”

“Well then perhaps you should read it to me in Russian.”

“Are you fluent in Russian?”

“Not yet, but perhaps one day...” she trailed off.

“It takes years to become fluent in Russian. Many people consider it to be a difficult language.”

“Well then I guess that you’ll have to stick around for a few years.”

“I think I might,” he replied as he pulled her closer. Though he desperately wanted to fuck her, he knew that he had to take his time with her. He contented himself with kisses.

“I didn’t serve you desert,” he said as they came up for air.

“What you’re serving right now is better than any dessert I’ve ever had,” she admitted.

“You must not say such things, angel moya.”

“Why not? It’s the truth.”

“I know that you speak the truth and if I wasn’t a gentleman, you’d discover yourself stuffed full of hard Russian cock.”

“Oh, goodness. Why do you have to be such a gentlemen right this second?”

Rolling over and gracefully rising to his feet, he dusted himself off before reaching down and pulling her up. Taking her chin and tilting her face up, he answered, "Because you're a lady, but don't pout. When we know each other better, I'll show you the beast that lurks under the gentleman in me."

"And I will tame it," she threw back as she walked him to the door.

He stopped and looked directly in her eyes before responding to her taunt. "Yes, you will tame the beast," he whispered in between kisses. "And I shall enjoy every second of it." With a final lingering kiss, he walked out, hoping that she liked the gift that he left. He chuckled, wondering how long it'd take her to discover it.

* * * * *

Other than the time she shared a home with Atlanta, Aloha had pretty much lived by herself since leaving home for college. She filled her life with fun and how could she not, having Atlanta as a best friend. Dividing her time between beating the high score on video games and building up Evil Twins, she didn't have time to be lonely. It wasn't unusual for her to go ghost for weeks at a time, and she'd never felt the lack of human company...until now. Until Ianikut. While she might not be filled with two hundred fifty pounds of hot Russian male, she felt his presence in her home. He'd slept on her trampoline. He'd done stuff in her kitchen. His absence left an empty space that only he could fill. She liked her some Ianikut.

Missing him already, she did what she always did when she had stuff to work out in her head. She got her game on. Cutting on her PlayStation 3, she played a quarter of a season of Madden before she was settled enough to chance sleep. Cutting off the lights, she headed for the bedroom and stopped in shock. Ianikut left her more than material for orgasm-inducing fantasy. He left her a gift. Sitting on her bed was a basket with two teddy bears nestled inside. One bear sported a Carolina onesie and the other a Duke onesie. She loved it and decided that right now would be a damn good time to tell him -- completely oblivious that it was four in the morning.

The phone rang five times, before Ianikut picked up.

"What took you so long to pick up?"

"Aloha?"

"Greetings to you, too, Ianikut. Thank you."

"You're welcome, angel moya, but couldn't you have told me at a more appropriate time?"

"Bite me, Ianikut. There is no inappropriate time to say thank you, so shut up and allow me to do so."

"Did you just cuss me out?"

"No, but I can. Now stop interrupting me," she said as she launched into a lengthy dissertation on just how much she loved the gift.

"I'm glad that you enjoyed the gift, but why are you still awake?"

"Because I just got sleepy, but now I'm all excited again, so I'll probably go logon and play Spider Solitaire for a little bit."

“That’s just wrong.”

“There’s nothing wrong with Spider Solitaire. How can you say that? Obviously you’re evil.”

“Angel, it’s four a.m.”

“And your point is what?”

“The only reason you should be up at this hour is if you’re in the throes of an orgasm.”

“Oh. My. Damn. Now my panties are wet.”

“Good, because my cock went hard as soon as I heard your voice.”

“Ianikut,” she groaned.

“Angel?”

“I hate you.”

“But you still want me, don’t you?”

“I’m hanging up, now.”

“Are you going to get yourself off?”

“No, I’m going to shower and plot revenge against you.”

“Well, make sure it’s my name that you scream as you come, angel moya. I’m a jealous man.”

She couldn’t stop the cum from sliding down her thighs. Ianikut was such a bastard. A hot one with a voice that made her come, but a bastard nonetheless.

Chapter Seven

Ianikut once again fantasized about being the object of Aloha’s undivided adoration instead of her undivided scorn. A little over two weeks had passed since their date. With it being mid-May, everything bloomed, love was in the air, and he was not unaffected. The quirky and colorful woman was constantly on his mind. He spent many an hour concocting methods to make her scream his name. The ringing of the phone interrupted his musings. Before he got a chance to answer, his ear was filled with the voice of his nemesis.

“Imax, I need a favor.”

“You need a favor from the prissy little Duke fan?” He asked in a snit since the phone had interrupted the best part of his fantasy.

“Ianikut, I don’t have time to give you a proper cussing out right now, so I’ll take a rain check on that

side order of bitchiness you're trying to give me. Can you go and check on Aloha? She isn't feeling well, which means she's probably taking even less care of herself than she normally does. I'm sure she hasn't seen a doctor, much less had a decent meal."

Ianikut went still for he knew from experience that whenever Atlanta spoke to him without nicking his name the situation was critical. What was wrong with Aloha? Ianikut hid his concern behind a façade of calm. "Should I take her to the ER?"

"Nah, as long as she looks remotely alive leave her be. On the other hand, if she looks like walking death by all means throw her ass into your Bentley, take her to the ER, and call Silana en route."

"So if she looks 'remotely alive,' what do you want me to do?"

"Just get her to eat some food."

"What does she like to eat?"

"Stop by Dréa's, tell her you're there to pick up an order for Aloha, and she'll fix you up. I'll pay you back."

"No need."

"Yes, need. I've never been a kept woman and I'm not about to start now."

"As always you find a way to be difficult for no damn reason. It's not even for you."

"Whatever. I'm still paying you back...and Imax?"

Feeling her hesitation, he answered. "Yes?"

"Don't get on Aloha's nerves. Just take her the food and act as if you don't notice that she's not well."

"I'm not supposed to notice that she's ill?"

"No, she doesn't like anyone to see her vulnerable."

"That's insane."

"Yeah, well insane is what Aloha does best. Just tell her that I told you to drop the food by. While you're there, trot out that stellar personality of yours and keep her company for a bit."

"I'm purposely choosing to ignore that dig about my personality for now. If I keep her company, how am I supposed to not notice that she's unwell?"

"I'm purposely ignoring the fact that you think that you have a personality so stop being an ass, Imax. It doesn't become you. Will you do it because the only reason that I'm asking you is because I absolutely have to deal with a situation."

"And is that situation's name, Steele?"

"No, but speaking of Steele, he's quite fond of Aloha. If you're too busy, I can call Steele and ask him

to check on her.”

Everything within him went still. “Only do that if things aren’t going well between you and Steele because if I catch any man at my woman’s home the very least they should expect is an ass-whipping.”

“So you’re going to see about her?”

“You know that I will.”

“Thanks. Imax, I know you’re busy, and that sometimes you get tired of my many demands, but I trust you with Aloha.”

Ianikut almost gasped upon hearing Atlanta’s admission. He knew that she was what Southerners call ‘right particular’ about her best friend. “Atlanta, I’m glad that you trust me enough to ask. I will do nothing to violate that trust.”

Hearing what he didn’t say, Atlanta responded, “I know and I love you too, Imax. Now go take care of our girl.”

“I will,” he fervently declared. *Forever*, his heart threw in.

* * * * *

Ring the doorbell, Ianikut was surprised to see the state that his angel was in. Only his damnably quick reflexes allowed him to catch her before she fell to the floor, while maintaining a grip on the food. *What the hell was wrong with her?*

After lifting her into his arms, he surveyed the surroundings. His keen senses told him that Aloha hadn’t been up and about. The electronics section was silent; all the screens black and even her favorite sleeping place looked remarkably untouched.

“Aloha, where did you sleep?”

“Bedroom...the trampoline moves, and all of my two thousand parts hurt when I move about.”

If she slept in the bedroom she was definitely hurting. “When was the last time that you ate?” He settled her into bed.

“Dunno. Ianikut, stop talking to me. Even listening causes stuff to hurt.”

Laying her gently upon the bed, he ignored her last demand and asked, “What did you do to yourself?”

“I tripped down the two stairs that lead to my baby’s resting place.”

Knowing that her baby was her Ferrari, he asked, “You fell on your car?”

“Don’t ask asinine questions. I made a vow to protect my baby and she made a vow to serve me in return.”

“Is anything broken?”

“Nah, everything just hurts, but it might’ve been worse if I’d hurt my car. I might’ve chipped her paint and she’s the color of candied apples.”

“How long have you been laid up?”

“Two days.”

“You’ve been in bed for two days?”

“Yeah, but I still have four more days to create the virtual universe,” she teased.

“You haven’t eaten, have you? Have you even played video games?”

“Ianikut, leave me alone. I know that Atlanta sent you over here to check on me. So now that you’ve checked, you may go,” she winced in obvious pain.

“Angel moya, I’m sorry. I’m just concerned,” he said as he lay down with Aloha.

“What are you doing?”

“Keeping you safe,” he said as he settled his considerable form next to his petite angel.

“What will people say?”

“You mean about me being in your bed for the second time in only four or five meetings?”

“Yeah, that. Even though I want you, I’m not a slut, Ianikut.”

“I wouldn’t be here if I thought you were.”

“Are you a slut? Because I don’t need a man who has slept his way across the universe.”

Not sure how he should respond to her question, he opted for plain truth. “I’ve enjoyed the bodies of many women, angel moya, but I’m finicky in my choice of partners. Will you hold my past against me?”

“Will you hold *my* past against me? Though I too am finicky in my choice of partners, I’ve had sexual partners.”

Imagining another man enjoying the pleasures of her delectable body wasn’t something that Ianikut wanted to consider. It was so much easier when women remained chaste and saved their virginity for their husbands. Men didn’t have to consider things such as how they stacked up in the size or pleasure departments. Still, he was *the* Ianikut Maksim and he was more than sure of his ability to pleasure this woman -- his angel.

“No, I won’t hold it against you but I’ll make you forget every damn man that came before me.”

“You seem so serious, Ianikut.”

“I can be no other way when it comes to something that I crave so badly.”

“Since you admitted craving me, I’m going to ignore the fact that you referred to me as a something.”

“You can’t be mad because you’re not just any something, but *my* something. Now rest, since you won’t eat any of the food that I brought for you.”

“I’m only resting because I feel like it -- not because you suggested it.”

Ianikut answered, after he stopped chuckling, “I don’t suggest, angel moya.”

* * * * *

Aloha wasn’t one of those come slowly awake people. Normally, she awoke all at once and jumped out of bed in pursuit of adventure and sugar. But then, she didn’t normally find herself waking atop six foot seven inches, two hundred fifty pounds of smoking hot man. Damn, she could feel Ianikut’s ridges of muscle. The man was rock hard and cut, and he was making her wet. Embarrassed by her reaction, she was about to jump off of him, when strong hands stayed her hips and his rumbling baritone damn near stopped her thought processes.

“Careful, angel moya. You’re still injured...and you have a handful of my hair.”

Aloha was so caught up in being atop him that she hadn’t realized that she had a handful of his locks in her hand. Damn, the man had beautiful hair. Biting her lip, she reluctantly released it. She was about to roll off of him when he sat up and carefully set her on the floor. “Thanks,” she mumbled.

Stretching, she realized that even though she was still sore, she was well rested and famished.

Ianikut interrupted her musings. “How do you feel, angel?”

“Better. I can’t believe that I slept so well.”

“That’s because you slept next to me.”

“Get over yourself. Are you leaving now?”

“Are you fully recuperated?”

Blowing out a frustrated breath, she pouted. “Why do you insist on being an ass?”

“Why is it that I’m always something unpleasant whenever I don’t agree with you?”

“Genetics?”

“No, angel moya. It’s genetics that makes me unconquered and great. It’s simply your bias that makes you act so mean toward me.”

“Bias implies prejudice. I’m not prejudiced. I’m simply honest and let you know that despite all of your fineness that the world doesn’t revolve around you.”

“If you’re not biased, then you must be scared of me.”

“Ianikut, I’m so not scared of you that it isn’t even funny.”

“Really?”

Aloha should’ve paid attention to the careless way he asked that, but no, she was too full of indignation to heed the warning he was tossing out. “Yeah, really,” she said with a hand on her hip and sass in her voice.

Aloha didn’t back up even when she saw Ianikut rise and stalk toward her. They both knew that he wouldn’t ever harm her. She watched as he reached out and lightly caressed her. Involuntarily, she shuddered.

“If you’re not scared of me, then why do you tremble when I touch you? Why does your heart beat faster when I approach you?” he whispered in her ear before lightly nipping her earlobe.

Damn, that motherfucker had her, and he knew it. Still, she wasn’t going to admit it. “Because.”

“Because what, angel moya?” he whispered as he gently pulled her slight form against him and massaged her back.

“I don’t know. Stop talking to me and keep rubbing my back,” she demanded as she dug her nails into his forearms. She was startled when she felt Ianikut lift her and place her facedown on the bed. Purrs fell from her lips before she could muster a single protest. Ianikut had magic hands and lips, and he knew how to use them. Laying his head on her back, he lifted the back of her shirt and traced imaginary patterns with his tongue, kissed her hurts better, and gently caressed her until she went completely soft. Kissing his way up her spine, he pulled her to him and tucked his head into her shoulder. Turning over, she entwined her fingers with his and snuggled into his chest, enjoying his strength and gentleness. Though she was comfortable, she was also scared that she was enjoying Ianikut’s presence too much.

“Ianikut, I feel fine now,” she began but ceased talking when he shot her a mean look. Aloha decided that she didn’t care for that look one bit.

“Yes, angel, you do feel fine, and I cannot wait until you are fully healed so that I can feel the rest of you.”

“Yeah, but I’m just saying that you can go now.”

“I know what you’re saying, and I’m ignoring it. You aren’t well, and I’m not leaving you to your own devices when you could further injure yourself.”

“Ianikut, I’m not dying. There’s no reason for you to stay while I recuperate. Thanks to you, I now have enough food to feed a family of five for two weeks. I think that I can manage on my own, although I appreciate your willingness to babysit me.”

“I’m sure that you could manage on your own, but it’s not going to happen. You don’t even have the strength to turn on your game,” he spat and nodded toward her dormant X-Box 360. “Now what you’re going to do is lie quietly while I get your dinner together. Then you are -- emphasis on the word ‘are’ -- going to eat. Knowing your affinity for Skittles, that’s all you’ve consumed for the last few days. After that you’re going back to bed to rest.”

“Ianikut, you aren’t my grandmother, my mother, or my father so you can’t tell me what to do!”

“You’re right I’m not your grandmother because if I were, I would’ve hauled your ass to the doctor

when your little accident occurred. And if I were your father, I would've married you off a long time ago to a man who was man enough to handle you. You need a man who can look into those obsidian eyes and tell you no."

"Let me know when you find a man that you think can*make* me do any damn thing," she challenged as she very carefully rose from the bed.

* * * * *

Equally incensed, Ianikut edged closer to his angel, taking note that she held her ground. Those who had even an inkling of the power that was an inherent part of him and the danger that lurked just below the surface would've retreated a few steps, but not her. He could appreciate that kind of valor in a man but witnessing that fearlessness in her only served to piss off both him and the beast. Dammit, not only was she injured, but she was a woman. More importantly, she was*this* woman.

Ianikut stalked her and gently grabbed her around the waist before lifting her up to his eye level. He paid no heed to her indignant gasp as he informed her, "Look no further, Aloha. I'm that man. Now that you have found me, what will you do with me?" He smirked.

He smirked because he could...and because he knew that it would piss her off. A pissed off Aloha was an intensely beautiful Aloha. Those intelligent eyes flashed caveats and those succulent lips delivered threats that only served to turn him on. Visions of her letting go of that temper and control taunted him. She was simply glorious in her passion.

Ianikut watched various emotions play across her beautiful visage. While other women might sigh and go soft at his display of dominance, he had a feeling that Aloha's brilliant, lunatic mind had kicked into high gear. Staring at her, he witnessed the battle taking place in her eyes and waited to see which emotion would win. It was rage, and his cock went instantly hard. As soon as she opened that delectable mouth to deliver what he was sure would be a good and proper cussing out, he swooped down, thrust his tongue in between her lips, and took control of her mouth and her breathing.

It was adorable the way that she thought for one second that he was leaving her house without her by his side. He could imagine the Posse sending over some other male to tend to Aloha. And then, he could imagine the carnage when he was forced to kill them for being in his territory. Aloha was definitely his territory. Any male who wanted to continue living better recognize that. Sighing, he knew that he had a fight on his hands making her accept that, but he would because not only was he a patient hunter, he was an unrelenting vampire who didn't know the meaning of quit.

Sighing, he cleared his head and concentrated on their kiss. Cusswords had never tasted so sweet. Still, he realized that he might've pushed her too far too soon and offered an apology as he gentled his kiss. "Forgive me, angel moya. I didn't mean for this to get out of hand. I'm merely concerned for you, and that makes me just a little bit out of control."

* * * * *

Aloha had to use every last synapse she possessed in order to convince her body to peel itself off of Ianikut. Damn this fine motherfucker and the way he was bringing it. What the fuck was he up to? She was all set to kick his ass when she heard his apology. Her temper immediately waned as Ianikut backed off. "I appreciate the help, but I know that you have stuff to do at your own home."

"That's correct but I can delegate the tasks that need to be completed. However, I won't delegate my

duties to you.”

“But you’re not obligated to me,” Aloha sighed.

“On the contrary, angel, I am. You just need more time to accept that.”

Aloha’s heart skipped a beat. Ianikut said that with such matter-of-factness. “I’m flattered but I know that you’re a busy man.”

“You should be flattered,” he teased.

“Then you should...” she began only to be interrupted by him trailing kisses across her temple.

“If you’re so concerned about my time, then come to my home to recuperate,” he challenged.

“I want to stay here,” she insisted.

“Well then this is where I’ll be staying in the interim,” he pronounced as he took a seat on her bed and gently pulled her into his lap, sitting there as if he had all of the time in the world.

Ianikut’s arrogance worked Aloha’s last nerve. *But he was also so damn fine and had a voice that left her shivering. And he feels like he has a big dick. Yeah, but he was also bossy as all get out.* Even though he was wealthy, Aloha knew that he didn’t simply sit back and enjoy his wealth; he worked for a living. From her limited interactions with the Russian, she knew that once he made up his mind, like the Negro spiritual, he could not be moved. He would remain here until he pronounced her fit.

And the problem would be? Her body asked getting comfortable on the hard perch that was Ianikut. Damn, he smelled so fucking good and he felt even better. More importantly, she loved the way he held her. Ianikut may act nonchalant about it, but she knew what he was: he was a predator. It wasn’t just the look in his eyes; it was everything about him. He may wear grace like a second skin but the line that separated the hunter and his civility was paper-thin. Yes, the man was a predator and she suspected that she was his prey. Perhaps she should feel trepidation but she didn’t. She felt honored. Still, she had to protest. Otherwise, she wouldn’t be able to reconcile her acquiescence with her ego.

“I can call Atlanta to stay with me,” she said.

“You could, but you know that misguided soul determined to court her needs all the help that he can get.”

Aloha would bet her private stash of Skittles that she had Atlanta to blame for Ianikut being here. Atlanta might be her best friend, but she also had the most annoying habit of playing the role of her mother when she saw fit. *How can you be mad at her when she sends this fine motherfucker over to play nurse?* her body screamed. She couldn’t. Even if she could, Aloha liked the way Steele loved Atlanta and cheered hard for the Viking to win. So she’d sit back and allow Ianikut to care for her...for now.

Ianikut had only been there for three hours, and he was already starting to work her nerves. Aloha expected him to set out her food and maybe watch a little television or something. She didn’t expect him to hover so thoroughly. Not only had he fed her, he attempted to literally feed her. Only her threats advising him of his imminent death got him to back off. After assuring him that she ate something other than Skittles, he sauntered off to run her a bubble bath. She didn’t even get a chance to protest before he hauled her into his massive arms and deposited her on the edge of her tub with an admonition to not do

anything crazy before leaving her in peace. The man corralled her in her own damn house, and she suspected that it wasn't the result of an accident but a well-planned siege. Ianikut kept looking at her and though he was fine as all get out, it was disconcerting to be the focus of that intense gaze, especially when she looked only slightly better than death warmed over and felt two steps below that. She needed the chance to get used to the dominant, not-taking-no-for-an-answer side of Ianikut. The man was just as stubborn as she was so it looked like she was stuck with the Russian. On her best day she couldn't physically throw him out, and today wasn't her best day. She was a few seconds away from unleashing her inner gangster when Ianikut switched to straight-out mack mode.

"Angel moya, I don't want to pressure you, but if you come to my house --"

"I'm. Staying. Right. Here." She interrupted petulantly.

Ianikut continued as if she'd said nothing. "I'll let you check out my newest purchase. I'm sure you'll like it."

Her interest piqued, Aloha uncrossed her arms, pulled in her poked-out lip, and asked, "You bought a Ferrari?"

"Of course not, but last month the rest of my furniture was delivered along with my new television. My new, one hundred three inch plasma," he said.

"What! Who did you sleep with to get a plasma that big? You must take me to it," she demanded as she hobbled from the loveseat."

"Well, I would love to but I don't --"

"Ianikut, later we'll discuss the proper order a story should be told in, but right now you're in danger of being killed dead if you keep me away from that plasma a moment longer than necessary."

Aloha was so busy grabbing her gear that she totally missed the predatory smile that settled over Ianikut's visage. Even if she had seen it, she probably wouldn't have given a hot damn. She just kept thinking about how to keep from climaxing as she thought about Ianikut's one hundred and three inches of plasma.

Chapter Eight

After saying bye to her baby Aloha allowed Ianikut to bundle her into his Bentley. "You'd better not be lying about the size of your television."

"I'm not accustomed to being in the presence of a woman who cares more about the size of my television than my personal endowment."

"You're just not accustomed to being in the presence of a real woman," she informed him right before launching into a diatribe of how he done her wrong. "Now that I have your attention let's discuss what you did wrong: first and foremost, if you have a giga-normous television, you start off every intro with that. For example, 'Hi, my name's Ianikut and I have a giant TV.' Second, when you make a juggernaut purchase, you should immediately inform any techno geeks in your inner circle. Third, you throw a party and invite techno geeks over to ooh and ah over aforementioned purchase. When I finish healing, I'm

kicking your ass in the video game of your choice -- on your own TV. Now hurry up and get me to that television,” she demanded.

Aloha didn't recall the trip to his house, she only recalled her first glimpse of that beautiful television set. Throwing off her Crocs sandals, she bowed before the plasma and touched it with reverence. She spent hours flipping through channels in awe. Sometime before nightfall, she recalled Ianikut forcibly -- but gently -- removing her from in front of the television. Though being cradled in his arms was nice, she put up a token amount of resistance, which only lasted as long as it took for him to walk her to a bedroom and settle her into a massive and deliciously comfortable bed.

Aloha knew with certainty that this was Ianikut's room, not just because it was all white, but because everything in it screamed that it was the domain of a man who considered himself great, which just might be true in his case...not that she'd admit that.

“Obviously, this is your room,” she stated as she got comfortable on the soft mattress.

“It is,” he replied offhandedly as he was busy trying to preserve her modesty while removing her sweatpants and tucking her under the covers.

“Why are you putting me in here?”

“Where else would I put you? You belong here.”

Though her inner diva preened at his response, she had to ask. “And where do you belong?”

“With you,” he mumbled while stretching his large form on top of the coverlet.

Oh damn. The big Russian was straight bringing it and though it might sound like a line, Aloha was sure that it was anything but since it came from his lips. “Ah, I'm not...”

Ianikut interrupted her. “Angel moya, I will not harm you in any way. Neither will I press you. If you wish me to sleep elsewhere, I will, but you will sleep here.”

“Why is it imperative that I do so?”

“Because this is where I want you. It's the master suite and therefore the most luxurious,” he whispered as he pulled her closer. “And more importantly, it's the most guarded space in my home.”

Arching a brow, she asked, “Have a lot of enemies, do you?”

“Not among the living.”

“Ah, evidence of that stellar personality of yours. I really appreciate you looking out for me, Ianikut, but I don't want to take your room. I'm not the master here.”

“*Net, ya -- vladelec zdes*, (No, I am the master here) *i Vy prinadlezhite vladel'cu* (and you belong to the master),” he whispered in his native tongue. Reverting back to English, he said, “The sentiment is appreciated, angel, and though you're not the master, this is nevertheless, where the master wants you. Do you wish me to go or to remain?”

“I want you to stay, but I...”

“Angel, as much as I want you, you’re not ready for the physical manifestation of my love. I will only consider making love to you when you are fully healed.”

“Are you insinuating that I’ll need to be in peak condition to withstand your lovemaking?”

“No insinuating about it. I’m not only a lot of man, but I’m all man, which means that I don’t do anything by halves, especially making love.”

Aloha felt her womb contract upon hearing Ianikut’s declaration, but she wasn’t about to give in so easily. “As long as you remember that you’ll need a few days to recover from my making love to you.”

Ianikut’s eyes went all black, and his cock went rock hard at her declaration. “Sleep, angel, so that you can recover the soonest.”

* * * * *

Aloha woke and took a minute to get her bearings. She was in Ianikut’s house, in Ianikut’s bed, and Ianikut had one hundred three inches of plasma television that was calling her name. Taking one last glance at the big Russian, she saw to her toilet as quietly and quickly as possible. Slipping on black, opaque boy shorts and a matching demi bra, she threw on a neon pink button-up shirt and padded to his basement where the television enticed her with its siren’s song.

Though Aloha had already experienced the television, she still got wet at the sight of the huge plasma. The computer geek in her demanded that she give it a thorough examination. She quickly located the VGA connector on the television and hooked it to her cutting edge laptop that boasted a seventeen-inch wide screen high-definition display. Like a boy scout she was always prepared, which meant that not only did she have impressive hardware, she traveled with all of the accoutrements including a c-pad, two extra batteries, and a VGA cord. Finishing her adjustments, she booted up and immersed herself in a game of Spider Solitaire on 1080-p.

She was so engrossed in her game that she failed to notice the presence of the five men who had thought to enter the room. Zhenechka and his brothers were surprised to see the petite woman in front of the television playing solitaire. They knew two things instinctively. First, this was the woman who had Ianikut panting and they could understand why. Second, she should be given a wide berth for knowing Ianikut as they did, they knew that he’d consider any male a threat to her -- regardless of whether they were related by blood or not. They were getting ready to quit the room when she turned and noticed them and sprang into a defensive stance.

Having only glimpsed her from the back while she had been playing solitaire, they were unprepared for the sight of the petite but abundantly stacked woman. Expertly arched brows framed black eyes that were scanning them with suspicion. Pushing back a stray braid that had escaped her Chun Li braided hairstyle, she pursed succulent lips that had one wondering how good they could make a man feel. This woman had something that made a man look more than a few times, and a whole lot of that something was viewable, since she only wore a button-up shirt that was mostly unbuttoned.

“Good morning. You must be Aloha,” Zhenechka said in a soft voice, hoping to put her at ease and looking anywhere but at her curvaceous body.

A slight gasp and a deeper scowl is all that she had time to get out before their brother materialized in the doorway. The men immediately retreated a few steps back even though they were already clear across

the room from the woman that Ianikut had claimed.

* * * * *

Ianikut had known the precise moment that Aloha had wakened. He allowed her to venture off because he knew that she was safe in his domain and because he knew that she would instinctively search out the television. Affected by her presence, he had forgotten all about his siblings. Though he loved them, Aloha was *his* woman and therefore, her wants and needs came first.

“Ianikut!”

Walking toward her Ianikut gently embraced her, which served to both cover her and force her to relax her fighting stance. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” she mumbled against his shirt.

“I see that you’ve made yourself at home,” he joked, eyeing the confetti celebration taking place on the screen indicating that she had conquered the game.

“You said to do so. The plasma is sooooo freaking hot. I was considering ways to make off with it.”

“You don’t have to make off with it when you can stay here and watch it.”

“What will you say when I refuse to leave?”

“I wouldn’t say anything, but I would march you straight to Indy so that she could marry us.”

“Oh damn,” she muttered not even realizing that Ianikut was leading her away from the impressive television until they had reached his bedroom.

“Why are we here when the plasma is in the basement?”

“I think it would be best if you finished dressing, so I won’t be forced to commit fratricide.”

“Oh,” she replied while throwing on a pair of jeans. “Did your brothers see anything good?”

“Hell, yeah, and I may have to erase their memories for my peace of mind.”

“You’re good for a woman’s ego, Ianikut.”

“And you’re hell on a man’s,” he replied, reaching for her hand.

“Why are you holding my hand? I’m perfectly capable of walking down the hall without assistance.”

“Perhaps, I merely want to hold your hand...no other reason.”

“Why?”

“Why, what?”

“Why do you want to hold my hand?”

“It’s what a man generally does with his woman.”

“But you’re a Duke fan.”

“And you’re a Carolina fan, but I find you intriguing, beautiful, and intelligent, nonetheless.”

“Well, fine, but you’re not holding my hand; I’m holding your hand.”

“I can live with that.”

Chapter Nine

Zhenechka, Antosha, Fyodor, Vyacheslav, and Tosya all rose when she reentered the den. Zhenechka being the one with the strongest sense of self-preservation cautiously approached her, stopped three feet from her, bowed and formally introduced himself.

“Hello, Aloha. I’m Max’s oldest younger brother, Zhenechka.”

“What’s up?” Sensing that his brothers were attempting to put her at ease, Aloha met him halfway. “So, are the rest of you going to introduce yourselves or what?”

One by one, they followed Zhenechka’s example until each of them had been introduced: Antosha, Fyodor, Vyacheslav, and Tosya.

“Well, being that Ianikut wears such an impressive name, tell me what your names mean.”

Hearing their responses, she merely smiled. Zhenechka meant noble, Antosha meant inestimable, Fyodor meant divine gift, Vyacheslav meant has glory, and Tosya meant beyond expectation.

“That figures. If you had named yourselves, I’d ask what you were overcompensating for,” she joked.

“Now that we’ve introduced ourselves, are you going to introduce yourself?”

“Isn’t it obvious who I am?”

“Yeah, but it would be nice to hear it from you,” Tosya said.

“Well then, I’m Aloha -- the simplest meaning is ‘hi’ -- which suits me just fine, since I’m not overcompensating for anything. Besides being the reigning call-in champion in the Southeastern region, I’m the one who is asking you to hand over the remote because we’re not wasting 1080-p or one hundred three inches of beautiful plasma on this crap,” she smiled, indicating the sitcom they were watching.

They watched television until Ianikut declared that she needed to eat and forcibly dragged her away.

“Nooooo, I’m not finished watching, Ianikut. You promised that I could watch it.” Turning to his brothers she pled, “You guys, help me out. Ianikut lured me over to his lair with tales of one hundred three inches of plasma, and now, he’s reneging on his promise.”

“Max, you lured her over here with the size of your...plasma?” Fyodor smirked. “Smooth.”

“Yeah, can you give us tips on how to woo a woman?” Vyacheslav asked.

“Ianikut isn’t wooing me,” she stated.

“That’s right, because the wooing is already complete. You need to eat. If you finish your lunch, I might allow you to come back down and spend time with it.”

“Allow? You either didn’t read the book I gave you or you read it but didn’t understand it because you’re pissing me off, Ianikut. I’m not your child. Perhaps I’ll simply find another man with a plasma equally as large or perhaps even bigger,” she taunted.

“And I’ll waste him,” he promised.

“For showing me his plasma?”

“For fucking with what is mine.”

“And just when did I become yours?”

“The moment I heard your seductive voice,” he said as he pulled her to him and kissed her deeply.

“Since you haven’t had a few days to rest up, you may as well sate one of my appetites.”

Leaning down, he whispered sotto voce, “I would be more than happy to sate any appetite that you have. You have only to say the word. You don’t have to be ashamed of your desire for me. I’ve been told that I’m devastatingly handsome.”

“Yeah, but most of the people who told you that are probably Duke fans.”

“Hey,” Antosha objected. “We’re all Duke fans.”

Tsking, Aloha replied, “That just proves that insanity runs in your family.”

“Wait a minute. You’re a Carolina fan, aren’t you?” Fyodor asked.

“Damn skippy, little boy. Now recognize and bow down.”

After seating Aloha, Ianikut watched as she said grace and selected food. He didn’t tackle his own food until she began eating. During this time, Tosya asked her how she came to be injured. Relaying the story, Ianikut’s brothers alternately laughed and gasped.

“I can’t believe that you’d take a spill merely to prevent denting your car,” Zhenechka said.

“Stop it. How can you say such terrible things about my precious baby?”

“What’s wrong with your ankle? I noticed that you’re still limping a little bit,” Zhenechka inquired.

“Hmm, I snapped my Achilles a few years ago. Every now and then, it reminds me to put the cape on, before I attempt to save the world.”

“How the hell did you manage that?” Antosha asked. “That’s not an average injury.”

“There’s nothing average about Aloha,” Ianikut interjected.

She smiled her agreement as she casually answered Antosha’s question. “Fight.”

“I just don’t see you starting a brawl,” Vyacheslav said.

“And normally I don’t, but the men that we were fighting didn’t share my respect for leaving people the hell alone,” she replied, helping herself to more grilled chicken. Since she was focused on her food she didn’t mark their sudden stillness.

“You fought men...as in plural of man...as in the gender that is not female?” Ianikut asked.

“Mm hmm.”

“And?”

“What? It’s a long story.”

“We have time,” Vyacheslav replied.

“Picture this,” she paused. “You thought that I was going to say ‘Sicily’ didn’t you,” she joked. “Tobacco Road, during the height of football season, and the beginning of basketball season. Lots of tourists in the Triangle and the Triad as the area is saturated with colleges and universities. You can literally go homecoming hopping. Y’all went to Duke. You know how it is. We take up residence at one of the local sports bars because it’s ground zero for all of the good stuff that’s going down, and they have the most banging fruit slushies. So alumni are out having a good time, when an argument jumps off. From the digs being thrown, I just knew it wasn’t going to end well. The bartender tries to diffuse the situation but before she can talk some good sense into them total chaos broke loose. No one has any regard for the fact that guys are jumping on women that didn’t have jack to do with it. Well, you’re not going to sit idly by, while some guy is straight whipping your ass. So, hey, sisters are fighting back, but it’s still too many guys versus women, so I jump in to even it up a little bit. Some other chicks jumped into the fray and it was a free-for-all in that joint.

When all was said and done, not one of those woman-hitting bastards was standing on his own power. All anybody -- our dads, the police, and the patrons -- said was that we should’ve just minded our own business, but dammit as humans, we’re each other’s business. That woman was somebody’s little girl, somebody’s sister. Nothing about the perverse situation was right and I know that as a black woman sometimes the only way to get justice is to go get it yourself.”

She paused to inquire, “Is there any *moretzatziki* sauce?” After dumping more on her food, she noticed the silence and proffered an apology. “Sorry, sometimes I drag out the soapbox without noticing.”

“No apologies needed. Please continue the story,” Tosya implored.

“Not much more to tell than that. Every time my grandmomma sees me limping she cries and my dad

gets pissed all over again. I know deep down that their sorrow and rage stems from the fact that they cannot stomach that their child was exposed to the injustice that permeates society. But I can live with the pain. It's a testament that I truly stand for truth and justice -- not merely in theory, but in reality. Whenever I forget the reality that comes along with not only being a woman, but with being a certain type of woman, all I have to do is take a look at this scar that runs along my Achilles and remember. And I know that I'm not alone in feeling that. Each one of the Posse girls has a testament somewhere on her body backing that up and none of us regret it."

* * * * *

Although Ianikut had an inkling of what had happened at the infamous fight that Atlanta was pretty closed-lip about, before Aloha told him the story he'd never had a clear picture. For that he was grateful. He and his brothers were angry. Had Aloha been focused on them instead of her food, she would've noted the looks on their visages and known what a vampire looked like in full-blown rage. Trying to keep his rage under control, Ianikut used his preternatural speed to make it to the nearest bathroom. Once there he did something that he had never done in the whole of his adult life -- he vomited. And while he vomited, he considered his revenge.

When he returned to the table, Aloha jumped up and placed her hand on his forehead. "Ianikut, are you ill? Do you need to lie down?"

"I'm okay, angel. What about you?"

"Actually, I'm feeling a little tired. I think that I'll rest for a bit, but when I get up, I have dibs on the plasma."

Ianikut thought it was cute the way his angel thought that he was going to let her attempt the stairs after the story she'd just shared. Scooping her up, he cradled her to his massive chest.

"Okay, you might want to warn a chick when you're about to do that," she breathed.

"Consider yourself warned then. Whenever you're around me you're subject to being pulled into my arms."

"Is there a particular reason for that?"

"Because I want to. As the master here, it's my privilege to do as I please."

"You might be master here, but remember that you're not my master. You don't rule me."

"I'd never attempt such a thing, angel moya. I don't want to rule you; I only want to please you."

"Oh, I like that."

"And you will really like moaning my name."

"Possibly, but you'll like screaming my name even more," she threw back.

Ianikut imagined the catalyst that would lead to him screaming her name and he grew hard. Pausing in his ascent up the stairs, he leaned down and took her mouth. Groaning, he took her scent into his nostrils and her taste into his mouth. The sweetness that permeated her person almost overwhelmed him. She

tasted like raw sugarcane and smelled like cotton candy. He literally shook from desire. No other woman had ever affected him thusly. Aloha metaphorically drove him to his knees. Surprisingly, he wasn't scared; he was determined. Determined to have her -- regardless of what he had to give up.

"Mine," he proclaimed when he released her succulent mouth.

"Don't you have to fight for me or something before you make such bold statements?"

"I wouldn't hesitate to do such, angel, but no other male would challenge me."

"Oh, you don't think that I'm worth it?" She sassed.

"You're more than worth it, angel moya. However, challenging me for what's already mine is not only stupid, but also imminent death."

"Well, damn. Thanks for the clarification," Aloha replied.

"I live to please you, angel moya," he said as he gently set her upon her feet.

Ianikut had good intentions -- really, he did, but that was before his angel decided to tempt him. Aloha didn't allow him to simply put her down. She slowly slid down his body. It was one of the most erotic experiences of his life. He was on sensory overload, and his body fairly burned where her lush body came into contact with his. Her moans sounded like the most amazing aria; the picture of her with her eyes closed, her head thrown back, and her full bottom lip gripped by her teeth rocked him to his core.

"Damn," he moaned while reveling in pure pleasure. "Angel, you have to step away so that I'll be able to stop."

"Where's your famous control?" Aloha taunted while wisely retreating a few steps.

Ianikut crowded her before answering, "You're the one thing that tries my control, angel moya."

"I'm not a thing. Thank you very much."

"You're the only thing, angel," he declared as he gently grasped her wrists, and pulled her forward into his strength. Instead of immediately ravishing her, he took a few moments to simply hold her. Using his beautiful hands he finger-combed her braids before taking her mouth as if he alone commanded time. And she kissed him back as if she believed he did. Nibbling on her lips, he feasted on her mouth. He continued kissing her until she ceded to his mastery and whimpered her surrender into his mouth. Ianikut laughed in triumph but it wasn't long before he realized his error. Aloha slid her hands under his shirt and scraped her nails over his nipples.

"Angel," Ianikut pled.

"Ianikut," she entreated.

"I can't be gentle right now when I want you this bad," he explained. "When I take you, angel, it will be nothing less than total ravishment."

"Well, ravish me gently."

Pushing her back on the bed, Ianikut slowly removed his clothes. Although he was aware that women found him attractive, he reveled in Aloha's appreciation. Not a vain man, he knew that he would always remember how she looked at him. She looked at him like she looked at the television when she was playing her PlayStation 3, and one simply couldn't dream of a higher compliment.

After allowing her to look her fill, he climbed on the bed and unhurriedly removed her clothes in between deep kisses. He left her clad in her scant bra and panties because Aloha completely bared to him was a temptation he couldn't resist. Turning her on her back, he gently lifted her injured ankle and kissed his way over the scar before traversing the rest of her body kissing away all of the sore places and every place in between. When he finished tasting all of her skin, he placed a kiss at her temple before gently wrapping her in his embrace. Pulling the sheet over them, he paused when he heard her quiet sigh.

"Is that a good sigh or a bad sigh?"

"It's a good sigh. You're good at tucking me in."

"It's a good thing because I'm the only one who has the right to do it."

"You're so possessive."

"That I am, so don't forget that, angel," he whispered in her ear and pulled her tighter.

Feeling the evidence of his desire pressed into her back, Aloha gasped. "Ianikut," she purred.

"Be good, angel moya," he admonished.

"Just give me the chance," she returned.

Ianikut prayed that she would heal fast.

* * * * *

The rest of the week flew by too fast for Ianikut's peace of mind. Though he desperately wanted to make love to Aloha, he had to give her time to heal. He knew that he'd be hard-pressed to hold back once he started making love to her because he had wanted her for so long. It was also imperative that he give his petite angel time to accustom herself to everything that he was: a massive and powerful dominant male. Large by human standards he was also extremely powerful even by vampire standards, and dominant as befitting the son of the current king. Once Aloha accepted him, he wouldn't let her go -- ever.

Chapter Ten

While Ianikut anxiously waited Aloha's complete healing, the berserker had received a yes to his marriage demand. The Norseman wanted to marry Atlanta yesterday and couldn't prod her to the altar fast enough. The next two weeks were a flurry of activity for all involved in the wedding party. Atlanta's mother gave him a "don't make me come over there" look and a better-do list. While everyone else ran themselves ragged planning her wedding -- which was several months away -- Atlanta busied herself with the management of her football fantasy league.

“Do you plan on helping out with *your* wedding?” Ianikut asked in a snit.

“I offered to get the napkins. If anyone wants me to help out any more than that, they can put that under the category of ‘too fucking bad.’ The only thing that I’m required to do is walk my beautiful self down the aisle,” she said between bites of cheesecake.

“Obviously, you’ve hidden the fact that you’re an evil incarnate from the berserker, else he wouldn’t be so damn eager to marry you.”

“Yeah, he would, because I’m devastating in the bedroom. While you’re over there in need of one good ass-whipping, you might want to consider how stunning Aloha will look in her gown, and how Steele’s brothers will react to her beauty. Like Steele, none of his brothers minds a little coffee in their milk.”

“Aloha’s mine!”

“Sure she is, but you might want to consider letting Aloha in on your little secret, especially considering that she’s due to begin her sabbatical at the end of the month.”

“What sabbatical?”

“The one she takes every year about this time.”

“She didn’t tell me.”

“And is there a ring on her finger requiring her to do so?”

“Not yet.”

“Well until there is, shut the fuck up.”

“Sometimes I fantasize about pushing you off of a cliff.”

“And when you think you can kick my momma’s ass, go ahead and try it.”

The thought of angering Atlanta’s mother caused him to shudder. Southern women didn’t care how old you were, how successful you were, or how big you were, there was never a time that they would hesitate to kick your ass. “Why is Aloha leaving?”

“Possibly to retain her status as call-in champion of the Southeastern region, or maybe because she’s a grown woman and she can do that.”

Growling in his throat at Atlanta’s less-than-helpful answers, he asked, “How long will she be gone?”

“For a while. After a quick pilgrimage to the shrine where techno-geeks worship, she’ll grab her trusty laptop and go into seclusion.”

“When will she return?”

“Right before the wedding.”

“You’re telling me she’s going to be gone from August until November?”

“Glad to see that you learned to count while at Duke.”

Ignoring her sarcasm, he continued. “I’ll put a stop to that.”

“So wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

“Why not? Aloha going off by herself has international incident written all over it.”

“No, that’s only if Reign and Zuri accompany her. Right now wreaking havoc is the furthest thing from Aloha’s mind; she’s working on getting her doctoral dissertation together.”

“I didn’t know.”

“There’s plenty you don’t know about Aloha. Being her best friend, I know how her mind works. She’ll engross herself in her laptop, immersing herself in a land of zeroes and ones. A few months later after a stellar diet of Skittles and energy drinks she’ll realize that she has an itch that needs scratching. Maybe she takes her handy vibrator with her, and maybe she finds a hot man to have computer sex with.”

“Maybe I’ll hunt that motherfucker down and beat him to death,” he promised.

“Why?”

“Because Aloha’s my woman.”

“Again, perhaps you should tell her this.”

“I have.”

“Then make her believe it.”

“Oh, I will. While I’ll leave her to work on her dissertation in peace, I’ll also leave no doubt that she’s my woman,” he said as he stalked off. He paid no attention to Atlanta’s smirk; he simply considered the warning he was about to deliver to Steele, and by proxy his brothers.”

* * * * *

A week later, Ianikut finally tracked down Steele.

“Berserker?” he asked without preamble.

“Vampire?” Steele matched the vampire’s insolence.

“If you want the men in your line to live, warn them that Aloha is off-limits.”

“My, how the vampire realm has deteriorated when one has to beg a berserker to leave his woman be.”

“You try my patience, berserker.”

“As your kind have tried the patience of every paranormal creature for centuries.”

"All vampires are not the same."

"Ah, but all berserkers are. Keep that in mind."

"There has never been a war between our kind," Ianikut warned.

"And if there is one now there will be many, many fatalities," Steele parried.

"Well, then, as leader of your people, perhaps you should do all within your power to maintain the peace that exists between us -- as uneasy as it is."

"Perhaps, you should cease provoking me to insure the continuance of your kind."

"Ah, there goes that infamous berserker arrogance."

"Is it arrogance when you speak the truth?"

"What does a berserker have that a vampire doesn't?" Ianikut snarled.

"Other than devastating good looks, superior intellect, and speed? I don't know, but I know one thing that this berserker has that you don't. I have a categorical claim on my woman."

"Berserker, you go too far, and one day, I will remedy your insolence and show you the error of your ways and your erroneous thinking, but today is not the day. And while you may think you have a categorical claim on that witch you call a woman, you have yet to get her to the altar."

"I advise you to watch your tone when you speak of my woman, especially when there is only one woman who is her equal."

"And that woman would be Aloha."

"Actually, that woman would be my mother, but only because she had the good sense to birth such an impressive son."

"Obviously, what they say about blondes holds true. You are surely a few sandwiches short of a picnic to believe that."

"Vampire, I tire of this conversation. What is it that you want other than a dissertation on the superiority of berserkers?"

"Aloha belongs to me."

"So you keep saying."

"I'm warning you, berserker."

"And I am warning you. Stake your claim, vampire or she is fair game."

* * * * *

After trekking to Silicon Valley to kick it with some of her fellow geeks, Aloha holed up near the

university where she worked diligently so she could fly to Japan and catch the Tokyo Game Show in September. In truth, she was all but done with her dissertation, but she needed the isolation. She had things to think over. At thirty-two years of age, she'd accomplished a lot but she was going through some kind of crisis. Not having the verbiage for it; she only knew that she felt lost. She'd done the school thing and would soon have her doctorate degree conferred upon her. Currently, she was doing the business thing and was a partner at a successful sports bar and restaurant. Being friends with Victorious, she'd done the travel thing and had even embarked on the road trip to end all road trips. By most measuring sticks she was successful, but she felt sadness as if she'd rushed through life and was now done. What was left to do when you've done everything on your to-do list? To a twenty-year-old that list had seemed impossible to get through, but to a woman in her early thirties it seemed lacking.

Dragging herself out of bed, she fired up her laptop so she could catch up on her e-mail. Besides the weekly update on Evil Twins there were caveats threatening the complete decimation of her entire collection of electronics should she miss the wedding. As if. It's not every day that her best friend got married. Attacking her e-mail in order of import --Atlanta's first, then the rest of the Posse -- she noticed an unfamiliar address. Taking a moment to scan the subject line, she laughed realizing that it was no one other than the Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich. Noticing that there was an attachment, she opened the e-mail and nearly choked on her Skittles.

No, that motherfucker didn't send a picture of himself looking like all of her fantasies combined. Damn, only Ianikut could make dress pants and a dress shirt look so good. Of course it helped that the shirt was unbuttoned showing the eight pack that begged to be licked. But even that wasn't what caused her to cream her panties. What brought her to the brink of orgasm was the pose. Even though it was a picture, Ianikut's eyes were locked directly on her. Ianikut's hair was loose. He had one of his big, capable hands on his impressive cock, and the expression on his face clearly said that he wanted to fuck her. No, not that he *wanted* to fuck her, but that he was *going* to fuck her and when he did, she would love it or actually she would recall that she'd loved it after she regained her senses. She bet that she'd be in any condition to do a damn thing but take him.

Aloha wanted to take Ianikut -- every way she possibly could. Sighing, she enlarged the picture, lay on the bed and imagined how she'd make love to him. First, she'd straddle the big Russian, grab a fistful of those glorious, raven locks and kiss her way from his mouth to his neck as she lightly raked her nails over his flat nipples. He was so much bigger than her that she could get lost in his embrace and that only turned her on more. She bet that he would hold her hips down forcing her to grind against him harder and harder until she climaxed all over herself.

After she came, she imagined lying against his chest while she caught her breath. Ianikut would softly caress her, telling her how he was going to fuck her. Speaking in that hypnotic voice, she imagined his words would be like caresses. Oh, she needed this man. Biting her lip and squeezing her legs shut, she rose from the bed on shaky legs, and replied to his e-mail.

Did your boyfriend take that picture before or after he got in your pants? Chuckling, she hit send and shut down her laptop. As she slowly caressed herself, she wondered what Ianikut's response would be.

* * * * *

Seeing a response to his e-mail, Ianikut smiled. He wondered what his angel thought about the picture he sent. Did it make her hot? When he'd taken that picture, he had to stop himself from freeing his cock and stroking himself to completion. Sitting back in his bed, he opened her response and growled. *Boyfriend indeed*. Ianikut knew that she was merely teasing him but the beast taunted him. The beast advised him

to hunt his woman and show her how hetero he was. As soon as he had her in his arms he was going to demonstrate how much man he was and it wasn't merely because of his ridiculously-big bank account, intellect, or cock...but because he had her as a woman. Growling, he responded to her response.

I'm all man, angel moya, and when you return, I'll be more than happy to prove that to you...all winter long.

For the next two months Aloha taunted and baited him -- the Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich. Ianikut spent that time telling her how he was going to fuck the insolence right out of her. And consequently, he spent his days with a hard cock and his nights taking cold showers. He couldn't wait for Atlanta's wedding day -- not because he was anxious to see her married off, but because he would finally get to see Aloha, touch Aloha, and take her scent into his body.

Chapter Eleven

Ianikut's possessive streak insured that he spent the majority of the brief wedding ceremony eyeballing the berserker's brothers -- especially Egil -- Steele's oldest brother and his best man. As maid-of-honor Aloha should've been escorted by him, but as far as Ianikut was concerned *he* was not only the best man but the only man. If any male present thought that they were getting anywhere near his woman, they'd have an ass whipping to go with that stupid thought. Although they snickered, no one challenged or reprimanded him when he planted himself next to Aloha -- and remained there for the duration of the strangest damn wedding he'd ever attended.

As soon as Atlanta reached his side, the berserker started off with heavy petting. He stopped making out with her just long enough to vociferously declare his 'I do' before laying a kiss on Atlanta that you had to be over the age of twenty-one to witness. Only the litany of throat clearing prevented the berserker from ripping off Atlanta's dress and fucking her right there. As it was, Steele practically had Atlanta undressed during what had to be the world's quickest photo shoot.

The berserker was so enamored with his bride that they missed the entire reception, which is why he was currently sitting smack dab in the middle of Atlanta's living room with the rest of the Posse watching them razz the newlyweds. Ianikut listened to the commentary with only half an ear as he was still trying to control his hard-on reminiscing about how his angel had looked in her bridesmaid dress. He'd had a hard dick for damn near three months and her outfit wasn't helping matters. Not only was the dress not neon; it wasn't nearly long enough to be considered a dress. Later, he would admonish her about how much of her person had been on display.

His petite angel was a stacked little something. Whereas everyone else witnessed Steele practically devour Atlanta at the altar, he'd been busy multitasking. While ogling Aloha, he concentrated on keeping his incisors from descending, doing his damndest to keep his cock from bursting through his dress pants, and shushing the voice in his head that taunted him to toss Aloha onto the ground and fuck her into submission. The three and a half months he'd been without her had driven him to the brink.

Ianikut snapped to attention upon hearing Aloha exclaim something about a field trip to who gave a damn where. He set down his glass of cranberry juice before he inadvertently crushed it to pieces. The fact that the love of his life thought that she was going to go man-hunting anywhere would've been laughable had he not thought that she would embark on such a trip just for the adventure. What if she were to find a man that she was interested in? He would hate to have to kill a man, but he wouldn't hesitate to do so if it meant keeping Aloha by his side. It was best that his woman find out about his

possessive side before he had to resort to murder.

Ianikut wasn't overly possessive, but being that he had yet to claim his woman and the room was full of unattached males, he was edgy. Aloha's careless remark had inadvertently roused the beast. Though the majority of the room's occupants were unaware of his distress, he knew that his brothers were concerned for he could feel their alertness. They were waiting for all hell to break lose.

* * * * *

"Aloha?" Ianikut inquired in a deceptively neutral voice.

Aloha paused in her commentary to answer him. "Yes, Ianikut?"

"You'll have to postpone your little adventure."

"Why? The south of France is always fun, especially this time of year."

"Because," he said as he got up and approached her. "I don't think that it would be in the best interest of any male who made a move on you."

"Ianikut, no one's going to make a move on me," Aloha protested.

"Yes, angel, they will."

"There's nothing about me that says that I'm in the market for a man."

"Not being escorted by a dangerous motherfucker would be enough for other males to risk their worthless lives to attempt to court you."

"Worthless lives? Don't you think it's just a little arrogant to deem someone's life as worthless, even if the someone is some imaginary man?" Aloha huffed.

"No. I'm merely stating a fact. Trust me. I'll destroy any male who attempts to take you from me."

"Ianikut, what's wrong with you?"

"Nothing's wrong with me, angel moya. You're beautiful, and why you don't see that is beyond me," he said as he silently approached her. "And beyond that, you're mine," he said silkily before leaning down to take possession of her mouth. Ianikut kissed her until her knees went weak...until she struggled for breath...until she surrendered to him. Only then did he release her. Pleased to see her eyes unfocused, her lips swollen, and hearing her harsh breathing placated the beast in him -- momentarily. Being apart from her for three months had worked him up good and proper.

* * * * *

Aloha knew two things without a doubt. One, Ianikut wanted her and the only thing on earth that would stop him was a 'no' from her. Two, there was no way in the actual or virtual world that she was about to say 'no.' Nuh-uh no freaking way. She'd pined for this fine motherfucker for damn near five years. Four years of lusting after that orgasm-inducing voice and months of lusting after his thought stopping body and do long math in his head intellect.

“Ianikut,” she breathed. “I need...”

“As do I, angel,” he responded as he hustled her out to his car.

Ianikut practically threw her into the passenger side and buckled her in before scrambling across the hood and getting in. If she hadn't been so aroused when he'd inadvertently grazed her nipple, Aloha would've appreciated the Duke boys move. Ianikut's unintentional caress coupled with the massive hard-on that had been rammed against her tripped her fuck-me-hard-and-right-this-minute gene. She reached over and gently cupped him much to his surprise...and pleasure.

Ianikut hissed when Aloha caressed him. She knew that she was severely testing his iron will, but dammit, she wanted to test it. The diva in her wanted to bring this big man to his knees. She wanted, no *sheneeded* to see him lose all of his cool...and know that she was the catalyst for him losing his decorum.

“Aloha, unless you let go, I'm going to fuck you right here, regardless of who's inside watching,” he made a sound somewhere between a demand and a plea.

“You'd risk another man seeing all of this?” She asked as she grabbed his hands and placed them over her breasts.

“Though I'm normally the epitome of propriety, all bets are off when it comes to you, angel. Staking my claim by fucking you into multiple orgasms won't be a problem for me.”

“Why?”

“Because you're mine. Full motherfucking stop.”

“But,” she said.

“You're mine, angel. You're my woman and other males need to know and heed that. If the only way to make them understand that is by continuously fucking you so good that you scream out my name in pleasure, so be it. You are mine and the only way any other male can have you is via my death and the death of my brothers. Aloha, you may see me and think that I'm nothing more than a soft, rich boy, but angel, I assure you that I am all man, all the time and so is every male in my lineage. People don't fuck with us because the Aleksandroviches are known for being motherfuckers you don't want to cross. Not only would my brothers fight to the death to help me keep you, they know that I wouldn't hesitate to waste every man on this planet to keep you and that includes them.”

Aloha looked into Ianikut's eyes and knew without a doubt that he wasn't joking. He meant every damn word. “Fine, then,” she pouted and scooted back on her side of the car. She wasn't sure how it happened but fifteen minutes into the drive, she was thrumming herself to the brink of orgasm. One hand plucked at her nipple, while the other stroked her pussy.

* * * * *

Ianikut held onto his control by a thread -- a microscopic thread. Their lengthy separation, their racy e-mails, his vivid dreams all conspired to drive him to the brink. His body was rock hard, the beast was close to the surface, and everything within him prompted him to claim what was his. He knew that Aloha didn't even have an inkling of the true depth of his feelings. Had she known how hungry he was, she would've kept her hands far away from her cunt. Witnessing Aloha pleasuring herself not only enhanced his hunger, it teased the beast. And the beast wanted, no demanded, a taste of her now. Luckily, there

was ample space to pull over. Clicking on his emergency flashers, he threw the car in park and unsnapped his seat belt. Turning to her he proclaimed, "Mine," as he slapped her hands away from his succulent treat. Bending over, he gently tugged her nipple with his teeth before pulling it into his mouth for a taste. While suckling, he jerked her panties down and spread her thighs wide. Closing his eyes, he breathed in, savoring the scent of her arousal. Her scent damn near intoxicated him. Growling, he yanked her to him and thrust a finger into her creaming cunt. Her scream would've concerned him had he not been witnessing the pleasure that crossed her face. Tangling a hand in her braids, he covered her succulent lips with his and devoured her cries of pleasure, stroking her to multiple waves of orgasms.

He thoroughly enjoyed the way Aloha came. She panted in staccato. She clawed at him, as if he was her lifeline; she ground herself so tightly to him that it was as if they were on the verge of melting into each other. Though he'd pleased many women, none had looked so beautiful in her pleasure, none had ever touched his soul like the woman in his arms.

Ianikut had to have more. Emitting a chorus of rumbles, he pushed his face into her cunt wanting to taste her. Licking her with firm strokes, he worked her clit furiously wanting her to flood his mouth with her nectar. Her nectar was ambrosia and she was his immortality.

Being that he still had to get them safely home he reluctantly pulled away from his treat but smirked at the picture that she presented. She was reclined in the seat gasping for breath. Her tasty breasts spilled over the tops of her demi bra. Panties around her ankles, he could just make out the barest hint of that delicious cunt. If he hadn't been so aroused, he might've taken the time to appreciate her lingerie. As it was, he could barely concentrate hard enough to tell you the color of her bra and panties, although he looked right at them.

* * * * *

Aloha was stunned out of her reverie when Ianikut brought the car to a halt and reached across her to unsnap her seatbelt. Before she could ask what was going on, he already stormed her castle and assaulted her senses. Moaning from his ministrations, she panted in time with the orgasms he was busy supplying her with. Realizing they were on the side of the road, she took a moment and gave thanks, grateful for dark window tint and light traffic. By the time she came down from his ministrations, Ianikut already had them both buckled in and was once again on the road.

Aloha realized that she should probably move her bare ass off of the supple leather of his seat, especially since she felt as if she was coming rivers. She moved to do just that but stopped when Ianikut growled his displeasure at her actions. The feeling of lust that ran through her intensified at the provocative picture that she knew she presented. Damn, Ianikut, for being so damn fine and for having the clarity to drive them home rather than dragging her off into the woods and having his way with her. The fact that he had the wherewithal to drive them home gave credence to the reputation he had sown as a man who was calm under pressure. If it wasn't for the fact that his normally perfectly coiffed hair was in disarray instead of lying obediently in the neat queue that he favored, and his face was sticky with her nectar, Aloha might've thought that he was unaffected by their passionate encounter.

Even before the garage door closed behind them, Ianikut had her over his shoulder and was having his way with her. It was obvious that he had a fascination with her ass as he was busy running his fingers over her plump cheeks. By the time that he reached the bedroom, he was well into the process of undressing her. Her shoes made clunking sounds as he tossed them aside, and the swishing sound her jeans made as he tossed them aside too. She heard the rending of her shirt as he impatiently ripped it off. The only reason that her panties were spared was because he'd stuffed them in his pocket as soon as he yanked them off. By the time they made it to his bedroom she wore only her demi bra and she was

quickly divested of that.

Placing her on the bed, he once again spread her thighs and greedily lapped at her cunt. Damn, damn, damn, he knew how to eat some pussy. Tightening her legs around him, Aloha screamed out a climax before collapsing onto the bed.

While she was experiencing the aftereffects of her climax, Ianikut rose to his feet and hastily tugged off his clothes. His clothes didn't fare any better than hers. Only a few of his shirt buttons managed to survive as he ripped the shirt from his body. She watched his shoes sail across the room and briefly wondered if he would inadvertently break one of the windows. Hearing his zipper, she quickly dismissed such mundane thoughts. If he broke a window, fuck it, he had plenty more. He tugged his trousers and underwear off simultaneously and then bent to remove his socks.

When he was finally standing naked in front of her, she could only gasp at his beauty. Ianikut was hands down, inarguably the most beautiful man she'd ever laid eyes upon. Standing 6'7" with his black hair spilling down his back, all he needed was a wind machine to fan it out behind him. If book companies could see him as he was now, the supply of romance cover models would quite simply be shit out of luck.

He was everything a man should be. The fact that he had virtually no body hair didn't detract from his manliness. It only served to highlight how damn fine he was. The thick cock dripped precum and doing its best to climb its way up his stomach was the exclamation point. When he wrapped his fist around it and started stroking it, Aloha involuntarily shuddered in response. There was nothing that turned her on more than a fine man pleasuring himself for her enjoyment. . .and if he could do higher level mathematics in his head, well that would merely be the cherry on top.

* * * * *

After witnessing her shudder, Ianikut slowed his ministrations and took a few moments to peruse the woman spread out before him. Breathing hard from the orgasms he'd just gifted her with, she looked like she *needed* him and therefore she'd never looked more beautiful. If he could burn that image on the backs of his eyelids, he would spend an inordinate amount of time with his eyes closed and a smile on his face.

Ianikut treasured the picture that Aloha presented and realized that he'd waited years for this moment. He'd started falling in love with her voice on the occasions that he called Atlanta. Hell, sometimes he called merely to hear that voice that was a perfect blend of sultriness and sass. By the sounds of her moans, the sultriness was currently overwhelming the sass. Taking a deep breath he crawled between her thighs. Balanced on his elbows he stared into her eyes and asked, "Are you sure?"

Aloha didn't bother answering, instead she threw her arms around him and took his mouth in a deep kiss. He loved the way the softness of her body felt against the hardness of his as she rubbed herself against him. Kissing alongside his jaw, she threaded her fingers through his decadently long hair. Urging him onto his back she kissed her way down his massive chest, tracing the contours with her tongue. She paused to take each nipple between her teeth causing Ianikut to roar with pleasure.

"Angel moya," Ianikut pled raggedly. Gently restraining her from pleasuring him, he demanded, "Aloha, you must answer. You must verbally give me your consent. Are you sure, angel?"

"Yes, Ianikut, I'm sure."

Those words entirely freed the beast within him. Flipping her over, he used his great weight to pin her beneath him. Grabbing a fistful of her braids, he plunged into her in one move. Both he and Aloha cried out in pleasure. Never had anything felt so right. She gripped him so tightly that he was sure that withdrawing would be as sweet a torment as entering.

Stopping to insure that his angel was okay, he kissed his way up the column of her neck as he rumbled an entreaty for her to open her eyes. "Let me see the fire in your eyes, angel." Though they had maintained eye contact since he covered her body with his, she had closed them when he entered her. When she finally attended his entreaty, he noticed that her eyes appeared unfocused. "Are you alright, angel?" he inquired with great concern.

"I've never been better, Ianikut," she moaned.

Though the beast in him wanted to roar out in triumph, the gentleman in him had to insure that his woman was truly okay, not merely soothing his ego. "Then why are you moaning?"

"Ianikut, you're such a fucking man. You're three times my size physically, more than a hundred pounds heavier, and you just stuffed me full of big, hard cock, so of course, I'm going to moan. Now, shut the hell up and finish what you started," she demanded.

Trust Aloha to cuss him out during their lovemaking. Ianikut didn't have to be threatened twice. Sensing the verity of her words, he fitted one of his large hands around her small waist, and used the other to place her leg around his waist -- at least as far around as it would go -- to give him more room. He pulled out as fast as her body would allow before sinking back into her hot, creamy box. Oh, damn, she was killing him, and he hadn't even gotten started.

"Oh yes, Ianikut. Yes, yes!" she screamed as he moved within her.

Ianikut loved hearing Aloha say his name, but he completely got off hearing her shout out his name in passion. He continued thrusting simply so he could watch those succulent lips move as they sung out his name.

Aloha would've lifted her hips to meet him, but Ianikut was gripping her too tightly to allow her to do anything except take him. "Oh, goodness, Ianikut, please --"

"Please what, angel?" he asked between hitting her G-spot.

"Oh, hmm. Please," she began before screaming out her climax. "Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh! Ianikut, I'm, oh, damn, I'm coming! I'm coming! Oh damn, damn, damn, I'm coming!"

Ianikut knew that he was giving her pleasure on top of pleasure. He had the sweat to prove it. Still, he continued thrusting into her wanting to wring out many more climaxes as he had waited lifetimes for this woman. "Tell me how good it is for you, angel," he demanded.

"I don't have enough words," she gasped.

"Find them," he demanded as he tossed her legs over his shoulders.

"Ahhh! Ianikut," she screamed as she reached up to pull him down to her. Ianikut wasn't having it and took hold of both her hands in one of his and proceeded to drive into her harder and faster. Giving her pleasure was getting him off like nothing in his past had.

“Whose woman are you?” He demanded.

“Yours.”

Ianikut simply grunted as he lowered her legs and flipped her over. Gently pushing her head down while pulling her hips up, he grabbed her braids and surged into her from behind. As soon as he entered, she screamed and sung out another aria. “Ianikut, oh, damn. Please, Ianikut. Please.”

“Tell me who you belong to,” he demanded again.

“You.”

“Say my name when you answer me. Who do you belong to?”

“You, Ianikut. I belong to you.”

Ianikut grunted his approval. “You’re damned right you belong to me! Remember that even if you forget everything else. You belong to me and I’ll never let you go! Are we clear on that, angel moya? Do you understand me?”

* * * * *

Though his voice was soft, it was pure steel. Aloha shuddered at his intensity. If she had any doubts about Ianikut’s manliness, his decree cleared it up. There was something about a big man going completely alpha -- especially when she was getting the benefit of all that testosterone. Although she’d been the beneficiary of many a man’s attention, those men weren’t interested in her femaleness, they were interested in what she could do for them as a mathematical genius, championship-caliber video game player, or as the youngest woman bearing the Carrington name, the legacy and all of the accoutrements that accompanied that name. But Ianikut was different. He didn’t give a shit about her genius, played video games like a newbie, and he sure as hell didn’t need her money. If he spent money every day, he wouldn’t run out. Ianikut crushed on her because he had fucking great taste and simply because they clicked.

She never understood why women often acted so damn simple over a man, but that’s because she had no experience. Sure, she’d engaged in sex, but it was simply a matter of physical release. Ianikut was different. He was the kind of man to make her drop her panties with merely a glance. Whenever he looked at her with that intensity, she imagined leopards, jaguars and other great cats. Imagined the male honing in on the female and stalking her. Imagined the chase. Imagined the female allowing herself to be caught. And most of all she imagined the wild sex that followed. Yes, that’s what she imagined because in the wild there were no thoughts of social propriety or social niceties. There was simply nature, and right now Ianikut’s bedroom was the Serengeti. And she was at the mercy of the alpha male who wanted and demanded her sexual submission. Aloha knew that she was going to give it to him for many reasons, chief among them was it felt so good and so right.

“Yes, Ianikut,” she sobbed as another orgasm overtook her. Sinking into the mattress she could do nothing more than take everything Ianikut was giving her...and love every freaking second.

She mumbled in protest when Ianikut retreated from her body. Before she could verbalize her protest, he had her on her back and filled with his big cock. Looking into his eyes, she gasped at the picture he made. There was intensity there as well as another emotion. Holding his eyes as he continued to rock into

her body, she named that other emotion -- passion. Damn, he was beautiful, and not simply because he looked at her like she was his entire universe but because she loved him back like that. She loved him. Though the admission scared her, it also liberated her.

"Ianikut," she began.

"You belong to me, angel."

"Yes, Ianikut. I belong to you," she said as she reached up to stroke his face softening the harsh expression with the pads of her fingers, with soft kisses, with her love.

* * * * *

"*Da*," he agreed as he thrust back into her. Tilting her head, he sank his fangs into her neck and exploded within her when she answered to his liking. They both shuddered when his fangs pierced her skin as the act of taking blood was a sublime intimacy between a vampire and his partner.

Ianikut was consumed with multiple pleasures at once. Releasing within her while savoring her essence took him to places he'd never dreamed. He experienced multiple firsts: never before had he had sex this cataclysmic, pussy this tight, or blood this savory. Though he'd had many, many years of taking blood, Aloha's blood was ambrosia Her blood kicked like high-proof liquor. Damn, her blood was addictive -- so much so that he failed to stop indulging even with the failsafe built-in to vampire physiology. Contrary to urban legend, vampires only took a few sips of blood, but something about Aloha caused him to continue to drink even after the failsafe was triggered. The beast in him only stopped when Aloha sighed his name.

Closing the bite marks, Ianikut sighed and waited for his fangs to recede before retreating from her body. She was so tight that he had to work to release himself from her body, which earned him another chorus of her moans. Smiling with satisfaction, he apologized as he collapsed next to her. Pleasing his angel was exhausting but pleasurable work. "I apologize, angel moya. You're addictive."

"In a good way?"

"In every way," he responded as he gently took her lips in a kiss. He smiled as he kissed her pleased to hear her moans and feel her body's response to his. Her body definitely knew its master and soon the rest of her would follow. Nudging her legs apart he inserted a finger into her. Her cunt overflowed with his release and instead of being concerned about the ramifications of their lovemaking, the beast within him growled its pleasure.

"I'm not sleeping in the wet spot," Aloha declared.

Laughing, he responded, "Angel, when I'm through with you this entire bed will be a wet spot."

"Oh, damn," Aloha moaned and drifted off to his promises completely oblivious to the fact that Ianikut had taken her blood.

* * * * *

Aloha awoke cradled in Ianikut's strong embrace. Sighing at the residual feel-goodness of mind-blowing lovemaking, she snuggled deeper into his embrace and enjoyed the feeling of being wrapped in his strength. Ianikut personified strength. Even resting it seemed as if his body was on alert. Every time she

moved he adjusted his hold on her so that while she had room to move, she remained in his protective embrace. Smiling, she knew that she wasn't getting out of his arms unless he allowed her to. Luckily, she didn't want to go anywhere but deeper into his embrace.

She laughed, realizing that she held a fistful of his hair. Running her hand through the silken strands, she spent a millisecond hating him for his hair before becoming distracted by his chest. How she'd slept against that hard eight-pack she had no idea, but she knew that she was going to make a habit of it. Gently nudging him, she removed her hand from his hair and traced one flat nipple while running her tongue over the other one before drawing it into her mouth. Without warning, she found herself flat on her back with Ianikut's cock grinding into her stomach. Pouting at having her favorite new toy taken away, she made noises of disgruntlement, as she tried to free her hands from his grasp.

"Ianikut," she whined tucking away the knowledge that playing with him thusly was a surefire method to bring the big Russian to full wakefulness.

"Woman, what are you doing?"

"Whatever I want, so let go of my hands and lay back down."

"Why?"

"Don't you like what I'm doing?" she asked as she thrust her hips up.

Ianikut merely growled, but she took that as a yes.

"It's my turn to play," she proclaimed as she nudged him over and kissed her way up his glorious body. Aloha was sure that Ianikut wasn't a man who ceded control without a helluva fight, but she wasn't the average opponent and this wasn't a win-lose situation but a win-win one. Either way she was going to get fucked to within an inch of her life...and so was he because though she enjoyed being dominated by him, the diva in her wanted to make her presence known. It was time to get some back. He was just where she wanted him: on his heavily muscled back -- right where he belonged when a real woman was in the bedroom.

Ianikut's body was like a topographical map with intriguing hollows, crevices, but mostly rock-hard ridges and planes. She admired every square inch...with her eyes and then with her hands. Licking her lips, she stroked his velvety cock intrigued with its size and texture. It was impressive, even when not fully erect. When erect, it felt like the rest of him -- rock hard -- yet the skin was silky smooth to the touch, almost delicate. When she was finished admiring with her hands, she admired with her tongue. Sighing in appreciation, she suckled him into a full erection. Though she couldn't fit most of him in her mouth, she spent several minutes alternately sucking and licking him. Using the intensity and duration of his growls as a directory, she learned what moved him and what incapacitated him. Since he growled so loud and consistently, she surmised that her touch was all that was needed to metaphorically bring him to his knees. And she knew from experience that a request from her lips would literally bring him to his knees. Right now, she didn't want him on his knees; she wanted him right where he was: writhing against her and pleading. When he was on the cusp of an orgasm, she pulled back and asked, "Who do *you* belong to, Ianikut?"

* * * * *

Ianikut was sure that his angel had asked him a question but the ripples of undiluted pleasure encompassing his body caused him to temporarily lose his ability to understand speech.

“What?” He panted while attempting to focus. Right now, his world boiled down to just one thing: Aloha. Her scent seeped into his nostrils. Her image imprinted itself in his eyelids. Her essence found its way to his bloodstream and became a living, breathing part of his blood. His petite angel was killing him, and he felt so good he didn’t mind dying.

His angel had magic hands. She used them to work him over. Those soft hands stroked him gently and sedately. Before he could enter a plea begging her not to stop, she engulfed the large head once more and suckled hard causing him to groan so loud his chest heaved from the force of the vibrations. Tossing back her braids and licking those succulent lips, she repeated her question.

“Who do you belong to, Ianikut?”

Pleasure engulfed him and took him to places he didn’t know existed; to possibilities that had been previously beyond his imagination. He couldn’t be blamed; until now, he’d only bedded lesser women. Aloha was clearly the best woman; the only woman; and more importantly, *his* woman.

“Who do you belong to Ianikut?” She asked again in that sultry voice that caused him to shudder. Her voice was so compelling, he considered banning her from speaking to other men.

“Ianikut?”

Though his eyes rolled back in his head, he managed to choke out an answer. “I. Belong. To. You,” he admitted while teetering on the brink of a cataclysmic orgasm. Damn, her mouth felt incredible. He thought no pleasure could rival the pleasure he received from sinking his cock into her hot, tight cunt but he was wrong, so wrong and being wrong had never felt this fucking good. Her mouth was just as hot, just as wet and because of his largeness and her smallness, the fit was just as tight.

“Who?” She asked again.

“You.”

“Say my name, Ianikut,” she purred.

Ianikut knew his petite angel had a temper, but he didn’t realize that she was also vindictive. She was his true equal and being that he loved her, he submitted. Yanking her up so that she could see his eyes, his need, his love, he admitted, “I belong to you, Aloha. Only you, angel moya. Only you.”

“Do you mean that?”

“Da,” he replied.

“Why do the words sound as if they’re ripped from your soul?”

“Because they are, angel.”

“Oh, God,” she cried before taking him in her mouth and bringing him to release.

“Aloha! Angel moya! Angel moya!” He screamed her name and ripped his sheets to shreds as he erupted into her warm, succulent mouth. Growling, he reveled in undiluted pleasure as she sucked and nipped her way up his body. When she was finished and crawled next to him, he yanked her against his

chest and held her as he shuddered through the last of his orgasm, Ianikut imagined how he looked to her. Bathed in sweat, nostrils flaring, hair flowing down his back, the vampire close to the surface, he eyed her possessively. Taking a nipple into his mouth, he pleased it and then its twin before taking her mouth in a kiss. Pulling back, he lapsed into Russian.

“Ti nuzhna mne(I need you/you are necessary to me).Ya tebya lyublyu(I love you).Ja ne mogu zhit' bez vas (I can't live without you).Ya bUdu vseгда lyubit' tebya (I will always love you).Dajte mne vashu vlyublennost' (Give me your love),” he entreated between kisses. And when her lips were swollen from his attentions he repeated his entreaty lest she forget it in her pleasure. *“Ti nuzhna mne(I need you/you are necessary to me).Ya tebya lyublyu(I love you).Ja ne mogu zhit' bez vas (I can't live without you).Ya bUdu vseгда lyubit' tebya (I will always love you).Dajte mne vashu vlyublennost' (Give me your love).”*

“I don't know what that meant but it sounded beautiful. What does it mean?”

“It means,” he began before realizing that Aloha was already asleep.

Chapter Twelve

The heat woke Aloha. Well, actually a combination of the heat and being crushed against something hard. Coming fully awake, Aloha realized that the something hard she was crushed against was Ianikut. She couldn't complain at how closely he held her considering how good it felt. Being in his arms felt better than winning Madden on the All-Madden level. Aloha had never spent the night with a lover, but then again, she hadn't wanted to. Though adequate lovers, none had been able to hold her attention.

It wasn't their fault; she had high expectations and a short attention span. But then there was Ianikut. That motherfucker had done more than hold her attention. He'd captivated her mind and her heart whilst fucking her so good her whole body tingled. The Ianikut was the man, no Ianikut was straight out the shiznit. And after last night, she had to admit that he deserved to put that article in front of his name.

Instead of being filled with morning-after regrets, she simply paused and admired the big Russian. Ianikut was one beautiful, beautiful man and she knew that she'd never tire of looking at him. He was the kind of beautiful that belonged in a museum, right next to the Mona Lisa. Well, maybe that wasn't such a good idea for if the curators displayed him next to that portrait, Ianikut would overshadow it. Truth be known, Ianikut was the kind of man that could not only overshadow the whole damn Louvre but also the Smithsonian, the Met, and at least six of the seven man-made wonders of the world. If she didn't consider Googleplex a wonder, then he would outshine all of them.

Tearing her eyes off of Ianikut's museum-worthy body, Aloha stretched languorously reveling in the way she felt. Still tingling, she bit her lip to stop her moans from spilling out. She was mush -- her whole body felt good in that fucked-into-submission kind of way. Smiling, she recalled Ianikut's promises to ravish her. She thought his words were mere bragging but if anything his taunt had been an understatement. The big Russian had straight brought it, and her tingly body was proof of his prowess. He'd put it on her in ways she hadn't known it could be put on.

Though she felt better than good, she had to see to her needs. Throwing another glance at Ianikut's sleeping form, she silently praised him and made appreciative sounds in her throat.

Bending over him, she lightly kissed his mouth and whispered her gratitude for the best night she'd ever

had before slipping off to the bathroom.

* * * * *

Ianikut woke as soon as his mind registered the change in her breathing and increase in her heart beat. After sharing such intimacies, he was as familiar with his woman's body as he was with his own. His physiology had undergone a metamorphosis after making love to her, making him attuned to any changes in her homeostasis and triggering his need to protect.

Knowing that she was safe, he gave her a few minutes of privacy before rising. Being that his hearing was as sharp as his vision, he'd heard her moans of appreciation and wanted to ravish her immediately. Never had a woman admired him so simply or sincerely. His past lovers screamed out their pleasure but to him it wasn't praise; but merely an affirmation of his prowess.

His ego was appropriately stroked with her soft appreciations but it was her whispered thank you that broke him down. He'd never had a woman thank him for ravishing her. Oh, he had received gratitude for the rare trinket or token of affection, but Aloha's thank you humbled him and cracked his heart wide open. She'd unknowingly accomplished what no other woman ever had: she entrenched herself in his heart and as soon as his heart was filled with her presence, it sealed itself around the treasure that was she. His heart and mind had firmly lined up on the side of his cock. Aloha was the only woman that his body, mind, or heart would accept, and the beast within him roared at him to move his ass and make her an Aleksandrovich.

Stretching, he was pleasantly surprised to discover that he'd slept so long. It could've been due to the fact that his angel was a restless sleeper. Spending long hours watching Aloha sleep, a satisfied smile settled upon his lips when he realized that her body continually searched him out. She tended to be restless unless she was snuggled into his chest with a fistful of his hair in her hand. After almost being ripped bald twice when he's inadvertently moved too far away for her body's liking, he repositioned himself so that she had free access to his hair. Sleep was easy after he discovered that little fact. Enjoying the feel of his woman in his arms, he fell into such a deep sleep that he'd almost missed the late-afternoon knock on his door.

Stretching, Ianikut was surprised to feel soreness. He rarely felt any physical discomfort, not even after battle. Pausing, he acknowledged that Aloha was all woman -- and all his, and she had fully put it on him. Taking a moment to shake his hair out of his eyes he padded to the adjoining bath. Knocking, he waited until she bade him to enter before opening the door.

"Good evening, angel."

She stopped brushing her teeth long enough to answer, "Good evening, Ianikut. I hope that you don't mind me using your toothbrush."

"Everything I have is yours, Aloha."

"Dibs on the plasma, then," she shouted gleefully.

Throwing back his head, he roared and received a swat on his ass as a reward. Ianikut waited until she was finished brushing her teeth before approaching her. Walking up behind her, he gently circled her petite form and dropped a kiss on the top of her head. Sighing, he took a moment to simply bask in the joy of holding her, grateful that she allowed him this small pleasure. He was surprised when she turned in his arms and laid her head against his chest.

“Thank you,” she said.

“For what, angel moya?”

“For last night.”

“It is I who should be thanking you.”

“Yeah, probably,” she joked as she disentangled herself from his embrace and made for the bedroom. “I’m going to let you have the bathroom now since I worked you so hard last night.”

“You worked me hard?” he asked with a hint of smarminess just to get a rise out of her.

“Damn right, old man. Notice that it was you, not I who was too tired to drag out of bed this morning.”

Raising a brow, he chuckled. “Well, don’t venture far,” he warned. “This old man has plans for you.”

“Like you could survive any more plans,” she smirked as she flopped onto the bed. “And by the way, there isn’t a law banning color in your home you know.”

“Well then, it’s a good thing that I have you,” he teased. Ianikut had never given much consideration to his surroundings as long as they were clean and functional. He was glad that the master bath was opulent -- even though it, like the rest of his home was white on white.

After taking care of his needs he opened the door and asked, “shower or bath?”

“How about a shower and then a bath?”

“Trust you to be contrary,” he answered as he adjusted the controls on his shower.

“Of course, I’m contrary. You wouldn’t appreciate me if I weren’t.”

Smiling Ianikut responded, “On the contrary, I appreciate you in ways you can’t even imagine, angel.”

“And I appreciate you just as much, Ianikut.”

“I know.” He smiled. “I was greatly moved by the sounds of your appreciation,” he said before kissing her.

* * * * *

After they finished washing each other, Ianikut discovered the real reason that Aloha wanted to shower first -- she wanted to play with his hair. He’d never had a woman want to wash his hair. They wanted to spend his money, play house with him, and drive his cars, but none had ever wanted to groom him. Damn, she made him feel things he’d never felt before.

She took his silence as a potential ‘no’ and launched an immediate protest. “Ianikut, I know that you’re not about to deny me especially after I let you play in damn near everything I have.”

As if I could deny you anything. “No, I’m not going to deny your request. I’m just surprised. No woman has ever wanted to do anything personal for me that didn’t result in an immediate reward,” he admitted.

“Then, they were idiots, which is why you don’t need to be with them. Playing with your hair is a treat that I plan to savor.”

“Do I get to wash your hair?”

“Absolutely not. You need proper training, before you get the privilege of doing a black woman’s hair -- so until then, hands off. Now hand me the shampoo and bend down,” she instructed.

Ianikut spent the next fifteen minutes moaning and it wasn’t because he was making love. Aloha had magic fingers. He wasn’t aware that the nerves in his cock were attached to the ones in his scalp, but fifteen minutes with a cock so hard that it could break glass alerted him to that fact. Groaning, he summoned all his control to refrain from ejaculating. As soon as Aloha finished, he backed her into the wall where he proceeded to kiss her breathless. Impaling her on his cock he was about to help her ride him when she shrieked for him to shut off the water and gave him a mini-lecture on the properties of black hair. Using one hand to shut off the water, he pistoned into her and quickly brought them both to orgasm.

Chapter Thirteen

Reclining in the Jacuzzi bath, Ianikut gently nuzzled her neck, while they both enjoyed the massaging jets. It was a good thing that they were already clean because they didn’t get much washing accomplished between languorous kisses. When they finally emerged from the bath, they bantered as they changed the sheets.

“These sheets could stand up and walk themselves to your laundry room,” Aloha commented.

Ianikut merely preened -- as much as a vampire of his stature and prestige could. “Is this the part where I insert an ‘I told you so’?” he inquired silkily.

Aloha didn’t answer, instead she bombarded him with the pillows on her half of the bed. “No, this is the part where I ignore your gloating because I’m the bigger person,” she teased as she collapsed onto the hastily-made bed. It was obvious that making beds wasn’t her skill; it was only his abilities that insured that the fitted sheet and the flat sheet ended up in the correct order.

Lying down beside her, he raised an eyebrow at her description of her being the bigger person. He couldn’t hold back his laugh considering that he dwarfed her in size. He began to suspect that he had a decidedly better temper than his angel when she opened her eyes long enough to glare at him.

“You know, your laugh is seductive,” Aloha commented as she turned in his arms and kissed her way up the column of his throat.

“Everything about me is seductive, angel moya,” he replied in between moans of pleasure.

“Especially your modesty,” she replied as she climbed onto his body.

Ianikut didn't get a chance to respond as she covered him with her hot, little body and placed her succulent lips above his and demanded entrance. Plus, she held his hair, alternately massaged his scalp and ran her fingers through it as she feasted on his mouth. *Oh, damn* . He should stop her, and he would... in a few minutes.

* * * * *

Sighing into his mouth, Aloha lost herself in the kiss. Having this man at her mercy gave her a heady rush of power -- literally. It was similar to the head rush she experienced when she drank slushies too fast. She drew back and grabbed her head, muttering, "Damn, you're better than my slushies."

"Of course I am, angel. And you're better than anything I've ever sampled. Now come let me feed you, so that I can sample you some more," he said as he rose and walked to his closet.

"Ianikut, obviously you missed the fact that I have nothing on," she said.

"Angel, although I choose to ignore many things, there are few things that slip past me. The fact that you have nothing on is something that I couldn't miss and something I definitely wouldn't ignore."

"Perhaps, I should go home --"

"*You are* home, angel," he forcefully proclaimed as he herded her to the bed.

Aloha marveled at his speed. One moment, Ianikut was headed to the closet and before she could blink, she found herself pinned under 250 pounds of fierce-looking alpha. The black woman in Aloha automatically responded to the challenge of an alpha male -- but probably not in the way he expected. "Ianikut, get your ass off of me. I've told you before to mind how you treat me and speak to me. And stop glaring at me like I'm taking away your favorite toy."

"You are my favorite toy." He pouted.

"Nevertheless, I refuse to lounge around naked."

"Why?"

"Because in a few minutes I'll be impressively ashy, which is so not cute," she huffed.

"So as long as you're not ashy, you can be persuaded to lounge around naked?" he asked as he wagged his brows.

"Maybe, perhaps, if the right man asked me," she teased.

"I better be the only man," he declared as he yanked her to him.

Aloha pretended to think about it but as far as her heart was concerned, Ianikut was the only man -- period. "You are. Now, get me some lotion."

Ianikut pointed to the closet, "You'll find what you need in there."

"There's a plasma television, a bag of Skittles, and a slushy in there?" She teased as she walked toward

the closet.

“I’m not foolish enough to let you talk me into placing a TV in our bedroom. You’d never pay attention to me, if I were to do something so asinine. The only way I can prevent you from running off with the plasma downstairs is to distract you with my lovemaking.”

“You’re such a baby,” she teased and then gasped as she spied virtually her entire luggage collection in his closet. “How did you get these?”

Coming up behind her, Ianikut fondled her luscious breasts and nuzzled her as he answered. “Believe it or not, Atlanta was able to pry herself away from the blond long enough to pack some of your things and bring them here.”

“She has no concept of the term ‘overkill,’” Aloha sighed as she brought her hands up to cover her face in embarrassment.

“No, she doesn’t, but that’s the least of her faults. I know you’re not embarrassed after all that we’ve shared?” he asked as he seductively rubbed himself against her back. It was actually more like the top of her spine due to the difference in height.

“Well, I was, but since you’ve done such a spectacular job of distracting me, I’ll shove my embarrassment to the side,” she said as she alternately cussed and dug through the cases.

Ianikut peeked at the condition of the contents in her cases and burst out laughing. “I see that Atlanta packs suitcases about as well as you make beds.”

“There’s nothing wrong with the way I make beds,” she muttered as she finally located the container of Chocolate Covered Berries lotion.

* * * * *

Sensing that his angel was tired, Ianikut gently took the tube from her and proceeded to massage the fragrant lotion into every inch of her silken skin. He took his time, paying careful attention to her thighs because he knew that she was tender and because he enjoyed having his hands on her. After thanking him with her succulent lips, she motioned for him to lie down so that she could return the favor.

“Angel, that’s not necessary. I’m not as delicate as you are.”

“Probably not, but you’re ashy so you may as well let me have my turn,” she sassed as she squeezed out a massive amount of lotion.

“I don’t think I need quite that much lotion,” he said.

“Ha, that’s what you think. Let me guess, you only lotion visible skin like your hands and forearms.”

“Right.”

“That’s why despite the sexual revolution, trade unions, and the equaling out in the status of the genders, women continue to be responsible for dressing the children for school. If left up to men, every year the fashion trend would be the ‘I’ve slept in my clothes for three days and lost a fight with a bag of flour’ look. Now roll over so I can slap some lotion on that beautiful white, white skin. It’s a wonder your skin

didn't cut me to pieces being that it's a virgin to lotion."

Ianikut had no answer to her accusations so he obediently rolled over and allowed Aloha to have her way with him...and enjoyed every damn second of it. He didn't even realize that he smelled like a woman, and when he did, he didn't care because smelling like *his* woman was a high compliment indeed. With Aloha, he could see grooming and hygiene being bumped up from a necessity to a favorite pastime.

Chapter Fourteen

Hunger finally drove them downstairs. Ianikut had forewarned Aloha that his brothers would show up sooner or later. Witnessing how close-knit they appeared, she expected no less. Experiencing Skittles withdrawal, she skipped downstairs. She didn't get nervous until she heard his brothers horsing around in the kitchen. It wasn't that his brothers made her nervous -- she could take them in a fight -- if they were blindfolded, gagged, had one hand tied behind their backs, and had recently woken from induced comas. It was just that they knew what she and Ianikut had been doing. She didn't want them to think that she was easy.

Ianikut correctly guessed her thoughts and reassured her, "My brothers won't think any less of you, but they will envy me." He punctuated his statement with a kiss to her temple.

Poking her head into the kitchen, Aloha was surprised when Zhenechka, Antosha, Fyodor, Vyacheslav and Tosya rose and applauded.

"What are you guys doing?"

"Paying homage to the woman who has obviously felled the Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich," Tosya answered.

She had indeed felled Ianikut but she wanted to know what led them to that grand conclusion. "And what makes you think that?"

"The ridiculous smirk on Max's face," Fyodor answered.

Aloha couldn't repress a grin after turning and catching a glimpse at said smirk. "Besides that," she challenged. "Ianikut always smirks."

"I have a lot to smirk about, angel," Ianikut interjected.

"We're just listening to the evidence," Vyacheslav piped in.

"What are you, like an extra on CSI?" she asked.

"Don't have to be. The way he dragged you out of Atlanta's house was clue number one. Even if we hadn't witnessed that spectacle, then the trail of clothing leading from the garage to the staircase was enough for us," Antosha smiled. "And then, there's the fact that he smells like you."

"I'm merely surprised that he isn't dressed like you," Zhenechka stated while looking at her tie-dye shirt, denim bib-overall shorts, and bright pink Crocs sandals.

Aloha would've been mortified if they hadn't been smiling...and if the shreds of her lingerie weren't lying safely on the floor of Ianikut's bedroom.

"You guys are so bad." She smiled back.

"I see that the theory of you and Atlanta being twins is correct. Leaving a trail of clothing seems to run in your family," Zhenechka remarked.

"As does the bad ending your clothes seem to come to," Antosha said.

"You guys shouldn't tease until you can out drink a couple of women," she tossed back, before they all dissolved into laughter.

* * * * *

Aloha was about to take a seat, when suddenly she swayed. She would've hit the floor, if Ianikut hadn't caught her.

"Angel, what's wrong?" He demanded.

"I'm just a little dizzy. I'll be okay after I eat."

"You need to lie down, now," he decreed as he sat her on the counter.

"Ianikut, I haven't had any Skittles for like a whole day and on top of that someone worked me out hard all day and all night. It's no wonder that I'm dizzy. Put me down, so I can eat," she demanded.

"I took too much from you," he admitted softly as he ignored her attempts to wriggle from his grasp.

Aloha was too incensed to consider the full meaning of his words, but apparently, he'd pissed off his brothers because the next thing she knew, they all rose to their equally impressive heights.

Zhenechka roared, "Brother, what have you done? She is a woman and under your protection. Her needs come before your lust. How much did you take from her?"

Ianikut said something in Russian. Though she didn't understand what he said, she had no trouble deciphering the frost in his voice, and knew he wasn't issuing an invitation to tea. Aloha couldn't abide arguments and jumped from the counter to leave. Ianikut caught her before her feet could reach the floor and returned her to the counter.

"Where are you going?"

"Don't you take that tone with me!"

At the same time, Zhenechka demanded, "We will not let you dishonor, our sister! Honor her as you should or as the next in line, I will offer challenge for her!"

"And you will die," Ianikut answered, stalking toward Zhenechka. "Before or after I bed her?" Zhenechka goaded.

Aloha was stunned...and embarrassed...and the black woman in her was pissed the fuck off. Despite

the threat of imminent violence, she started crying. Immediately every man in attendance rushed to her side with concern.

“Get away from me!” she demanded as she blindly threw plates, cutlery, and whatever she could get her hands on.

“What’s wrong?” they all demanded as they dodged the objects she tossed their way.

“I am not a fucking whore. You can’t pass me around like a joint!”

“Little sister, we don’t mean any disrespect to you. It would be an honor to wed you,” Zhenechka stated. “However, what Ianikut has done is dishonorable.”

“Having sex with me is dishonorable?” she asked confusedly.

“I did not have sex with you! I made love to you!” Ianikut proclaimed.

“Semantics. What the hell was dishonorable about that?”

“Taking too much blood from you was dishonorable because it means that I failed to place your well-being before my own desires,” Ianikut admitted.

“Blood? You took my blood? When?” she asked in one breath. “Oh, that is so nasty!” she declared in the next breath.

“I took your blood when --”

Ianikut began to explain, when she interrupted, “Why the hell are you taking my blood? What the fuck is that about? Oh damn, you’re one of those crazy-ass white boys, aren’t you? Are you in a cult? You’re not going to kill me without a fight on your hands!”

“Angel moya, we’re not in a cult. We’re vampires,” Ianikut informed her softly as he gently relieved her of the knife she’d grabbed from the counter before she accidentally maimed herself.

“What?” she yelled.

Ianikut knelt before her. “It wasn’t my intention to act dishonorably. All day and all night I’ve told you of my need and love for you.” He paused to say it in Russian once again, “*Ti nuzhna mne. Ya tebya lyublyU. Ja ne mogu zhit' bez vas. Dajte mne vashu vlyublennost'*. Pardon me for one moment, angel.”

Chapter Fifteen

Ianikut was only gone for a few moments. When he returned, he dropped to his knees.

“*Zhenites' na mne!* Marry me,” he asked as he slid a huge diamond onto her finger.

“You’re a vampire?” She completely ignored his proposal and the ring that he’d just placed on her finger. “Where the hell are your fangs if you’re a” -- she paused to make air quotes -- “vampire?”

Ianikut would have to teach his angel the foolishness of tossing out a challenge to a vampire. Allowing his fangs to extend wasn't a difficult feat considering how desperately he wanted to fuck her again.

Aloha gasped and then ran her finger along the edge of Ianikut's fangs.

"Careful, angel. They're not just for decoration. They're sharp."

"Why do you need fangs that sharp? I bet you're one of those guys who likes a little moo in his steak."

Ianikut didn't think that his angel was ready to hear that his fangs were sharp in case he had to rip out an enemy's throat. He was about to tactfully change the subject when Aloha threw another question at him.

"That's some interesting dental work. Then again, you're in the South where interesting dental work is the norm."

"I think Southerners would be upset about your statement."

"Unlike you, I'm not a Yankee. As a full-blooded Southerner, I have an endorsement on my Southern card that allows me to talk smack about other Southerners."

"I'm not a Yankee -- I'm Russian."

"Same damn thing. If you're from any place other than the South, you're a Yankee. You would've known that if you had bothered to read the book I gave you."

Ianikut didn't know how they'd veered off topic so completely. He turned to gape at his brothers who all wore looks of disbelief. "Aloha," he said only to be interrupted by a barrage of questions.

"Didn't I ask if you were a vampire? You know, after getting to know you, I was willing to overlook the fact that you were a Duke fan, but this holding out on me about the fact that you're a vampire is complete bullshit."

"What would you have done if I had affirmed your suspicions, angel?"

"I would've given you a list of all the people who were mean to me and had you do something bad to them."

"Are you all vampires? What kind of vampires are you? Are you evil? And I hope that you don't think that I'm giving up slushies or daytime football games because you're vampires. And if you think I'm sleeping in a coffin you can just get the fuck over that." She finally stopped her rant long enough to ask, "Are you in a cult?"

"No angel, we aren't in a cult. Though we celebrate Christmas and Easter on different days, we are Christian as you are. As for the rest of your questions, yes, we're all vampires. We're no more or less evil than humans. You can continue to eat slushies and walk about in the daytime. And the sleeping in a coffin bit is an erroneous stereotype and -- as you would say -- just plain nasty."

"Hmm, well, we need to get something straight. The only place that I like blood is in my body or covering my enemies. You owe me an apology, and by the way you don't eat slushies, you drink them."

Ianikut and his brothers just looked on in incredulity, while Aloha continued to throw out a barrage of questions.

“What kind of vampire doesn’t have any powers?” she asked incensed.

“I have power,” Ianikut clarified.

“Can you turn to mist?” she asked.

“No, but...”

“Can you fly?” she interrupted.

“No, but...”

“Are you immortal?”

“Angel, you’ve been watching too many movies with Reign. Being a vampire is part of who I am but it’s not all that I am. Though I’m vampire, I’m also a man. You cannot separate that from who I am. As far as powers go, I cannot change my corporeal form. I cannot fly because I don’t have wings. And although vampires usually enjoy long lives, we’re not immortal.”

“Define long life.”

“My great-great-grandparents lived well into their hundreds.”

“Hey, can you incinerate things with your eyes?”

“What did they teach you in Chapel Hill ? Angel, you should’ve made the eight-mile trek to Durham . Then, you would’ve received a stellar education and not been so caught up in unproven hypotheses and urban myths,” he joked. “I cannot incinerate things with my eyes, but then, I don’t need to when I can destroy my enemies in hand-to-hand combat.”

“Yeah, whatever. So can Jack and I, but she’s a lot more impressive in hand-to-hand combat. Anyway, let me get this straight. You can’t change form. You can’t fly. You can’t zap things to ashes with your eyes, and you’re not immortal. What the hell is that about? I’m pretty sure that vampires are supposed to come with powers.”

“I have powers, angel -- just not Saturday morning cartoon powers.”

“Yeah, well. I’m not impressed. I don’t know what discount warehouse sold you those half-ass powers, but I hope that the fee is refundable!”

Ianikut didn’t bother to answer that, instead he flashed to her side and kissed her until she went soft. He only backed off when she was panting and grasping for purchase on his person. Uncaring as to whether it was the kiss or his minor show of power that impressed her, he continued to hold her close enough that she felt his raging hard-on. “Are you impressed now?” He smirked.

“Shut up, Ianikut. Is that how you handle your enemies, by kissing them into submission?”

Laughing, he answered, “I don’t have any enemies who are still alive, angel. I have a problem with

people fucking with me...or anything that belongs to me.”

“Well, then you might make a decent Southerner after all. Now tell me what you can do.”

“I have heightened senses, preternatural speed and superhuman strength.”

“For?” She asked.

“So that I might impress you, angel.”

* * * * *

The brothers of Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich watched and listened in complete disbelief. Apparently, Aloha had a strand or two of raving lunatic in her. After ascertaining that they weren't a cult hell-bent on sacrificing her or depriving her of her favorite treat -- all while destroying their kitchen -- she'd quickly regained her equilibrium. She wasn't displaying the fear or uncertainty that any of them expected. Obviously, she wasn't aware of Ianikut's status among vampires. Members of the Aleksandrovich lineage were treated with extreme deference. Males of the lineage were generally given wide berth because they were danger personified when moved to anger. Few surpassed them in the bringing-the-wrath department, and none surpassed Ianikut, not even their father -- the current king. Ianikut was hands down the most dangerous vampire in existence. His danger was tempered by his love for justice, which is why he also enjoyed the respect of his people.

“Excuse me, Aloha,” Tosya interrupted.

“Yes?” She paused in her rant to gift him with a beautiful smile.

“You do know that Max is quite powerful?”

“Yeah, and?”

“And few would dare to treat him with such blatant disrespect,” Antosha remarked.

“Well, few dare to treat me with such blatant disrespect. I'm just letting him know that I'm not about to allow him to run over me.”

“Those that challenge him usually end up dead,” Fyodor advised.

“Probably because they deserved to die, but I'm telling you guys right now there will be no attempting to kill me.”

“You're not afraid of him?” Vyacheslav inquired.

“No, but if you guys are afraid of him hide behind me and I'll protect you,” she said before stomping from the room.

Ianikut and his brothers were busy righting the fallout in the kitchen when Aloha's scream rent the air.

Ianikut was at her side, before she finished her scream.

“What is it, angel?”

“Ianikut, you need to get that...thing,” Aloha yelled as she scooted further into the corner.

“What thing?” Ianikut asked, seeing no threat.

“That thing right there!” Aloha screamed again and pointed.

“You mean that bat?”

“Hell yeah, I mean the bat! It’s not one of your brothers, is it?”

“My brothers are vampires, Aloha -- not shape-shifters, and even if they were I’m certain that they would shift into something more impressive than a baby bat.”

“Okay, thanks for the dissertation on shape-shifters. Now get that thing.”

“Aloha, it won’t hurt you. It’s only a baby; it’s not even a full-grown bat.”

“I don’t give a flying fuck what developmental stage it’s in! It’s nasty and icky, and I’m scared of it.”

“Let me get this straight: You’re not scared to take on me, my brothers or any damn body else in a fight, yet you’re scared of a little bat?”

“No, I’m not scared of you because you’re not an icky thing; you’re just a man, which is technically only half a step up from an icky thing. I’m not scared of your brothers because they’re cute and nice to me. And I’m not scared of bats, but I don’t like them. Now, get it, before it gets tangled up in my braids.”

“Why do I have to get it?” he asked as he retrieved the bat.

“Because you’re the man. Taking care of icky things is part of your job,” she said with conviction.

“How did it become part of my job?”

“Because it’s your house, so get it.”

“So if we were at your house...?”

“There wouldn’t be any bats in it.”

“And if there hypothetically was a bat?”

“Well, then, I’d shoot it with all due haste.”

“Don’t you think that’s overkill?”

“There is no such thing as overkill when it comes to my safety.”

“Truer words have never been spoken, angel,” he said as he opened the window and freed the bat.

“What? About bats being icky?”

“No, about there being no such thing as overkill when it comes to your safety.”

“Are you getting ready to go all crazy vampire Duke fan on me?”

“No, angel. I’m already a vampire and a Duke fan. The crazy description is debatable. But what isn’t debatable is your safety. In my code of ethics, there is no such thing as overkill, especially when it comes to the safety of those I hold dear.”

“Do you hold me dear?”

“Angel, I hold you the dearest of all. Now keep that in mind, before you inadvertently get an entire lineage of men destroyed.”

“You might be whiter than driven snow and a Duke alum, but you must be related to Jack because y’all think just alike.”

“I will take that as praise.”

“And you should because Jack is a helluva good woman,” she said as she settled in front of the television.

Chapter Sixteen

Ianikut watched Aloha look at the plasma with lust, and for a moment, he was almost jealous of his TV. He detoured to the kitchen to get her something to eat sure she would be too contrary to eat, and as her man it was his job to take care of her needs. Sitting nearby to insure that she ate, he watched her mouth and grew hard. Consequently, he spent most of the time wishing that he was her food, for few things could be better than being devoured by her succulent mouth. Breathing deeply to clear his lustful thoughts, he waited for her to finish eating before resuming their conversation.

“You didn’t answer my question, angel.”

“What question?”

“The only question that matters!” He thundered. “I asked you to marry me.”

“Impressive manners from such a cultured man. Go to hell, Ianikut. There’s a ninety percent chance that I’m going to marry you so shut up and let me watch television in peace.”

Any other man might’ve been content with that answer but he wasn’t any other man. Plus, a ninety percent chance meant that there was a ten percent chance that she wouldn’t marry him, and that just wasn’t acceptable to his heart, his mind, his cock or the beast within him. Currently, they were all pleading their case. *We love her*, his heart pumped in tune to hers. *Her impressive intellect will insure that life with her will never be boring*, his mind added. *That is the best pussy we’ve ever had and I want more right now*, his cock begged. *Mine*, the beast within him proclaimed.

His angel was marrying him -- regardless of how many stops he had to pull out. Pulling her onto his lap, he caressed her, kissed her, nipped at her. He lingered at the places that elicited moans from her -- the shell of her ear, the column of her neck, and the hollow of her shoulder.

Aloha didn't respond outwardly, but her heartbeat increased, her breathing became choppy, and he was pretty sure that her eyes were glazed over. His angel was so cute when she was being stubborn. He respected the fact that she was standing up for herself; but he didn't appreciate that it was him that she was standing up to. She was his woman, his destiny. He loved her and his beast hungered for her. He was a male Aleksandrovich and he always got what he wanted. And he wanted her.

He knew that Aloha wouldn't give in, regardless of how bad she wanted to. Although he wanted her, he had to be careful of her feelings. She wasn't prideful, but she was a woman who despite her quirkiness, quick temper, and atrocious sense of color, had a great deal of dignity about her. As much as he wanted her, he wouldn't do anything that made her feel less than the beautiful woman she was, or cause her to question what he thought of her. He didn't plan on letting her deny him; he simply had to make her want him as much as he wanted her.

Taking up a position behind her, he sat quietly and allowed her to play her game. He spoke softly to her asking about her game knowing that his voice got to her.

"You know we have to talk about this, angel."

"I have to finish this level first," she answered without looking at him.

Dropping his voice an octave, he responded. "I understand. I'll wait a little longer."

"Kay," she answered without even looking at him.

Patience may have been a virtue but it was also kicking his ass right now. It only took an hour for him to realize that Aloha had no intentions of abandoning her game anytime soon. God created the entire world and everything in it in six days, yet Aloha was still on the same level of her game. Every time he asked if she was almost done he was gifted with another increment of time. He noticed that she had a thing for patterns. She went through all of the prime numbers. 'Give me one minute, give me two minutes, give me three minutes, and give me five minutes.' It took him a few moments, but he soon realized that she now worked through increments of time that were multiples of three. After being told to wait for fifteen more minutes, Ianikut kicked his game up another notch, before she had a chance to delay him yet again. He gently nipped her neck. When she merely moved her head aside to accommodate his lips, he reached around her and palmed her breasts. He smiled when she arched into him, giving him better access to what was his.

"Eighteen more minutes?" He asked knowing by her breathing that she wasn't thinking about her game or the plasma.

"What?"

"How long until you're finished?" he whispered into her ear.

"I'm almost done," she breathed.

"Are you sure?"

"Yesssssss. Why?"

"Because in a moment you're not going to be able to concentrate on the game," he answered smoothly.

“Why not?” she asked, hitting Pause.

“Because I’m going to do this,” he replied while smoothly pulling her from the sofa and spreading her out on the floor.

“Oh, yes.”

“I need to take you to our bedroom, for only silk should touch that glorious body,” he rasped, even though he doubted his ability to wait that long to have her. He had an overwhelming need to dominate her, to witness her surrender and her subsequent acknowledgment of him as her man.

“Ianikut,” she half-moaned and half-protested.

Her semi-protest brought out the beast in him. She belonged to him. He was the Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich, and she was his angel -- his and no other man’s...and there was no way in hell that he was going to let her escape him. His angel had a temper, but as fiery as it was it could not stand against his need to have her.

“So, *when* will you be marrying me, angel moya?” he asked, nibbling her ear. ‘If’ was not an option he was willing to entertain.

“Ianikut, leave me alone,” she moaned as he pleased her.

“That ceased being an option long ago, angel,” he said as he took a nipple in his mouth.

“I’m mad at you.”

“I understand, but I’d like a yes to my question if you please.” He stopped kissing her long enough to breathe.

“That’s the thing about questions. One can answer it in the affirmative or the negative,” she paused to arch into his talented mouth, “and at their leisure.”

“That may be true under most circumstances...but not this time. Any answer other than yes is unacceptable. In fact, I will be displeased with anything other than an emphatic ‘yes.’”

“You’re just selfish and used to having your own damn way,” Aloha moaned.

“From our numerous conversations you must know that the only time that I’m selfish is when it comes to you, angel,” he said as he inserted two fingers into her cunt.

“If you’re referring to your grunts of appreciation, your sighs of longing, or your roars of completion as conversation, something is really wrong in your head,” she panted.

“Think harder, angel. What did I ask you as I made love to you?”

“The same thing that I asked you as I fucked your brains out, which is why you must be acting as if you don’t have any sense right now,” she threw back.

Ianikut smiled at her sass, but plowed on determinedly. “What did I say when you mentioned going

home?" He asked as he pulled her tighter to him and rubbed his throbbing cock against her.

"You said that I was already home."

"And I meant it, angel."

"Whatever, Ianikut. Now, put your finger back in my pussy," she replied as she moaned in pleasure at the friction of Ianikut's cock against her ass.

Ianikut would settle for nothing less than an unequivocal yes and a date that was within a few weeks at the latest. "How about if I put my big cock in your cunt? Hmm?"

"You know what? The percentage of me consenting to marry you is steadily dropping."

The beast was now completely out. "Angel, I've tried to be patient. I've tried to be a gentleman. I've tried to give you a choice, but you push me too far. You will marry me and that is that! Know this: you will be my wife even if I have to pull every dirty trick in the book. That means if I have to impregnate you, hold your Ferrari hostage, buy out the company that makes your favorite video game and put production on hold indefinitely, *I will* do it!" he roared as he positioned her under him and plunged into her in one motion.

Catching her breath, she asked, "Did you just threaten me into marrying you?"

"No, angel, I did not threaten you into marrying me, although that can be arranged if that's what it takes. I demanded that you marry me -- there's a difference. You will be my wife," he panted as he rammed into her.

* * * * *

"Oh, goodness!" Aloha screamed out in pleasure and shock. She had been so mad that she had missed him undressing her and himself. Damn vampire and his powers. His powers were the only reason she didn't get up and kick his ass. Well, that and the fact that his cock was lodged so firmly within her she bet an E-N-T doctor could see the head of his cock via her throat. She couldn't say anything but moan and sigh between pants. If someone didn't know better, they'd think that she was in labor, had a stuttering problem, and that she was arguing with the father-to-be who was part animal.

"Ianikut," she panted in time with his growls.

"Ianikut," she moaned backup to his roars. "Ianikut! Ohhhh," she whispered in time with his roars before they both lapsed into silence.

Aloha was stunned silly. Ianikut had just fucked her so completely she wasn't even interested in the plasma. She could only stare at the man crouched above her. Hair in disarray, fangs fully extended, eyes daring her to deny him. He was the most masculine, beautiful, exciting thing she had ever witnessed... and it was all for her. All of it. All six feet seven inches and two hundred and fifty pounds of alpha vampire and oh my goodness Duke (gag) fan. She was going to have a mixed-marriage... one Carolina fan and one Duke fan. What would the good people of the great state of North Carolina say about that? She'd never be able to trek along Highway 15-501 again. *Who the hell cares? Fucking Ianikut will more than make up for that*, her heart threw in.

* * * * *

Ianikut balanced his weight on his elbows careful of his petite angel. He hadn't meant to lose control like he did, but he found that he had precious little control around her. Looking at her, he wondered what she thought. One could never tell what her brilliant, lunatic mind would come up with. Was she contemplating his death? Did she fear him? When was she going to marry him willingly? He was about to ask her when she spoke.

"If I have a carpet burn on my back, I'm not giving you any pussy for a month!"

"*Zhenites' na mne!* Marry me," he demanded. *Tell her that you love her you idiot*, his heart reminded him. "*Ti nuzhnA mne*(I need you). *Ya tebyA lyublyU* (I love you). *Ja ne mogu zhit' bez vas* (I can't live without you). *Ya bUdu vsegdA lyubIt' tebyA* (I will always love you). *Dajte mne vashu vljublennost'* (Give me your love)," he pleaded.

"You know damn well that I'm going to marry you. Now, leave me the hell alone because I'm still mad at you. And our kids are going to Carolina, and that's that."

And that was how the Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich proposed to Aloha and that was how the Aloha Carrington answered. He couldn't wait to one day tell their children the tale.

Ianikut made love to her all day long and elicited her promise to marry him before delivering each cataclysmic climax. Even sleep didn't deter Ianikut from his mission. He woke her several times and made the same request although she had answered yes every time: "*Zhenites' na mne.* Marry me."

"Ianikut, what?" she began before his tongue engaged hers so that the only thing that could slip out was the chorus of her moans. He wasn't sure when it had gone demand or if it had ever been anything but a demand. Ianikut wasn't satisfied with a simple yes to his request-demand; he wanted her to answer in the affirmative, without hesitation, in her sleep, until it became an automatic response. It had become a chorus: "*Marry me. Who do you belong to?*" He would only accept two responses: "*Yes, Ianikut. You, Ianikut.*"

* * * * *

Aloha was pretty much a hostage -- a willing one, but a hostage, nonetheless -- to Ianikut's ravenous sexual appetite. She'd fall asleep in his arms and wake up wrapped in his strength. Ianikut wasn't a passive lover. He was fully committed to giving her pleasure upon pleasure. Every. Single. Time. Though she loved the intensity of his lovemaking, it'd be hard to get anything done if she constantly had 250 pounders of domineering Russian between her thighs. And as good as his loving was and as much as she hungered for him, craved him, and loved him, she needed to be more than just Ianikut's woman. She was an accomplished woman and had many interests, which is why she decided to call Atlanta and have her come get her. She needed a dose of her craziness and needed to check that Evil Twins still stood.

Atlantahad her laughing as soon as she climbed into her truck. Only Atlanta would have a half gallon of iced-tea, a box of glazed doughnuts and two containers of grits in the center console. Despite her misgivings about her driving and mixing a sweet drink with glaze, she was glad she decided to go out. If she'd stayed in, she would've missed a glorious day, an unexpected appearance by Zuri...and the big motherfucker that Zuri dragged into Evil Twins.

Hannes Sighelm was built like a freaking armored vehicle and had piercing golden eyes. He seemed to be a decent fellow, but until he received the Posse seal of approval, he was an ass-whipping waiting to happen. Though she wanted some more of Ianikut's attention, she knew that Silana was going to call for

the lunch and that she was going to go. Chuckling, she couldn't wait to hear what Zuri had to say for herself. It was nice to have someone else under the microscope of the Posse.

Though she may've anticipated the Posse's response to the intriguing Austrian, she had no idea that Ianikut would have such an intense response. By four p.m. she was exhausted. It wasn't that she was soft; it was the fact that she wasn't a morning person. It was also the fact that Ianikut had spoiled her with his pampering. Her body didn't appreciate getting up so damn early unless it involved Ianikut loving her right back to sleep. Sighing, she called herself all kinds of stupid for leaving his bed and putting her nose back to the grindstone. Her job was more mentally-taxing than physically-taxing, however she must've looked like shit warmed over because Atlanta directed her to the office with instructions to nap.

"I can't believe that you've allowed a Duke alum to make you go all soft on me," Atlanta tsk-tsked before throwing a blanket on top of her and dimming the lights.

"Viking whore," Aloha threw back.

"Just Steele's. Now go to sleep so I don't have to keep explaining to people why you're hobbling around like you've been on horseback for weeks on end."

"When I get up, I'm kicking your ass."

"By the time you get up, Imax will be here and have you on your back again."

"You are evil."

"Nope," Atlanta denied, pointing to her imaginary halo.

When Aloha awoke, Ianikut was indeed there. Taking a moment, she simply watched him watch her. She liked the way he looked at her.

"Why are you here?"

"I was summoned by your evil twin."

Making a noise of disgust, she replied. "I'm fine, Ianikut."

"Angel, you're exhausted. Why didn't you tell me that you weren't feeling well."

"I'm fine, Ianikut."

"No, angel. You're beautiful," he said as he approached her. Dragging her into his embrace, he sniffed and everything within him stilled.

Aloha felt him tense beneath her. "Ianikut? What's wrong?"

"What male has been so close to you?"

"What?"

“Some male has been close to you. Who is he and why is he encroaching on my territory?”

“Ianikut, you’re out of line. And I’m working in a public establishment, so of course, males are going to be near me.”

“This male smells different.”

“Ianikut, you’re being a dick. Leave me alone.”

“I shall never leave you alone, angel. You’re mine. I’m not accusing you of anything. I merely want to know who this male is.”

“Well, you can find out on your fucking own because I’m through with this conversation,” she said.

Ianikut gently grabbed her arm as she walked past him. “Are you coming home?”

Aloha stopped. She wondered if he realized what he said. He’d asked if she was coming home. Looking into his eyes, she glimpsed his ever-present arrogance, but she also saw uncertainty.

“Oh, yes, because we’re about to have our first fight, and you’re about to learn how to lose graciously.”

“I never lose, angel.”

“That’s because you’ve never had me as an opponent.”

Chapter Seventeen

They did indeed have their argument. And she did indeed win simply because her argument was dead-on accurate and because she didn’t give Ianikut a chance to talk, which he pointed out.

“Are you going to give me an opportunity to speak?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’ll only say something stupid, which I will have to respond to, which in turn will lengthen this discussion.”

“But I may have something to say that you’d like to hear.”

“Is it the words ‘Aloha, I apologize for being a complete ass, and I will endeavor not to anger you again, and as penance I shall be your love slave and do whatever you wish’?”

“I’m always your love slave and I will always endeavor to please you.”

“Not exactly what I wanted to hear, but that’s a start.”

“It has come to my attention that you really enjoy having your way.”

“Are we playing ‘let’s state the obvious’ because if we are, then, let me add that it has come to my attention that you’re tall.”

“And good-looking.”

“And arrogant.”

“And in love with you.”

“Obviously, you have fan-freaking-tastic taste.”

“Yes, angel. I do,” he said as he kissed her.

* * * * *

Aloha enjoyed Ianikut’s tender lovemaking and his thorough pampering. When she finally drifted off to sleep, she had a smile on her face...and so did Ianikut. She woke a few hours later, feeling nauseous. She tried to be quiet, but Ianikut and his supersonic hearing heard her moan.

“Angel, where are you hurt?”

“Leave me alone, Ianikut.”

Of course he ignored her and said, “No.”

Blowing out a sigh, she turned to him. “Ianikut, leave me alone and let me sleep.”

“You can sleep, after I’ve tended to you. Now, tell me what’s wrong.”

“Fine, whatever. I feel sick. My stomach feels as if an alien is trying to claw out of my body.”

“How much candy did you eat?”

“Ianikut, can you be helpful and either get me some antacids or give me peace.”

“I don’t carry antacids, but I’ll procure some. Do not move from that bed,” he ordered.

Flipping him the bird, she buried her head under the covers and concentrated on not throwing up the three bags of tootsie rolls she’d consumed when Ianikut wasn’t looking. So focused on breathing, she didn’t realize that Ianikut had entered the room until he set the meds and a glass of water next to her. He only wore a towel and though he was looking all kinds of hot she hoped that he didn’t go to the store like that.

“Please tell me that you didn’t go to the store dressed like that.”

“Of course, I didn’t, angel. Now take these,” he said as he shoved the antacids at her.

“Um, then, how did you get this?” she asked, tossing back the pills and chasing them with water.

“I called Zhenechka.”

“The store’s not even fifteen minutes away.”

“Leaving you alone when you’re not well is out of the question.”

Aloha knew that it was pointless to argue the point. “Is Zhenechka mad at me?”

“Has he ever been mad at you? He’s probably busy plotting my demise, so that he can have you for himself,” Ianikut mumbled in a disgruntled tone.

“Why are you crazy?” she asked in disbelief. “Did you consider that he might’ve been entertaining a young woman himself?”

“Like I care. It’s his duty to see to your needs in my absence or at my request.”

“Ianikut.”

“I am not discussing this, angel.”

“You’re such a man.”

“I can be no less.” Indicating the bottle of antacids, he inquired, “How long does it take for these to kick in?”

“Maybe half an hour,” she said. She looked at the scowl on Ianikut’s face and thought that he was upset about the mess she had made. She immediately started apologizing. “Ianikut, I’m...”

Ianikut had placed his fingers against her lips. “Don’t you dare apologize...until you’re well enough to take your punishment like a woman.”

“And just how do you plan on punishing me?”

“By spanking your ass, angel.”

“But that’ll hurt.” She pouted.

“It’s supposed to, but don’t worry, I’ll fuck you better. In future, I shall keep a closer eye on you. I cannot bear it when you hurt in any way.”

“But...”

“But nothing,” he said as he drew her into his arms. “Now, go to sleep and dream of me.”

Aloha was touched and would’ve started crying if Ianikut hadn’t growled for her to cease breaking his heart at once. She did and then turned over, ran her fingers through his hair and demanded, “Ask me to marry you again.”

Ianikut didn’t know what she was up to. Nevertheless, he complied. “*Zhenites’ na mne!* Marry me.”

“Da, Ianikut. Yes! Next week if you wish.”

“*Ja ne mogu zhit' bez vas*(I can't live without you).*Ya bUdu vsegdA lyubIt' tebyA* (I will always love you),” Ianikut declared.

Ianikut had said as much so many times over the past week that she no longer needed the translation. “*Ya tebyA lyublyU*(I love you) Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich.”

Then, it was Ianikut who cried and simultaneously broke her heart and repaired it with the magnitude of his love.

* * * * *

Aloha woke to the buzzing of her cellular phone. She knew that she was alone in bed or else Ianikut would've answered it.

“Yeah.”

“Granddaughter, what's going on?”

Aloha should've known that her grandmother would contact her. She had this freaky accurate ESP thing going. Though her grandmother wasn't much for talking on the phone, she always called when Aloha was at a crossroads or experiencing a crisis. She knew better than to try to bullshit her grandmother so she jumped right into the meat and potatoes of the issue. “I'm getting married.”

“Why?” her grandmother inquired.

“Because Ianikut loves me, Grandmother, and I love him right back.”

“And the problem would be?”

“He's,” she paused, “white.”

“Hmm,” her grandmother said.

Aloha wasn't sure how to interpret her grandmother's response, although she knew that she wasn't giving Ianikut up. Older black women tended to distrust white men, and though she could understand why, she understood that *her* heart beat for Ianikut.

“I'm not giving him up, Grandmother.”

“I didn't expect you to, little girl, which is why I'll be there in an hour.”

“What do you mean that you'll be here in an hour?”

“I mean that in sixty minutes I shall be outside the home of this Mr. Ianikut M. Aleksandrovich.”

“How?”

“Don't ask questions you don't want answers to. Now, get your hind parts out of bed and make yourself presentable.”

* * * * *

Hanging up the phone, Aloha scrambled out of bed. "Ianikut!" she screamed while scurrying to the bathroom.

Ianikut was at her side almost instantly. "What is it, angel?" he asked with concern.

"My grandmother's on her way over! She'll be here in an hour! Get dressed, and you have to straighten up the house and make sure none of my panties are hanging about. Oh, damn. And don't you dare suck any of her blood."

"Angel."

"I mean it, Ianikut. If you or your brothers touch my grandmother, it will be on."

"Angel," he repeated before taking her toothbrush from her hands and embracing her. "Calm down. Breathe."

"But, Ianikut..."

"Angel, I promise you that no one will touch your grandmother in an inappropriate way and live. The house will be in perfect order by the time your grandmother arrives. Now, run yourself a bubble bath and relax. That is the extent of what I need for you to do," he said while gently nipping a path from her ear to her neck.

"But you can't even make a decent bed," she moaned.

"Neither can you," he retorted.

"You need to get dressed. You can't answer the door wearing that." She swallowed as she scanned his bare torso. "While my grandmother might be impressed, I won't be amused."

"What do you mean 'might'?" An incensed Ianikut asked. "I am 6'7" of devastating Russian man."

"Yeah, and all Grandmother will see is that you're severely lacking in the melatonin department."

"Isn't she going to notice that anyway?"

"Yeah, she is, but that doesn't mean that she gets to ogle my stuff. Now go cover up all of that devastation, before I'm tempted to kick my grandmother down a flight of stairs, if I catch her looking at you too long."

Regardless of Ianikut's decree to relax, Aloha set a new world record for completing her toilet. She didn't know how or when he did it, but Ianikut had the room looking as if it was getting ready to be featured in a home interiors magazine. She was throwing on some lip gloss when the doorbell rang. She was in the process of sprinting down the stairs when she was stopped by Ianikut's warning growl. "Angel, there's no need to run. Please be careful of your ankle," he said as he scooped her up and carried her down the stairs.

"You're going to spoil me," she protested.

“That is my plan,” he said, before he answered the door.

* * * * *

Ianikut knew that Aloha’s grandmother held sway, but he wasn’t sure what to expect. Mrs. Sojourner Carrington was what he imagined Silana would be like in another fifty years.

Bowing to her, he invited her in. “Please come in, Mrs. Carrington.”

Looking the young man up and down, she nodded her head and entered.

“Would you care for something to drink?”

“No, thank you. What I would like is to see my granddaughter,” she answered in a tone that brooked no nonsense.

He escorted her to the living room and watched as Aloha ran across the room and practically launched herself in the older woman’s arms. Concerned that his angel would accidentally knock the lady to the floor in her enthusiasm, he ran over to steady them but realized that his assistance wasn’t required. Sojourner Carrington was a tough old bird.

“Grandmommy! Grandmommy!” Aloha screamed as she was enveloped by strength and warmth. “Why did you come?”

“Who else should come? It’s for certain that your parents cannot help you. They know about putting on facades -- or fronting as you kids would say -- but they know nothing about love. That’s why I’m here.”

Ianikut was about to leave, so the two women could have privacy, when he was summoned. “Little boy, sit down.”

He sat, although he bristled at being called a little boy.

Aloha was still curled up in the older woman’s ample bosom.

“Explain yourself.”

“I love her,” he simply said.

“And why have you dishonored my granddaughter by taking liberties that should be reserved for a husband?”

Mrs. Carrington didn’t mince words.

“Grandmother!” Aloha gasped. “That’s not fair, and it’s not correct! He didn’t take advantage of me. He only did what I allowed!” she said as she jumped up full of indignation.

“Little girl, don’t take that tone with me. I know what you’ve allowed this man to do and I suspect you enjoyed every second of your debauchery. Now, sit down, so that this boy can answer my questions,” Mrs. Carrington demanded.

"I will not allow you to," she said, before Ianikut was at her side.

Kissing her, he bent and whispered, "Angel, calm down."

"Ma'am, I did take advantage of Aloha. I wanted Aloha and so I persuaded, tempted, and finally bullied her to my side. At first, I was merely intrigued, but then, I fell in love with her. And now, it's she that holds all the power in this relationship. I'll give her anything she desires unless her wants or needs place her in danger...or takes her from my side."

"Those are pretty words. Men have never been short on pretty words when they want sex."

"What are you asking, ma'am?"

"When's the wedding?"

"As soon as I can drag her beautiful self down the aisle."

"Little girl, you giving this boy trouble?"

"Yep."

"Good. Now, Mr. Aleksandrovich if there isn't a wedding after carrying on with my granddaughter, I guarantee that you won't enjoy the ramifications of hurting my baby or pissing me off. I might be a little older than you, but you shouldn't underestimate me."

"Nothing will get in the way of me marrying her."

"Grandmother, you didn't even look at my ring," Aloha accused, wanting to show it off.

"I saw that rock, and you deserve all eight of those carats, but I'm interested in seeing the wedding band that goes with it," she said as she threw Ianikut a look that promised bad things should he fuck up.

Chapter Eighteen

Aloha finally spent quality time with the plasma after promising to marry Ianikut. She contacted Atlanta and invited her over as Ianikut had growled out a hell no when she mentioned going to Reign's house for a movie fest with the Posse and their circle of friends. He was still pissed about the unknown male that he scented on her. When she gave her patented 'motherfucker please' look, he admitted that he wouldn't be comfortable with her being in the proximity of so many unattached males probably ever, but definitely not until the 'I do's' were exchanged. Ianikut was possessive, but unlike many men, he was honest about it. She couldn't mind all that much. After all, he had one hundred three inches of plasma in the den.

* * * * *

Ianikut didn't object to Atlanta coming over, after all she'd been to his home several times, and his brothers practically lived at Evil Twins. Atlanta wasn't the reason that his brothers were standing sentry at various points of the property -- the berserker was. The berserker was a power unto himself. Regardless of how refined and laid back he seemed to be, power recognized power and he knew that the berserker was capable of unbelievable carnage if he was so moved. If Aloha hadn't been there, it wouldn't have

been a problem, but Aloha was there, and it was his duty to protect her from any unknowns. Not that he thought that Steele would harm her; it was the fact that Aloha wasn't technically his yet. Until such time, he trusted no man around her -- married or not.

He might've felt ridiculous, if he didn't know how jealous both Iain and the berserker were over their women, who were theirs by their own law and the laws of the state. Ianikut knew there was no way in hell that either man would allow their ladies to visit his home without being at their sides. Though Iain was relatively easygoing, the blond was still incensed that he retained his position of being Atlanta's second-best friend.

When the doorbell announced Atlanta's presence, only his inhuman speed allowed him to get to the door before Aloha. He would soon have to teach her the rules that governed their lives. Shoving her behind him, he opened the door noting with grim satisfaction that the berserker faced a similar dilemma. When Ianikut opened the door, Atlanta would've run straight to Aloha, if Steele hadn't had a death grip on her arm. While Atlanta scowled at him, the berserker ignored her attempts to free herself from his clutches and merely met Ianikut's gaze, awaiting an invitation to cross his threshold.

"Won't you come in?"

"That is a question, not an invitation," Steele replied, still not moving from his stance nor relaxing his grip on Atlanta. Ianikut smiled. Obviously the berserker was no fool. Aloha's long-suffering sigh went in perfect tandem with Atlanta's impatient foot-tapping.

"You are welcome to enter, Eirikr Bastille Magnussen."

"Thank you, and I accept your invitation, Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich," he replied. It wasn't his full name that caused Ianikut to reconsider the power of the berserker but the use of his title. The berserker had whispered his title softly so neither Atlanta nor Aloha heard it. Ianikut went still surer than ever that the berserker would make the worst kind of enemy.

Atlanta and Aloha had both had enough of their posturing. "If you two are finished with the ass-sniffing routine, Atlanta and I have sports to watch on the plasma."

"Yeah," Atlanta agreed and breezed by him without so much as a 'hi, I hate you,' and ran to Aloha as if they'd been separated for centuries rather than a few days.

Aloha had at least acknowledged the berserker -- albeit briefly. She threw a greeting his way before grabbing Atlanta's hand and summarily dragged her past the two startled and angry alpha men.

"Well, I guess we've been dismissed," Ianikut said.

"It seems that way," Steele lamented. "Do you think that they will be gone for long?"

"Unfortunately, yes. I made the grave mistake of tempting Aloha with my big screen plasma. I'm starting to think that my plasma is the sole reason that she allows me to keep her company," Ianikut stated.

"Where are your brothers?" Steele asked without preamble.

"Where would you like for them to be?"

"Away from Atlanta."

“Done,” Ianikut assured him, directing his brothers away from the women, since the berserker wouldn’t be in proximity to Aloha.

“I guess you should have a seat. Would you like a drink?” Ianikut asked.

“The seat will be more than enough,” Steele answered.

Ianikut showed him to the living room where his brothers lounged and took a seat across from him. Both men looked forlorn as if neither could bear the brief separation from their respective women. The two alpha men sat in silence for fifteen minutes, before the ringing doorbell brought them out of their respective reveries.

* * * * *

Ianikut wasn’t expecting additional company, so he went on immediate alert when the bell rang.

He didn’t get a chance to get to it, before the pounding began...then the shouts. Smiling, he opened the door to admit the rest of the Posse. He was amused but not surprised to see the gaggle of women on his doorstep. Even without his sensitive hearing, he clearly heard Reign’s demand to invite them in.

The first wave of the Posse -- Silana, Indy, and Jack -- entered sedately. Silana exhibited her usual grace; Indy her usual calm; and Jack her usual alertness. The second wave of the Posse -- Zuri, Victorious, and Reign -- virtually bum-rushed their way into his home. It was a good thing he possessed preternatural speed else he would’ve been road kill.

“Imax! Move your ass. Aloha’s been extolling us with stories about the plasma and I’ve brought my copy of *The Trilogy*,” Reign whooped.

Ianikut smiled at the sight of the woman wearing a hat that came straight out of a Dr. Seuss book. She was practically hopping up and down with excitement.

The palpable enthusiasm of the Posse even brought a smile to Steele’s lips. “Are not all movies that have three parts considered trilogies?” Steele asked.

From the look of disgust on Reign’s countenance, it was obvious she considered the question idiotic. He knew that she was a woman who took her movies seriously. “Steele, there are movies that have three parts, then there’s ‘the’ trilogy. Some amateurs will try and convince you that there are many trilogies, but there’s only one -- the *Die Hard* trilogy,” she said solemnly.

“What about *Star Wars*?”

“Listen well, *Padiwan*. *Star Wars*, though a damn fine series, is a sexology since Lucas added the three prequels,” she explained, while the rest of the girls laughed at Reign’s reference to Steele as a young Jedi-in-training.

“Yeah, well, not everyone lives in their mama’s basement with a freaky collection of comic books and sci-fi movies.” Zuri sighed.

“You’re just jealous,” Reign threw back as she yelled for the twins.

Chapter Nineteen

Like any event the Posse was involved in, there was a lot of laughter, trash-talking and telling it. It was the beginning of a long day, but that's the way the Posse had planned it. The women made themselves comfortable, before Silana advised Ianikut to be on the look out for Iain and Hannes who were en route with the provisions.

Upon hearing Hannes's name, both Steele and Ianikut went still.

"Who is Hannes?" both men inquired simultaneously.

"Hannes is my friend," Zuri responded softly. "I can go," she said, before Ianikut interrupted her.

"Zuri, you will never say such nonsense. You are always welcome in our home. I just get antsy about strange males around my woman."

"As do I," Steele said.

"We've checked him out," Reign added.

"And when she says that she checked him out, she means it literally. I shudder thinking about how many laws she possibly broke." Silana said.

"I said I was sorry." Reign pouted.

"Yeah, but you also said that you'd do it again," Zuri said.

"Hannes is alright," Jack said.

Both men knew that being described as 'alright' was high praise from the normally taciturn woman.

* * * * *

Both Iain's and Hannes's trucks were loaded down with enough food to end world hunger. It took the males several trips to bring it all in because they had zero help from the Posse who had spotted Aloha's ring and started wreaking their special brand of havoc.

"Careful, before you put someone's eye out with that!" Reign screamed.

"Grandmother thought it was beautiful."

"Your grandmother was here?" Atlanta asked.

"Yep," Aloha smiled.

"What did she say about it?" Silana asked.

"She threatened; not said. She expects a wedding ring to be next to it -- soon."

“Dammnnn, so Imax got the Grandmother seal of approval?”

“She didn’t exactly give me verbal confirmation that she approved of me,” Ianikut muttered.

“Not shooting you is a sign of approval coming from Mrs. Sojourner Carrington,” Jack commented.

“Now that you put it like that, I feel so much better,” Iain said.

* * * * *

The women demanded hospitality, and Zuri being the diva that she was, was specific about how they should be spoiled. “Hey, since you guys aren’t really doing anything, you guys should be our man servants.”

“Yeah, and since you guys are going to serve us you should put on sarongs and find some palm leaves to fan us with,” Reign added, waggling her eyebrows suggestively in the direction of Imax’s very fine and very eligible brothers and directing a purr at Hannes.

“Stop purring at my man, Reign.”

“Make me, Zuri.”

“Children,” Silana warned, breaking up a potential argument before it began.

“But Silana, Zuri’s being selfish. We get to ogle everyone else’s man but she’s trying to keep Hannes all to herself, which isn’t fair. Now the way I see it, we have a house full of Russians, a Southern boy, a Norseman, and an Austrian here, and they’re all smoking hot. It would help my fantasies if they wore sarongs while they served us.”

“And it would help my fantasies to punch you in the throat,” Zuri muttered.

“Okay, then, how about only the unattached males wear sarongs. That would still make my fantasy work,” Reign argued.

“That might help your fantasy, Reign, but it wouldn’t do a thing for mine,” Iain drawled. “If you don’t mind, I’d rather y’all kept all of your clothes on if you’re going to be around Victorious.”

“I must concur with Iain. It would not be appropriate to wander around half-dressed in front of my wife,” Steele said.

“Neither would it be safe,” Ianikut added menacingly.

Hannes simply growled.

“You guys are such spoil sports,” Reign pouted.

“It’s so cute when you guys get all jealous,” Victorious sighed as she snuggled closer to Iain.

“And alpha,” Aloha said.

Tosya attempted to lighten the mood. “Little sisters, you know you’re surrounded by men who aren’t

accustomed to being in the company of such beautiful and intelligent women.”

“Since you guys aren’t going to be our man servants, you might as well leave us to our own devices.” Zuri sighed dramatically.

“Very well.” Ianikut released a sigh that spoke of long-suffering. “See, if you can stay out of trouble in our absence.”

“And no plotting to overthrow governments,” Iain remarked.

“And absolutely no thinking of other men,” Steele added, “Unless you want them to die.”

“Very slowly,” Ianikut said.

“And painfully,” Steele said.

Again, Hannes simply growled.

“The thought of men dying slowly and painfully turns me on.” The normally silent, Jack said.

* * * * *

The men left them to their own devices and went upstairs to Ianikut’s den. Nursing iced tea and a collective concern for the trouble that the Posse could cook up, the men attempted to relax.

Iain wasn’t a man of many words -- unless they involved Victorious. However, he was an observant man. Though he’d only been in the presence of these men on a few occasions, he knew that there was an otherness about them. They wielded great power, but he didn’t care. He had something to say to them that couldn’t keep any longer.

“I don’t really know what’s going on with y’all. I just know that you’re different. Nevertheless, don’t hurt those women.”

The vampires had to struggle to keep their fangs retracted. The berserker had to concentrate on keeping his eyes from glowing. The shifter simply growled.

“You know what we are?” Ianikut asked.

“No, but I know what you aren’t,” Iain said.

“And what do you plan on doing about it?” Ianikut inquired.

“Nothing until you make me do something about it.” He looked them in the eye as he answered.

“You’re not frightened,” Ianikut asked somewhat baffled that he sensed neither fear nor anxiety in Iain.

“There are things that frighten me, but none of those things are in this room,” Iain admitted. “I’m a God-fearing man and I know the limitations of other men and what they can and cannot do to my wife, and therefore to me. It’s my own limitations that I question because I know that in my quest to keep Victorious safe and happy, that I can be moved to acts that I thought I was above.”

Iain might be all human. However at that moment, he gave every male in the room pause.

“Are you threatening us?” Ianikut asked incredulously. His brothers all wore identical looks of incredulity.

“Do you feel threatened?”

“Not particularly. I’m just getting over the fact that you’re threatening us.”

“So, what’s your interest in the Posse?” Steele inquired.

“Victorious considers them her sisters, therefore so do I. I’ve been looking after those women for the last three years.”

“None of those women need you to look after them,” Ianikut interjected.

“Possibly not, but I’m doing it anyway.”

“So, if someone hurts any of those women?” Fyodor tested.

“I’d rain down the ten plagues of a pissed off Southern man.”

The berserker and the vampires simply nodded. Hannes, on the other hand, smiled. All of them however, knew that Iain’s words weren’t braggadocio or jest. He was perfectly serious.

He might only be human, but he commanded the respect of every male in the room. Humans were odd -- and Southerners were pretty much beyond explanation.

“Are you going to introduce yourself?” Steele turned to Hannes.

“I’m Hannes Sighelm.”

“You were near my woman recently,” Ianikut added.

“I met her at Evil Twins.”

“And?”

“And she threatened me almost as well as Steele’s wife.”

“But?”

“But not as spectacularly as Reign or as menacingly as Jack.”

“And were they right to threaten you?”

“Yes, Zuri is a woman. A delicate, beautiful woman who has been hurt by an uncaring, foolish man, and I am a male, a large, strong male. So yes, they were right to threaten me.”

“And what are you?” Iain inquired.

“Shifter.”

Ianikut and Steele both nodded.

“How did you know that I am next in line for the Kingdom?” Ianikut suddenly asked Steele, since there was no longer any reason for pretense among this group.

“How did you know that I am berserker?” Steele returned.

“You have that look about you.”

“You mean the so devastatingly handsome that ladies swoon and so fierce that nations tremble before them look?” Steele answered.

Ianikut almost choked on his drink. Hannes did choke on his.

“You’re jesting, I presume?” Ianikut asked.

“Not at all. I am just going by what I’ve been told.”

“You try my patience, berserker.”

“Everything tries your patience, vampire. But it is your way, is it not?”

“I would think that being married to a black woman would’ve taught you to steer clear of stereotypes,” Ianikut returned.

“I am not dealing in stereotypes. I am dealing in fact. You vampires -- especially you Aleksandroviches -- are notorious for your nonexistent tempers.”

“Perhaps, that’s why we’re given great berth.”

“If you call having the show, the movies, and romance novels being given great berth, obviously my understanding of the terms ‘great’ and ‘berth’ are skewed,” Steele said with a smile that spoke volumes.

“If my woman wasn’t best friends with yours,” Ianikut said.

“I would’ve already laid waste to you.” Steele smiled in the face of his brother’s growls.

“Are you guys going to do this all of the time?” Hannes asked.

Turning from their argument, both the berserker and the vampire turned to the normally silent shifter.

“Do what?”

“Squabble incessantly.”

“I do not squabble,” both said.

“As English isn’t the native tongue of either of you, perhaps you two simply misunderstand the meaning of the word.”

“Shifter, you try my patience,” Ianikut said.

“Mine also,” Steele said.

“Did you consider that your anger weakens you?”

“What danger is there, here?” Ianikut asked.

“There is always danger, Vampire. Though we are strong, fast, and hard to kill, we aren’t invincible, and more importantly, those women we love are not. In fact, they are more vulnerable now that they are associated with you. Answer this question. Of the women downstairs, who do you think poses the greatest threat?”

“Jack,” every male in the room answered.

“No. Jack is dangerous, and she makes no move to hide that fact. In fact, she wears it like she wears her gun -- in plain view. The truth is that each woman is equally dangerous, especially to a person who doesn’t consider them such. In any given scenario the individual who appears the least dangerous is the one who always gives me pause.

“So, if you were in Vegas and you had to let it all ride on just one of the women, who would you put your money on?” Iain asked.

“Toss up between Indy and Silana.”

“Why?”

“Because they’re better at hiding how they feel. In our world, few bother and while our people have taken much for granted, they aren’t stupid. Few would cross either of you, but one or two would...and those are the ones you should be on the lookout for instead of squabbling with each other, when we all know that you won’t fight.”

“And you know that how?” Steele inquired.

“Because, berserker, you love Atlanta, and the vampire loves Aloha, and Atlanta and Aloha love each other. Not even your mistrust of each other would be enough of a catalyst for you to jeopardize the happiness of your women.”

The Posse only made it through two parts of the trilogy before deciding to call it a day. Although they didn’t get the pleasure of glimpsing Ianikut’s brothers in sarongs, Zuri did manage to talk them into carrying her out on a makeshift litter, much to her delight.

Chapter Twenty

Aloha insisted that she needed Indy to marry them, knowing that Indy was reluctant to perform most pastoral duties. She dragged Ianikut to Indy's house to plead their case. She could've called, but then, she wouldn't have been able to give Indy the puppy dog eyes. Indy, in her usual fashion, declared that she wasn't a proper pastor and did everything she could to get Aloha and Ianikut to change their minds.

"I cuss like a sailor," she said.

"Which will come in handy if you ever become a sailor," Aloha countered.

"I don't even go to church," Indy said.

"Neither do I," Aloha answered. Though she was Protestant, she too had issues with the Church.

"I..." Indy began.

"You married Atlanta and Steele, so you have to marry us."

"That's because I felt it my duty to protect clergy from Atlanta," Indy answered.

"Please, Indy," Ianikut pled.

And a heartfelt please was the straw that broke the camel's back. Indy loved them and thus, she couldn't deny them, regardless of her own personal hang-ups about religion. And she did have those stellar credentials.

* * * * *

Aloha decided that the wedding should be a mixture of both her and Ianikut's cultures. Since Indy was marrying them, she thought it would only be fair to incorporate as much of Ianikut's traditions as possible into the ceremony. Their union would be considered a "mixed marriage" due to the fact that she was a non-Orthodox Christian (not because she was black). Aloha dragged Indy to a Russian Orthodox priest to get answers to her many questions. After returning from the meeting, both she and Indy were upset. Indy, because she was Indy and had particular issues with the ecumenical Church; and Aloha, because she didn't want to take anything from Ianikut that she couldn't replace.

"Let's go to Reign's house," Indy said in a 'don't try me' tone.

Indy drove her straight to Reign's house, so the professional finder of loopholes could have a go at the problem. After sitting amongst piles of documents, books, and laptops for hours, Reign sighed.

"Aloha, babe. I'm sorry. I've searched high and low, yet I cannot find a loophole, small print, even an asterisk, nothing around this. Either you convert to Orthodox or..." She didn't finish the sentence, but she didn't have to.

"I see. Thanks for looking," Aloha smiled sadly.

"Aloha, there's something else," Reign said.

“What?” Aloha asked, not that the something else mattered. Regardless of what Ianikut said, she just couldn’t do this to him. She just couldn’t condemn him to this no matter how hard it broke her heart.

“Let’s say, hypothetically, Imax is a vampire. He would have different physiology from you. Unlike in the movies, he can’t convert you into something you’re not. He isn’t God. There’s also no guarantee that you could successfully procreate. I could be way off base, here. Those are just hypotheticals -- except the Imax not being God thing -- that’s a given, like the first proof in geometry. It just seems to render the whole white guy-black woman thing and Protestant-Orthodox thing impotent.”

“Yeah, it does. Thanks, Reign,” she said before lapsing into silence.

“Aloha, I’m just tossing out theories. Talk to Imax so he can give you the facts before running off half-cocked.

“I’m not running off half-cocked, Reign. I’m walking off informed and resigned.”

“So, are you going to break it off?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“That’s the most asinine thing I’ve ever heard you say, Aloha. And that’s really saying something, considering some of the things you’ve said.

“If it’s any consolation, it’s the most difficult thing I’ve had to say,” Aloha answered. Aloha knew that she had no choice but to break it off with Ianikut regardless of the numerous hell no’s and looks of incredulity Indy and Reign bombarded her with.

“That man loves you, Aloha! How can you even consider breaking his heart?” Indy yelled.

“Because I love him, Indy. He’ll get over me.”

“At least give him a choice! You don’t have the right to make that choice for him.”

“I am giving him a choice, Indy. If he marries me, he’ll no longer have those choices.”

“You are such a . . .” Indy said, before she started mumbling. Aloha knew that whenever Indy was highly agitated, she started arguing with God. Although she suspected Indy did a lot of talking and arguing; she suspected she never won. Still, she didn’t interrupt her. Indy merely shot her a disgruntled look before driving her over to Ianikut’s house full of piss and vinegar, and not doing a damn thing to hide it.

* * * * *

Ianikut took one look at the two women and demanded to know what was wrong. “Angel, what has you so upset?”

“You won’t be able to remain in good standing with the Church if Indy marries us, and I want Indy to marry us! The Orthodox Church will only recognize our marriage if we marry within the Church, but if Indy performs the ceremony you won’t remain in sacramental communion with the Church. You won’t be able to receive Eucharist, be able to serve as a godparent to any of your nieces or nephews, or serve as a sponsor at the wedding to any of your brothers. I can’t do that to you, Ianikut.

On top of that, you're a vampire and what if we can't have kids and then..." Whatever else she said was lost in the sound of her tears. Great sobs shook her petite body. He heard something about children and physiology in between her great sobs, and though he didn't understand most of what she was saying he understood that she was trying to back out of marrying him. "I love you. I'll miss you," she wailed as she turned and ran to the door.

That was the wrong thing to say to a man in love. She didn't make it a single step, before Ianikut crushed her to him. "Angel, I can't claim to be an expert on any church canon, but I do know that God has brought us together. And I also know that death is the only thing that I will allow to separate us. I will NOT give YOU up EVER!"

"But Ianikut..." she said.

"But, nothing!" He declared. "Aloha, what did God do on the seventh day?"

Aloha was startled by Ianikut's question. "He rested."

"Where does the sun rise and where does it set?" Aloha was totally confused now. "It rises in the east and sets in the west."

"What month does the new version of Madden drop?"

"The last week in August. Ianikut, what --"

Ianikut cut her off. "Just as you know the answers to those questions without thinking about them, you need to know the answer to the following question: when will Ianikut let Aloha go? Never. I will never let you go!"

"Ianikut."

"Even if no Church would agree to marry us, that wouldn't stop me. I'd simply drag you to the highest mountain top so that we could be as close as possible to Heaven. And then, I would say the words to marry us. And those words simply are, 'God, I take this woman.' I've taken you into my body, into my heart, into my soul, and I'm not giving you up."

"Ianikut, I love you so much."

"And as much as you love me, it is nowhere near as much as I love you, angel."

"Ianikut, I feel so bad though," she said.

"How can you feel bad for me when I have you, angel?"

"Well, when you put it like that, I guess I can't," she sassed. "And since you guys celebrate Christmas and Easter on different days, I get double the stuff," she teased.

Pulling her into his arms, he vowed. "I'll treat you like it's Christmas every day, angel."

"And I'll make sure that you do," she said as she poured out her heart into their kiss.

* * * * *

Ianikut's brothers watched the byplay with interest. There were things that they knew and chief among them was the fact that there was no force on earth that would make Max give up Aloha. Though they already loved Aloha, the fact that she took the time to research their traditions and attempted to "save" Max from doing something that could ultimately create a divide between him and his Church and him and his family made them love her even more. Aloha was a first-class woman in spite of being an alumnus of Carolina .

Each of his brothers approached her and Ianikut with identical proclamations. Dropping to one knee, Zhenechka, Antosha, Fyodor, Vyacheslav, and Tosya spoke in unison.

"We stand with you, Max. And whatever the decision, there is no better man to serve as godparent to the children we hope to one day have. There is no better man to stand beside us when we find our destinies and honor them with marriage. And Aloha, there is no better woman for our brother."

Aloha cried after hearing their words. "Thank you, guys. For a moment, I thought I was getting five additional wedding proposals," she joked.

"We're fond of you, little sister, but we're also fond of living," Zhenechka tossed over his shoulder as he herded his brothers off to Evil Twins, so the couple could have some privacy.

Had Silana been present for that scene, she would've asked what they meant when they said 'the decision', but she wasn't so the question went unasked, and therefore unanswered.

* * * * *

"Is Indy still marrying us?" Ianikut asked sometime after Aloha's third climax.

"Yeah. Why?"

"She looked mad," Ianikut replied.

"She wasn't mad; she was royally pissed. First, she was pissed at me for trying to do the honorable thing, and then, she was pissed at the Church. I was so proud that she didn't go into Jack mode and beat the cooperation out of the priest." Aloha sighed. "She has problems with the word 'no.'"

"But she's an ordained minister."

"But first, she's human, which is why she is putting up such a fight and trying to run from her calling."

* * * * *

In the wee hours of the morning, Ianikut and his brothers sat around the table wearing solemn looks.

"So, are you going to tell her?" Zhenechka asked. Though they shared everything equally amongst them, they reverted to vampire custom when discussing vampire law, which was synonymous with Aleksandrovich law.

"No," Ianikut answered without hesitation.

“She has a right to know, Ianikut.”

Ianikut knew the situation was serious, whenever his brothers used his proper name. Though he could appreciate the seriousness of the situation, he knew that he wasn't about to face the future without his angel. He wasn't just saying that to say it, he meant it when he said he wasn't letting her go. The cost of that decision didn't matter.

“You'll make a fine king, Zhenechka,” Ianikut affirmed.

“I would if I planned to be a party to this nonsense. You are my brother, Ianikut, and nothing will come between us -- not religious tradition, not vampire law, not our father's prejudices, not even the regency.”

“I appreciate your support, brothers, but I cannot ask you to go into exile with me for a decision that I make of my own free will.”

“This we know, just as we know that you would never ask that of us. How will you live Ianikut? More importantly, how will you protect Aloha when you're separated from your people, cut off from your lineage, banned from the use of your own name and the privileges that come with that?”

“I will protect my *zhena*, even if it means becoming a pestilence among my own people and laying waste to them,” Ianikut roared. His fangs were fully extended, his eyes were pitch black, and the beast was there for all to see. “I will abdicate my right to the regency, and if need be I will surrender my right to the Aleksandrovich name, but nothing will make me give Aloha up.”

“And that is why we will stand with you, brother. Because one pestilence among our people is impressive, but six males in their prime with veins full of Aleksandrovich blood is a caveat our people cannot ignore. We will face exile together and insure the protection of you and your *zhena*. We will build our own dynasty here and none will challenge us and live,” Zhenechka vowed. His brothers all nodded their agreement.

Chapter Twenty-one

A week later, Aloha stood blindfolded in a spare room in Silana's mansion. Tonight, they celebrated the fact that she and Ianikut had finally set a date.

“That poor man doesn't stand a chance. You know we ought to be ashamed, having our Aloha looking this damn good,” Silana stated while surveying her and Zuri's work.

“Yeah, the entire male population of the metroAtlanta area will be floored,” Atlanta laughed imagining Imax's face when he glimpsed how much of Aloha was exposed in that dress.

“I'm not concerned about the entire male population ofAtlanta. I'm just concerned with one male in particular,” Aloha stated. “You think Ianikut will like my dress?” She asked nervously since the Posse hadn't let her see the dress yet. She simply stood like a mannequin while they primped her.

“Honey, that boy's nose is so open, he would like you if you walked out in full battle gear,” she announced as she turned Aloha toward the mirror and removed her blindfold.

The rest of Silana's explanation was cut off by Aloha's cry of outrage. “What in the hell is this?” she

asked, pointing to the swatch of fabric that was trying to pass itself off as a dress.

“It’s a dress, Aloha,” Reign commented.

“Where the hell is the rest of it?”

“There is no rest.” Zuri smiled wolfishly, admiring her own good taste.

“This barely covers my…” Aloha said.

“And that’s the point,” Zuri quipped.

“But, Zuri…”

“Aloha, whining does not become you.” Indy sighed.

“Yeah, the dress is perfectly decent as long as you don’t inhale,” Victorious threw in.

“Or exhale,” Atlanta piped up.

“Or sit down,” Jack added, eyeing the indecent slit that ran from the scandalous hemline to damn near the bottom of her panties.

“Or walk with your feet apart,” Victorious added with a wink.

Aloha kept the dress on, regardless of the fact that one wrong move would cause her to catch a charge of indecent exposure. The dress highlighted all that made her woman. And though it wasn’t perfectly decent, it was perfect, which was evidenced by the look on Ianikut’s face. He went completely primal. His face went stark white; his eyes went completely black; the veins in his neck throbbed like Yoruba drums; and his fangs had fully extended. Ianikut was seconds away from a total loss of all control -- and he didn’t give a damn. The beast wanted his woman and he wanted her now. When he finally recovered his powers of speech and movement, he growled out what could only be translated as a death threat. Ordering every man in the room to close his eyes before he ripped them out, he ran to Aloha and herded her away from the other males. He didn’t have to worry about challenge for he had staked his claim with nothing more than his presence. Though he threw his jacket over Aloha he wasn’t satisfied because some of her skin was still visible. Ripping one of the silken curtains from the grand windows of the dining room, he promptly bundled her up, before she could take the last step into the dining room. When he was finished, Aloha looked like she was getting ready to be mummified and laid in a sarcophagus.

The last thing any inhabitants of the room heard was a warning growl and the screech of tires as Imax peeled out of the driveway like the proverbial bat out of hell. Silana was glad that she had kept the wrought iron gates open else she imagined Imax would’ve simply crashed through them in his haste to get his woman home.

As soon as everyone in the room got over their shock, they fell out laughing. Zuri being Zuri, thought the occasion called for a toast. Raising her glass she toasted. “Operation drive Imax mad, successful.” She preened after hearing the chorus of hell yeahs from the rest of the Posse members.

“You should be ashamed of yourselves,” Steele choked out between laughter.

“We would be if Imax wasn’t her man, but since he is, we just can’t be bothered to muster any fake shame.” Zuri smiled.

“Yeah, did you see what Imax did to my window treatment?” Silana chuckled.

“So, do you think that you guys should go and check on those two?” Atlanta asked Imax’s brothers. “You know, just to make sure they arrived home safely and all.”

“I value my life and the lives of my brothers too much to get within ten miles of that house,” Zhenechka commented. “Those growls he emitted weren’t just for show.”

Chapter Twenty-two

Aloha didn’t say a word as Ianikut took her from the house in a rage. The fact that she was wrapped in a curtain said enough. She remained quiet until they reached home safely. The speedometer didn’t dip below seventy. It was a good thing that neither Silana’s nor Ianikut’s homes were in Atlanta proper.

“Okay, where’s the fire?” Aloha asked breathily as Ianikut practically ran into the house.

“Maybe it’s with the rest of your dress. You have to be cold since you’re practically naked.”

“You’re not my mother, Ianikut.”

Ignoring the warning note in her voice, he simply held her tighter.

“You’re right. I’m your man.”

“Only as long as I allow it,” she sassed.

“Ask any man that was present at Silana’s house. You’re mine, Aloha, and I will kill anyone who challenges that.”

Ianikut finally set her on her feet once they reached the bedroom. After freeing her from the remains of Silana’s window treatment and his dinner jacket, he stood back and perused her. Aloha was a bit dizzy, but after gaining her equilibrium she chanced a peek at Ianikut and knew without a doubt, that lust and jealousy were riding him hard. The Zuri in her preened at Ianikut’s blatant desire. Rather than make an offhand remark, she struck a pose that violated every rule of wearing that dress and remaining almost covered. Then she gave Ianikut a smile that challenged him to come and get her. She didn’t even have time to loosen her hair from its intricate knot before he was all over her.

Ianikut knew that dress was trouble the moment he glimpsed her in it. He was only glad that he had gotten her to the privacy of their bedroom, before she revealed all of the dress’s secrets. When she struck that enticing pose that simultaneously revealed glimpses of her breasts, copious thigh, the top of her ass, and a hint of panty, he lost the little bit of composure that he had held in reserve. The man took a second to admire how mouth-watering good she looked, but the beast would no longer be held at bay and answered her challenge.

Ianikut was on her in an instant. Crushing her to him he kissed her breathless and continued until she slumped in his embrace. Giving her no quarter, he continued until her ragged breathing turned to choppy keening and she surrendered complete control of her body to him. When she silently offered him her throat, he struck. Grabbing the back of her head, he loosed her hair until it was swinging around her shoulders, forgetting all about her caveats regarding black women's hair. He indulged in her taste and reveled in her surrender...and then he ripped the dress from her body.

"I will never allow you to prance around half-naked for anyone other than me! You belong to me, angel and I'll kill anyone who tries to take you from me!"

"I only want you, Ianikut," Aloha promised. "Only you," she reiterated with a moan.

The beast was riding him hard, and though he heard her declaration, he wanted more. "Mine!" He proclaimed. "Mine!"

"Yours," she agreed. "Yours," she said as she threaded her fingers into his hair and offered herself to him.

Ianikut growled once more and turned her to the wall. He ground himself into her, nipping a trail across her neck and shoulder. "Tell me how you want me," he demanded.

"Every way," she answered. "Take me, Ianikut," she purred.

And Ianikut took her. He wasn't gentle, but then, he sensed that his woman didn't want him to be. Ianikut left no inch of her skin untouched. He kissed, nipped, and caressed. Taking a deep breath, he took his time priming her for his lovemaking. Drinking from her until his mouth overflowed with her essence, he stroked her until she lost her voice screaming out his name. When she whispered threats, he simply turned her onto her stomach and kissed his way down her spine and across her ass, taking gentle nips along the way.

Lifting her hips, he finally ended her torture and drove into her. Aloha gasped at the intrusion and then, gave herself up to the pleasure that Ianikut's possession evoked. "Oh, Ianikut, please," she cried as pleasure consumed her. Aloha clenched him so tightly and moved against him so provocatively that he came on the first stroke. He shuddered at the sensation of being lost in her body, crying out her name before collapsing against her back. "Aloha!"

Aloha enjoyed the feel of Ianikut against her back. She felt dominated, protected, and loved. The diva in her enjoyed making Ianikut lose all control knowing that regardless of how far gone he was he would never hurt her. Rolling over, she settled herself atop him and returned the favor and kissed and nipped a path to his cock. Engulfing him in her mouth, his gasps were the sweetest sonatas. When he regained his full erectness, she straddled him and rode him to yet another mind-blowing orgasm.

Ianikut had never felt so damn good. His angel spurred him on with taunts and he answered each one. Her moans placated the beast, but it was the way she opened herself to him that soothed his soul. Ianikut had never been a jealous man. Sure, he had been a selfish man, but never a jealous man -- until Aloha. He knew without a doubt that if any male, including her father, her brother, or her physician attempted to

touch her in that moment, that he would kill them, without a second thought and without remorse. He could lose himself in this woman; the love he felt for her frightened him, humbled him, and strengthened him. Growling, he recalled Iain's earlier declaration regarding the things that Victorious could push him into doing things he never thought he'd do, and he too was humbled because in that moment, he knew that Aloha completely owned him.

He spent the night demonstrating to her just how much he desired, wanted, and loved her. And she spent the night alternately moaning and screaming out her appreciation and making him shout out his appreciation for her skills. They fell into an exhausted sleep and didn't rise until well past noon.

Aloha woke crushed against Ianikut. Though he held her tightly, she basked in the possessiveness of his hold. She snuggled deeper into his embrace and listened to him wake. "Good morning, angel," he rumbled.

"Good morning to you," she whispered since she had yet to regain her voice.

"Sore?"

"No more so than you should be," she countered.

"I love you," he declared as he embraced her tightly.

"I kind of got that from your display of dominance," she joked. The look in his eyes startled her. She had never seen that particular look in a man's eyes. It was total devotion. Humbled, she kissed him softly. "I love you, Ianikut."

"I kind of guessed that," he joked as he embraced her.

"I'm not going anywhere, you know," she assured him.

"I wouldn't let you, if you tried."

"You sound jealous."

"I am jealous, angel. You must never forget that."

They enjoyed a leisurely bubble bath, which led to Aloha washing his hair, which led to them making slow and gentle love. It was damn near two hours, before they left the confines of Ianikut's luxurious bathroom. Aloha gasped when she saw her reflection. She wore love marks from her neck to her ankles. "Oh my goodness!" She exclaimed.

She caught the smirk on Ianikut's visage. "This is not funny," she huffed. "I look like I've been attacked by something."

Ianikut chuckled and embraced her from behind. "Angel, it's not funny. You do look like you've been attacked by something and that something is me. Those love bites are testaments of how much I love and need you. I've never felt the need to mark another woman. I've never loved another woman. I've never

been so completely conquered by another being.”

Chapter Twenty-three

The wedding was held at her grandmother’s grand home. In two weeks, they would fly to Russia and if things went well they’d have a wedding feast. He couldn’t wait to see her face when she realized that wedding feasts lasted for as long as there was food and liquor. If things went wrong, well they’d still have a feast -- right after he and his brothers beat the insolence out of anyone foolish enough to insult his bride.

It was a beautiful day for a wedding: the skies were clear blue, the sun was shining, and the flora was lush around them -- even though it was January. Such was the luck of those who lived in the state of Florida. Even the participants and guests looked beautiful and as far as he could tell, Jack was unarmed. Well-wishers packed the church. All was well, except that his bride still hadn’t made an appearance. He knew that she was on the premises because he’d had his brothers shadow her to insure her presence.

After fifteen minutes of waiting, he’d had enough. He knew Aloha didn’t have cold feet; she was probably in that room playing a game. Nodding to the rest of the Posse, who’d settled themselves in the sunroom, while the wait staff pampered them, he followed the sound of her laughter. Coming to a stop outside of her room, he knocked briefly and entered. Yep, she was in there playing a video game. Ianikut knew that he couldn’t yell at his bride on their wedding day, so he yelled at Atlanta instead.

“I thought I told you to keep her away from video games!”

“No, you said to keep Madden out of her reach. Big difference, Duke grad,” Atlanta yelled back.

Shaking his head in disgust, he hefted Aloha over his shoulder, completely unconcerned that she was going for a high score, and that she still had the controller in her hand. Yelling for the organist to start the wedding march, he marched down the makeshift aisle with Aloha over his shoulder, still holding the controller and yelling at him for interrupting her game. “You better hope that my game is saved!”

The rest of the Posse assembled at the front left of the church and Atlanta ran down the aisle with Aloha’s bouquet. The organist played beautifully, but no one paid any attention to the music when there was such an interesting spectacle taking place complete with sound.

“Put me down before someone sees my ass, you idiot!”

Ianikut considered her dress and put her down. Never fully releasing her, he repositioned her before resuming his march down the aisle.

Indy closed her eyes and emitted a long-suffering sigh. “This is one of the reasons why I make my living as a writer instead of a pastor,” she mumbled. Turning to Aloha and Ianikut, she asked, “Are you two sure that you want to go through with this wedding?”

“Yes,” both Aloha and Ianikut answered.

“Indy, can you hurry this ceremony along? Had she bothered to look past her anger, she would’ve

realized that Indy was fast becoming angry. "Indy, can you hurry up?" Aloha repeated as she stomped her foot and tapped the controller against her thigh.

Ianikut recognized that Indy was fast losing patience with Aloha, and so was he. Offering an apology for interrupting, he bent and kissed Aloha into silence.

Grabbing his hair, and inadvertently loosing a few strands from its tidy queue, Aloha remarked, "It's a good thing that you can kiss like that, or I would've kicked you to the curb eons ago."

Indy interrupted their argument, by clearing her throat. "Again, I ask you. Are you sure you want to be married?"

"Yeah!" Aloha answered.

"Absolutely," Ianikut declared.

"Why?" Indy asked.

"What do you mean why?" Aloha and Ianikut asked simultaneously.

"You cannot be serious. Ianikut had to fetch you, Aloha. Then, you two argued all the way down the aisle." Turning to Ianikut, she finished. "Then, there's the fact that you had to literally drag your bride to the altar. You have the nerve to wonder why I'm asking if you're sure you want to go through with this marriage. I want to hear a decent reason why you two want to get married or you can find someone else to officiate this lunacy. Holy Matrimony is not a game, and I won't be party to either of you making a mockery of it. Do I make myself clear?"

She paused, awaiting their agreement. "Now answer my question! Why do you want to marry each other?"

Aloha was properly chastised. "Because I love him enough to fight the whole world to keep him."

"And I love her enough to give up the whole world to have her," Ianikut confessed.

"Is love a good enough answer, Indy?" Aloha asked.

"Love's the only answer." Indy sighed. "Love is what will hold you together when there isn't any more money to make the misery you wallow in easier to live with. Love is what will hold you together when beauty fades. Love is what conceals flaws and covers a multitude of shortcomings. As it is written in Corinthians, love is the only thing that will never fail for it trumps even faith and hope and is the very best of us.

"As Rev. Dr. King remarked, it's love that can drive out hate. As James Baldwin says, it is 'love that takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without, yet know we cannot live within.' As Halle Berry's character alluded to in *Boomerang*, love is what should bring you home every night. It is love that will have you standing on the precipice of hell to save someone from themselves."

Indy preached as verified by the choruses of "Amen's" and "tell-its" and the call-and-response of the congregation. She poured her heart into the words or perhaps it was the words being poured out of her heart. Indy didn't remember the rest of the ceremony -- only that it was brief. She came to herself when she uttered the words, "What God has brought together, let no man tear asunder." That was her favorite

part. Always was, and she suspected it always would be. It was Steele and Atlanta's favorite part too...and now Ianikut and Aloha's.

Chapter Twenty-four

Although they remained fully dressed, Aloha and Ianikut's wedding photos showed two people enraptured with each other. Recalling the ribbing that they took about their wedding pictures, Steele directed his youngest brother to take pictures of this moment. Though it might not be sporting of him, he wasn't going to let this go. In fact, he planned to introduce it into conversation as much as possible.

It was a veritable laugh fest. Ianikut had to practically wrestle Aloha to the ground and pry the controller out of her hands. When he finally wrested the controller from her hands and flung it across the lawn, Aloha retaliated by snatching the tie from Ianikut's hair and throwing it across the lawn. Of course, an argument ensued and of course, the rest of the Posse had to get their two cents in. The vampire snatched Aloha to him and once again, kissed her into silence, which did nothing to quiet down the rest of the Posse who was riled up on Aloha's behalf. The argument finally ended when Aloha's grandmother threatened to take a switch to the lot of them.

While the rest of the guests were herded to the reception, those doing the herding knew better than to try to separate Aloha from Ianikut. From the death grip he had on her, they knew that the only way to accomplish such a feat would result in a massive amount of bloodshed. Ianikut hadn't let go of his bride, since he had fetched her and dragged her down the aisle.

Aloha's grandmother took one look at Ianikut, and everything hard within her melted. She remembered when her husband used to look at her like that. Regardless of how she felt about white men, in that moment, she knew that she couldn't hope for a better man for her granddaughter. "Ianikut?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered respectfully, although he was practically frothing at the mouth to get his bride alone.

"I'll make sure that everyone stays clear of the sitting room for the next fifteen minutes."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Call me 'grandmother,'" she said, walking out in a whirl of whooshing skirts and dignity.

Ianikut walked to the sitting room with an armful of bride. He figured he might as well do something with the beautiful and somewhat angry bundle in his lap. Ianikut didn't plan to let her go until they were safely ensconced in their bedroom. Groaning, he continued kissing her to shush what he knew were cusswords. She was still mad but he couldn't bring himself to give a damn about anything except having her under him. Had he been smart, he would've made his escape as soon as they shared their first kiss as husband and wife. Although it was tempting, he knew that this was the only opportunity he'd have to participate in the wedding rituals, so he tamped down his raging hard-on and took advantage of his fifteen minutes. Though he wanted to caress her silky skin, he decided to keep his hands safely on the outside of her dress knowing that once he ventured under that dress, it was over. Not only would her beautiful dress be destroyed, her intricate hairstyle would be mussed, and her grandmother's sitting room would be leveled. He felt so needy that he felt concern for the whole region of the southeastern United States.

When he heard a soft knock, he sighed and reluctantly put his bride off of his lap. Perhaps, if he hadn't

been so desperate to have her, he would've taken a moment to glance in the mirror. Had he bothered with a mirror, he might've called for a brush to tame his hair and a tissue to wipe away the traces of Aloha's lipstick.

Regardless of being somewhat bedraggled, Ianikut still managed to look as if he was getting ready to do a photo shoot as Mr. January through December. The men in attendance chuckled at Ianikut's bedraggled state. The women, on the other hand, offered up mmm-hmm-ms.

Ianikut didn't have much patience for the reception. He'd already held his desire in abeyance throughout the wedding, throughout the photo taking, and the make-out session with his bride. Grabbing her hand, he practically set a world record in his haste to expedite the traditional reception activities. Tamping down his desire, he marched straight to the lavish multi-tiered cake and was going to cut a piece without taking the time to appreciate its magnificence. He remembered just in time that the bride and groom were supposed to cut the cake together. Considering how dangerous his angel was with sharp objects, he guided her hand as they cut the first piece.

Breaking off a piece, he forewent the fork and instead hand-fed the piece to his angel. Damn, she was beautiful. He might've been able to hold onto his desire a little longer, if he'd kept his eyes off of her mouth. She truly enjoyed sweets and when he placed the bit of cake in her mouth, she closed her eyes and shuddered as she savored the confection. He followed the movement of her mouth, but when he caught a glimpse of the tip of her tongue licking the frosting off of her lips, he lost it.

Ianikut hadn't realized that he'd still held the plate until he felt her take it from him. She tried to offer him a piece, but he couldn't be bothered with the sweet when he could get his cake straight from the source. Grabbing a fistful of her braids, he proceeded to lick the frosting from her lips before plundering her mouth. She tasted so damn good and he wasn't sure if it was the cake that enhanced her taste, or if her naturally sweet taste enhanced the flavor of the cake. He vowed that the only way he'd eat cake from this moment on was from her lips.

Aloha still tried to catch her breath from Ianikut's record-breaking sprint across the floor. Before she had time to think, he had fed her a piece of wedding cake that was so delicious, it elicited an involuntary shudder from her. She wanted Ianikut to taste it -- not just because it was a reception tradition -- but because it was so good. Taking the plate from his hands, she was surprised when he refused the forkful of cake that she proffered. And she was even more surprised when he set it aside, crushed her to him and kissed her breathless. If he hadn't been holding her up, she would've fallen to the floor because her legs had completely given out.

"Ianikut," she'd moaned. "Please," she'd begged as she laid her head against his massive chest.

"Angel, if you want a first dance we have to do it now else I cannot promise you that we'll both be dressed much longer."

"You'll have to carry me there because I'm mush after that kiss," she admitted.

Aloha wanted to smack him after he flashed her that 'I'm the motherfucking man' smirk. Fine, she might have to concede that point, but dammit, she was the motherfucking woman. She waited until he carried her to the center of the floor before letting him in on a little something special.

“Ianikut,” she purred. “The only thing that I’m wearing under this gown is me.”

Aloha took one look at his face and knew he was close to the edge. His eyes were pitch black, his face was stark white, and his body was tight with unleashed desire. She was glad that she wasn’t the only one affected by his cake-feeding routine.

Ianikut thought that she meant that she was braless, which he kind of suspected, since her dress was strapless. He didn’t know that she was also sans panties until she’d dropped that bit of data. Quickly turning her around, he realized that the length of the veil concealed the fact that the back of her dress was comprised of an intricate matrix of ribbons that crossed her back at various intervals. Groaning, he broke out in a cold sweat. Gritting his teeth, he tried his best to finish the dance, but with a hard cock, and his fangs threatening to shoot out, he’d done what he’d longed to do. He backed her against the nearest wall and had his way with her mouth. Grinding his cock into her, he kissed her until *he*’d run out of breath. When he released her lips, he didn’t have the strength to walk another step. He drew in a deep breath, pulled her against him, closed his eyes and prayed for the strength to make it through the next few minutes.

Silana answered his prayers. She directed the rest of the Posse to see to Aloha, while she virtually frog-marched him to a sitting room. Pushing him into a chair she ordered him to stay put. She returned a few minutes later with a glass of cold water and an admonition to get himself together, which was tempered by the wicked gleam in her eye and her rich laughter.

It was good advice so he took it. He’d been mere seconds away from taking his angel to the floor and having his way with her uncaring of their audience or the fact that his fangs had fully descended. Luckily, they had remained hidden by Aloha’s lips. When he felt his fangs retract and his cock soften sufficiently to allow him to walk, he went in search of his bride. He was determined to allow her time to enjoy their reception, regardless of how difficult it was for him. After all, this was the only reception either of them would ever have.

If Aloha had been able to form words, she might’ve protested the Posse’s actions. Aloha didn’t recall asking for anyone’s help. After taking a glimpse of herself she quickly changed her mind. She had a dazed look in her eyes, her lips were swollen and she was breathing so hard that her chest heaved. Damn, that man could kiss his fine ass off.

Aloha might not have asked for help but it was obvious that someone had needed to interfere. She didn’t have any strength to do anything but take the seat that Jack had gently sat her in. Taking a sip of cool water she tried her best to follow the conversation around her. Someone handed her a baby who smiled up at her, before snuggling his adorable self against her bosom.

It didn’t matter where his angel was, if she was in a room, his eyes searched until they spotted her. Conversely, if she wasn’t in the room, there was no reason for him to be there. Ianikut spotted her amongst a group of women. All of his good intentions were shot to hell when his gaze locked onto her. And although they’d only been at the reception for about half an hour, it had felt like ten hours. He was close to the end of his rope when he felt the berserker approach. Slipping him a set of keys, Steele

directed him to his car. "Do not interpret this as a sign of friendship. I still don't trust vampires. Try not to bring it back full of dings," he teased before walking off.

That was the moment that Steele rose in Ianikut's opinion. Perhaps, he wouldn't have to kill the berserker after all.

Aloha chatted with some of her grandmother's friends, when suddenly she felt Ianikut's presence behind her. Turning to ask what he wanted, she noted the look in his eyes that managed to be both tender and fierce at the same time. Ianikut gently embraced her, tipped her head back and placed a feather light kiss on her lips. Before she could utter a protest, Ianikut offered his apologies and before she could inquire what he apologized for the baby she held was gently extricated from her arms, and she was hoisted in Ianikut's strong arms.

"Mine," Ianikut growled.

"Ianikut!" "He's just a baby," she huffed in disbelief.

"He's old enough to get his first beat down over a woman," Ianikut tossed back before returning it to his mother.

Moments later, Ianikut settled her in the passenger seat of Steele's Mercedes and headed home. She'd officially been Mrs. Aloha Carrington-Aleksandrovich for thirty-three minutes, had already cussed Ianikut out twice and was on the cusp of cussing him out yet again. However, she held her tongue. A big part of her heart threw confetti over Ianikut's desire for her, but a small part of her was livid. The livid part was going to cuss him out after the diva fucked him senseless. What had possessed her to marry a barbarian? She didn't appreciate him warning off every male in the vicinity. And when she said every male, she meant every male.

Casting Ianikut yet another disgruntled look, she folded her hands together lest she be tempted to brain him with something.

"I love you, angel," he whispered.

"You're a total cretin," Aloha answered.

"I'm also a jealous ass, angel moya, but I love you."

"Do you know how much ribbing I'm going to take over your little wild out?"

"I didn't do anything wrong. I followed standard wedding protocol."

"Are you serious? Whose standard wedding protocol includes threatening babies and ravishing your woman in public?"

"Mine," he said.

"What about the toast...or the cake...or the garter removal?" She sputtered.

"I thought that I'd made it clear that I wouldn't hike your dress up, so that other men could ogle your

thighs. Speaking of which, there is entirely too much of you exposed in that,” he paused, “dress.”

“Ianikut, if I walked out wearing a nun’s habit, you’d proclaim that too much of my person was exposed, so get over it.”

“I’m jealous over you, angel. Get accustomed to that because I don’t envision much changing on that front. You cannot go about tempting men like you do,” he answered.

“Ianikut, I’m wearing my wedding dress. I don’t think a wedding dress is an invitation for other men to look or touch,” she spat.

“There’s hardly anything to that wedding dress, angel,” he said through a clenched jaw.

“Stop clenching your jaw like that.”

“My jaw has been clenched, since I discovered what you weren’t wearing under that dress.”

Aloha knew that she looked beautiful in her gown. She felt decadent when she’d shimmied into it. It felt like a silken caress everywhere it touched her skin. When her grandmother placed the tiara on her head, she’d felt like a queen...as if she was made to walk by Ianikut’s side. The dress was simple in form, but the intricacy was in the details. Strands of hand-knotted pearls stretched across the backless gown. Tiny straps held the gown up and the bodice dipped enticingly without revealing the fact that she wore no bra underneath.

“You don’t like the dress?” She purred.

“I love the dress so much that it took every ounce of patience I possessed to hold back from hauling you upstairs and fucking you into submission while Indy shouted the marriage vows through the door!”

“Ianikut, the dress covers everything.”

“That’s not the point.”

Sensing that Ianikut was approaching a dangerous mood, Aloha made an admission. “Ianikut, I selected this dress because I wanted to wear something worthy of you.”

“You were born worthy of me. It’s I who has to prove my worth to keep you.”

“This is the one gown that made me feel beautiful when I put it on,” Aloha whispered.

“Angel, even when wearing Carolina paraphernalia, you’re too beautiful for words.”

“Oh,” she gasped.

“It’s a good thing that I have iron-clad control,” he said.

Having felt his raging erection against her, Aloha challenged his assertion of self-control. “You think that you had ironclad control because I didn’t see any evidence of said control on the dance floor.

“Angel, if you knew how much I wanted you in that moment, you would applaud my control.”

“Well, that’s what you get after that stunt with the cake,” she harrumphed.

“That’s your fault for having such a delectable mouth. I might have to forbid you from eating in public. Angel, you are so beautiful,” he rasped.

“I love you, Ianikut,” she whispered.

Ianikut brought the car to a complete stop and spent the next fifteen minutes kissing her. “I love you more, angel moya.”

“You do not,” Aloha exclaimed.

“Yes, angel. I do.”

“Take me home and prove it,” she challenged.

Ianikut restarted the car and headed home. Aloha started undressing only to have Ianikut stop her. “I’ll only have one chance to unwrap a woman from her wedding gown,” he whispered.

“You might get married again,” Aloha teased.

“I’ll never marry another woman, Aloha. I can’t, so don’t tease me about this.

“Ianikut, you’re probably going to outlive me being vampire and all,” she said.

“No, angel. Mated vampire couples die together.”

“I’m not a vampire, Ianikut.”

“But I am. When I made love to you and took your blood, physiological changes took place within me. I’m attuned to you. When you cease to be, so will I, angel.”

“But that means that you’re condemned to human life expectancy -- not the standard long ass vampire one,” she whispered.

“Yes, angel, but that is a small price to pay for the privilege of being married to you.”

“Oh, Ianikut. I...”

“Don’t tell me that you’re sorry for marrying me, angel, when I’m both honored and grateful to be your husband.”

“You gave up so much life for me though,” she wailed...honored beyond belief. “Why didn’t you tell me before we got married?”

“Because you would attempt to ‘save’ me not knowing that I would willingly give up everything for you.”

“Ianikut.”

“Perhaps now you understand why I’m such a protective bastard when it comes to you.”

“Oh, Ianikut.”

Chapter Twenty-five

Ianikut was cognizant of every detail. He realized that he would never have another first time to carry his wife over the threshold, or carry her up the stairs or make love to her. So, he vowed to take his time. As soon as he reached their bedroom, he placed her on the bed and dropped to his knees. Closing his eyes, he prayed for strength. He didn’t want to say the wrong thing. His heart was full of so many words, but he wasn’t sure how to say them. “Angel, angel, angel” he whispered.

“Ianikut,” she answered.

“Oh, God, Aloha. You are my Marya.” He had known, those many months ago when he refused to imagine life without her. Like Sansoni, his world revolved around two things: his God and his woman. Like Sansoni had started loving his God when he realized that it was God who had given him this woman.

“Who is Marya?” Aloha asked.

“Marya was the wife of Sansoni. To our people, there is but one romance -- that between Marya and Sansoni. That remains the romance to which all other romances are compared. No one is sure where Sansoni came from only that he was not Russian. He was a man, who was known for one thing: for being a law unto himself. It was said that there was no worse enemy than Sansoni. Men feared him, but women only knew gentleness from his hands and heard only pleasantries from his lips.

But when he fell in love with Marya, he became known for two additional things: his love for Marya and his love for his God. Never a churchgoing man, nevertheless he frequently sang litanies to God for gifting him with Marya. When people asked him how much he loved Marya, he responded, ‘Like Christ loves the Church.’ Aloha, you are my Marya.

I love you. I love you, I love you, I love you. It doesn’t seem as if three words can ever convey everything I feel in my heart. Saying I love you seems insufficient. You will never know how much I care for you, need you, want you. This is the first time I’ve ever been scared. I’m scared that I’ll fail you in some way...that you’ll leave me. I’m scared and I’m honored that God has seen fit to gift me with you. The money, the houses, nothing measures up to you, angel. I deeply and truly love you.”

Aloha listened to this man who had humbled himself to her...who had exposed his heart and his vulnerability to her...who had not only admitted having a weakness, but admitted that she was his weakness. And she too thanked God for this man. “Thank you,” she gasped. “Ianikut, you honor me. You’ve given me love that I didn’t even know I needed. And if I am your Marya, then you are my Sansoni.”

They were both crying as they poured out their hearts.

“If I don’t stop crying, I’m going to be a mess.”

“You’ll always be beautiful, angel, regardless of how messy you get.”

Aloha gave Ianikut a moment to ogle her before she undressed him. She wasn’t careful with his suit because she was anxious to have him...to make love with her husband...to be made love to by her husband. In moments, she had him undressed although she wasn’t sure where she had chucked his clothing.

Pulling her to her feet, he slowly unwrapped her from her gown. And when she stood before him in only her veil, he wept again at her beauty and his blessing. Though the alpha in him was present, he didn’t want to dominate Aloha this time, he wanted to make love to his angel. His hands shook as he gently pushed her braids away from her face. He caged her in with his massive upper body. Taking her hands in his he stopped and just looked at the gift of his beautiful wife. Ianikut stared into her eyes willing her to see the depth of his love for her. When he saw the same love mirrored in her eyes, he took her mouth and kissed her until they were both breathless and then he entered her. When he was planted deep inside her, he stopped. “Aloha, I love you.”

“And I love you, Ianikut.”

“I really love you, angel. With everything I have. With everything,” he declared as he stroked into her with excruciating slowness. He loved hearing her respond to his lovemaking and treasured each sigh he coaxed from her; every moan she gave up. Her pleasure was a gift to him, one he would never take for granted. The pure beauty of her climax absolutely amazed him. His angel’s eyes filled with such wonder right before she threw her head back and gave herself over to the sensation. She was joy personified. He always tried to hold his own pleasure in abeyance so that he could witness the beauty of her taking pleasure from his body. It was a testament to her trust and her love for him, and it never failed to humble him for he knew that she was a woman who closely guarded her heart. He also knew that this woman loved him, both the man and the vampire.

Aloha always enjoyed making love with Ianikut. He had loved her every way there was to love her and all of them led to the same thing -- a cataclysmic orgasm. This time was different. Ianikut touched something within her with every caress. Each kiss carried promises. He gently opened up her soul and inserted himself there. She read incredible dreams in his eyes. And she knew without a doubt, that whatever came, she would spend forever with this man; she would die for this man; and she would live for this man.

Even after they had made love many times, they couldn’t let each other go. They lay face-to-face whispering I love you’s to each other before lapsing into the comfortable silence that preceded deep sleep.

“Aloha,” he whispered.

“Yes.”

“Aloha, promise me you won’t leave me.”

“Ianikut, what’s wrong, baby?”

“Promise me you won’t leave me,” he repeated his plea.

“Baby, why do you think that I’m going to leave you?”

“Because you might after I make this confession.”

Aloha attempted to sit up, but Ianikut pulled her under him and used his weight to press her into the mattress.

“Is there another woman?”

Ianikut felt her agitation and did his best to calm her. Her heart beat much too fast and he felt the adrenaline building within her. How could she think he’d want another woman? He had to quickly dispel such insane notions lest she attempt something foolish like leaving him.

“There can never be another woman, angel. Never think such nonsense, because that’s all any such thought would be. I love only you!”

“Then, what is it?”

“The Aleksandrovich lineage is categorically the most powerful vampire family in existence. My father is King of all vampires. That title has passed to the eldest male in our line for the last few centuries. It’s supposed to pass to me.”

“Okay, so you’re like a vampire prince?”

“There’s not really a human comparison, but I guess that’s close enough.”

“And what’s the problem exactly?”

“My father, isn’t happy with our marriage.”

“Is it because I’m not a vampire, non-Orthodox, or black?”

“Yes, yes, and yes.”

“But your father has met Atlanta,” she said.

“And he despises her,” he answered. “He thinks that American women are too headstrong -- black women in particular.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before we got married?”

“That my father despises Atlanta ? Because pretty much everyone despises Atlanta and she doesn’t give a damn.”

“Ianikut, you’re so close to perishing right now. That is not what I’m talking about. Why didn’t you tell me all of this -- the regency thing, the way your father despises black, non-Orthodox American nonvampire women.”

“Because, angel, you would’ve attempted to avoid marrying me.”

“You said attempted.”

“Yes, attempted because you’re my heart, angel. There’s no way that I would allow you to run from me forever.”

“You are so...so...”

“Handsome? Wonderful?”

“Yeah, you’re all that, but I was going to say delusional.”

“Aloha, we’re married and that’s that.”

“Oh, really, because we have this little procedure called --”

Covering her mouth, he stopped her speech. “Don’t even utter the d-word. There will never be a divorce between us, Aloha.”

Seeing that she was working up a good amount of anger, he took the alpha down a notch. “You promised me that you wouldn’t leave me. You promised, angel. You cannot leave me.”

“I’m not going to leave you, Ianikut. I have a thing or two to say about your omissions, and later in our marriage I’ll trot that out. But right now, I need to know what we’re up against.”

“Aloha, my father can challenge me. He can cut me off from my people and forbid me to use the Aleksandrovich name...for starters.”

“A, I’m not changing my last name again, and B, why are we going to Russia considering what you just said?”

“Because I have to. My father has to make an official decree. If I don’t go, angel, it’s as if I’m doing something shameful. Marrying you is worth any price I have to pay; worth any punishment that he may mete out. And I am sure he will mete out punishment but he will have to look me in the eyes to do it, and when he does he will see that my love for you overrides anything he can do to me.”

“What if he tries to fight you, Ianikut?” She sobbed.

He lifted her chin and looked into her eyes. “Then he will die, angel. I have much to live for. And one of the first lessons males of any species learn is that it’s dangerous to come between a male and his female.”

“Don’t you mean a vampire and his mate?”

“That too, angel, but before I am a vampire, first I am a man.”

“We need to tell Jack in case he gets a bunch of other vampires to jump you. And I bet Reign knows how to kill vampires.”

“Angel, my brothers have chosen to go into exile with me should that punishment be handed down. There’s no vampire who can stand against me, and no group who can stand against all of my brothers and live.”

“I hear that, but we don’t leave for Russia for two weeks. That’s plenty of time for me to form my own contingency plan. Now, make love to me and convince me why marrying you was a good idea.”

“And when this is over, I want a tiara since you’re a prince and all.”

“So you’re confident that I’ll be victorious?”

“How can you not be with me by your side?” she answered.

Chapter Twenty-six

They made love throughout the night and straight through the week. They decided to postpone their honeymoon, which made perfect sense considering their upcoming ceremony in Russia. Though she was concerned about it, Ianikut distracted her from any worries that clouded her happiness with his superior lovemaking.

Aloha reveled from Ianikut’s lovemaking. He always loved her with a thoroughness that left her breathless, soft, and amazed that this man was so turned on by her. The question must’ve been in her eyes for when she came down from the crest of the last orgasm and opened her eyes, Ianikut pulled back.

“What’s wrong, angel moya? Did I not please you?”

What the hell was wrong with him? She was pretty sure he wasn’t stupid, yet he asked that asinine question. She didn’t realize that she’d spoken aloud until he answered.

“I’m glad to know that you don’t consider me stupid in spite of me being a Duke alum and all. Regardless of how it may seem I assure you that it’s not an asinine question, angel. There’s an emotion in your eyes other than absolute pleasure.”

“I,” she stopped.

“Go on, angel. Tell me what it is.”

“I just don’t understand why, Ianikut. You can have your pick of women. Every time I see some leggy, porcelain-skinned woman with a silken cascade of hair I think there goes a woman worthy of Ianikut and I feel that you’ve been cheated. That feeling is tenfold now that I know about your father. And then I realize how selfish I am because even though those women are beautiful and can give you so many things including acceptance from your father, I’m not willing to give you up.”

Ianikut knew that she felt that her words held truth but he needed to quickly disabuse her of that notion.

“Angel, how do you think that I, the Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich, feel when you’re surrounded by your cult like following of males? It’s not simply the handsome, successful black men that concern me, it’s all males regardless of race, paranormal affiliation, or university ties.”

“But those guys are just my friends.”

“Angel, I have excellent vision and hearing. I had to call the berserker and warn him that I’d kill his brothers if they made a move on you. When you walked out in that gown at Atlanta’s wedding, I growled out a warning so that I wouldn’t ruin their wedding by starting a brawl.”

“Actually, that might’ve helped it.”

Ianikut spoke as if he hadn’t heard her. “And at our wedding. Angel” -- his voice croaked -- “I...I had no words. I only knew that I would do anything to keep you by my side. Anything, angel.”

“You don’t have to do anything more, Ianikut. You’ve already done enough to catch me so now you’re stuck with five and a half feet of stacked black woman with kinky hair.”

“Even though you’re five foot~~three~~, there’s no other woman who can stand against you.”

“I love you, Ianikut even though you cannot measure.”

“And I’m glad that you love me in spite of this fault.”

“You said fault without making it plural.”

“I told you I was damn near perfect.”

“And you ain’t never lied, Ianikut. You are damn near perfect but I’ll never admit that outside of our bed,” she sighed into his mouth.

“Well, then, I shall simply keep you in the bedroom.”

* * * * *

While Ianikut took care of the last minute plans for their trip to Russia, Aloha planned a siege with the Posse. Clearly, Reign was the general in charge of the complex plans involving copious subterfuge and Jack was the commander who would carry out the devastation that Reign concocted. Though Reign might be slightly insane, she was clearly in her element and more dangerous than any of them gave her credit for. Regardless of her inanity, Aloha was glad that Reign was on their side and told her so.

It was a good thing that Ianikut had his own jet because Aloha was pretty sure that everything Reign had planned was illegal pretty much everywhere. General Reign had just wiped the board down with glass cleaner when there was a knock at the door. The total lack of panic in the room could easily lead one to believe that the ladies were doing nothing more than watching cartoons and gossiping. Then again, that’s what the scene was set up for: the windows were open, fragrant potpourri perfumed the air, there was even a pitcher of lemonade and a tray of snacks laid out on the table. All visitors would see was a picture of domestic tranquility -- not the deadly weapons that each woman knew the precise location of. Reign’s motto was it’s easiest to pull off subterfuge in plain sight.

The ladies watched as Reign's den was filled up with wall-to-wall fine ass men. The Norsemen entered first: Steele followed by his brothers -- Egil, Haakon, and Håvard and his cousins -- Njord, Roald, and Sigurd. Then came Hannes followed by men who were obviously his kin. The Southern boy brought up the rear. It wasn't that he was unassuming; it was precaution in case one of them went on a wild out. He might not be paranormal but he had a pocket full of dynamite and a big enough explosion would take care of any problem regardless of how big, fast, and strong you were.

One thing the ladies of the Posse didn't do was play dumb -- for anybody, for any reason and they didn't start then. They waited for the men to take seats before beginning the interrogation. "Hannes, your family?"

"Yes, Silana," Hannes answered as he handed Reign a cake box, which Victorious and Aloha promptly relieved her of. "Allow me to introduce my brothers. This is my twin Mathis, and my younger brothers Gevehard, Lothair and Konstantin."

"I'm guessing y'all were involved in a lot of fights with those names," Aloha piped up.

"Yes, but we didn't lose any," Hannes assured her.

"I didn't suspect otherwise, however, I'll be nicking your names. That's completely ridiculous."

"From the woman named a greeting," Victorious threw in.

"So says the woman named an adjective," Aloha returned.

"Children, please." Silana interrupted their bickering, before it became a full-fledged argument. "Might we return to the matter at hand?"

As Hannes made introductions the ever watchful Jack took note...of everything including the fact that Hannes' brothers were unusually golden in the dead of winter especially for men who hailed from Europe.

"How do you plan to be of service to us?" Silana inquired silkily.

"Ladies," the always impeccably-mannered Steele addressed them after he'd kissed his wife breathless and disarmed her. "Know that we only hold the highest respect for you as professionals and individuals. We know that as women of superior intellect and great strength that you're accustomed to handling life's little events on your own, but what made you think that the men in this family would allow you to continue to do so?"

Iain spoke in the face of their silence. "I'd like to know the answer to that too. I don't know what the hell y'all are plotting but y'all placing yourselves in danger isn't happening."

Gasping, Victorious turned to her husband who as always placed himself between her and the area of greatest danger. "You ratted us out, didn't you?"

Snatching her to him, Iain answered. "Yes, Victorious, I did. Unlike you, I wouldn't dream of oh, I don't know considering an overthrow of vampire hierarchy without help."

"Iain, I'm not talking to you."

"You don't have to talk -- all you have to do is moan out your pleasure. I'm not going to lose you or any of my sisters-in-law to your foolishness."

"I understand the Norsemen being here, but what is your stake in this Hannes and what are you?" Jack asked.

"I'm Zuri's shield from whatever danger is close to her."

"But I didn't ask," Zuri said.

"And you will never have to, *liebling*. We are shifter, Jack."

"What type?" Reign inquired with a gleam of excitement in her eyes.

"The dangerous kind."

"Specifically?"

"Grizzly."

Before Reign could pelt all and sundry with more questions, there was yet another knock and a question regarding entrance before the room was filled with the vampire contingent. Ianikut and his five brothers -- Zhenechka, Antosha, Fyodor, Vyacheslav, and Tosya -- entered.

"I'm not surprised to discover my wife and her sisters planning a coup; I am surprised to find all of you here," Ianikut addressed the other paranormals and the Southerner.

"Because I loathe, hate, and despise you doesn't preclude me or the men of my line from protecting your house, Vampire. After all, these women are our wives and our sisters."

"Shifter?" He inquired.

"Vampire?"

"Your reason?"

"Zuri. What hurts her hurts me and while I'm here, nothing hurts her...and lives."

"And nothing hurts our brother and lives," Mathis added as his younger brothers nodded their agreement.

"Hannes," Zuri cried as she scrambled into his arms and basked in the comfort of his strength. "I love you."

"And I love you, *liebling*, but we shall discuss your putting yourself in danger -- regardless of how much you tempt me to do otherwise."

“Really, because I have some things I’d like to discuss with you too, like how you thought I’d ever like that asshole who shared a womb with you,” she spat as she glared at said asshole.

“Jealous of all the time I get to spend with Hannes, little woman?” Mathis taunted.

Zuri made to stand when Hannes stopped her with a firm hand on her luscious hips. “Be calm, lieblich.”

“I am perfectly calm, Hannes. If we didn’t need you Mathis, I’d fuck you up right now.” Turning to the unmated vampires, she warned them. “Watch out for Mathis. Not only is he a fucking moron but he’s probably on the prowl for a handsome alpha.”

“Just because I don’t like you doesn’t make me gay,” Mathis returned calmly.

“No, it doesn’t and saying that you were gay would be a slur to the stellar gay men that I know. The fact is that you are a fucking asshole Mathis.”

“Children, do not make me rise from my seat.”

“He started it, Silana.”

“Zuri, I’m sure he did, but we have a greater issue on our hands. After this issue is closed you can go back to arguing with Mathis but until such time, not another word from either of you. Understood?”

“Fine,” Zuri pouted.

A stern look from Hannes prompted Mathis to respond to Silana’s request. “Yes, Ms. Toussaint.”

“Good. Now, let us repair to the dining room and discuss our plans over lunch.”

“You never planned to take on the vamps alone, did you?”

“Oh, we planned, but that’s called a worst case scenario, Ianikut. I’d never let my girls walk into danger unless there were no other options, and even then we wouldn’t walk. We’d run straight at it -- hard and fast.”

“Silana, you do know that though we are powerful, we’re sadly outnumbered,” Ianikut admitted in a somber tone.

Patting his back, Silana smiled. “I understand that, Ianikut but I also understand that both Steele and Hannes command many men and should any of them be harmed, your father risks war with not only the vampires who’ve chosen not be part of the empire, but also with the berserkers and all of the shifters. That’s a death wish for all involved and one thing I know about wealthy, white men is that they’re generally avaricious about their privilege. I don’t imagine many would be willing to risk that simply because you are willing to concede your privilege for your woman. Now come, all of you look like you could use something to eat.”

Everyone in the room paused and looked at Silana realizing just why she was so successful at her profession. She was thorough, crafty and not above manipulation if it meant justice would be the reward. They all looked at her and nodded in respect.

“Silana,” Ianikut said as he walked to her. “I am in awe of your brilliance and I feel privileged to have you on our side.”

“Are you awed enough to let us fly on your pimped-out private jet?” Reign asked.

“As if I would have it any other way,” he answered.

“Woo hoo! This is going to be the hotness!”

“I have a feeling Russia will never be the same,” Ianikut said.

“It won’t be but if no one nuts up, we’ll leave it mostly intact,” she promised.

Chapter Twenty-seven

Aloha had experienced some unbelievable events in her lifetime including: riding Corkscrew, Gemini, Magnum XL-200, Mantis, Maverick, Mean Streak, Millennium Force, Raptor, Top Thrill Dragster, and Wicked Twister -- the aggressive-thrill rated roller coasters at Cedar Point; kicking it at the Googleplex; attending the Conch Republic Independence Celebration; rode all five slides of the Mayan Temple at the Atlantis Resort; beating Madden on the All-Madden level, with every team, twice; going to the Tokyo Game Show and E3; chugging back a peach slushy in under thirty seconds before chasing it with a bag of Skittles; and, watching Carolina win two championships in men’s basketball and the women win one. But nothing compared to walking into the castle that served as both home to the Aleksandrovich family and vampire headquarters.

As soon as they disembarked they were ushered into waiting limousines. The ride to the Aleksandrovich Estate was made in silence as everyone was on high alert. Once they pulled up to the front doors of the castle, Ianikut pulled her onto his lap and spent ten minutes kissing the tenseness out of her. She hadn’t realized that she was so on edge until she melted into him.

“I love you, angel moya.”

“I love you, Ianikut.”

After trailing a few more kisses down the column of her neck and across her collarbone, he set her off of his lap and signaled the driver to open the door. After exiting, he assisted her from the vehicle and held her against him. Taking her hands he pressed a kiss into each palm. “I will protect you,” he said.

Aloha shushed him with a soft kiss. “You always have,” she breathed as she smiled up at him before pulling him down for a kiss. Turning around, Aloha finally noticed the sea of men standing on either side of their party. Besides the vampires, berserkers, and shifters, there were men she could only describe as unknowns. She wondered who they were but before she could ask, her grandmother asked.

“Young man, who are all of those men?”

“Allies, ma’am.”

“That’s good to know who is foe and who is friend.”

Experience had taught Aloha to be concerned whenever her grandmother asked questions.

“Grandmother, why are you so concerned?”

“Because if something goes awry, I need to know which men I should kill, baby. Now, fix your lipstick. You have some stereotypes and obsolete opinions to crash.”

Perusing the contingent of men she knew that under the three-thousand dollar suits that they wore lay straight up warriors. Aloha loved Ianikut but when she saw the lengths he was willing to go to for the people that she considered to be her family, her heart swelled. There was nothing more she could say so she placed her hand on his arm, drew herself up to her full height of five feet five inches (yes, dammit in heels) and acted as if she’d been groomed to be a lady of leisure. She was, but she’d spent the last fourteen years doing her best to forget that. Aloha knew she’d done well when her grandmother made a sound of approval and looked at her with eyes full of love and pride.

As always, whenever Ianikut looked at his petite angel he had to tamp down the beast. She was simply beautiful. She wore an ivory gown that ironically matched the complexions of most of the women in the vampire universe. On the hanger it appeared to be an understated gown that bespoke money and class but on her it was a red flag in front of a bull. Growling low in his throat he led her into the castle.

Their party looked good -- damn good. If this had been a movie, their party would’ve won an award in costume design because Zuri and Silana combined their superpowers to insure that they all looked their best. Zuri simply wanted to look good for the sake of looking good, but Silana insisted that if things went bad that they should look their best going down. Aloha smiled thinking bloody entrails didn’t do much for an outfit regardless of how kickass it was. Her gown was simply cut but beautiful. Diamonds glistened at her throat. The only other jewelry she wore were her wedding rings but that was all she needed, for everything about her screamed money and privilege.

Ianikut looked devastating, but then he always did. He wore a dark gray tailored suit that was going to look so good scattered about their room when she had him on his back. She couldn’t believe that in spite of the gravity of the situation all she wanted to do was fuck him like there was no tomorrow.

Aloha had been so wrapped up in her fantasies of fucking Ianikut that she’d failed to take in her surroundings. She recalled ascending the stairs and now she stood in front of a man that left no doubt who he was. Ianikut’s father was a handsome man to be such a fucking asshole. Seated beside him was an elegantly-dressed woman who could’ve been a stereotype for vampire queens. On either side of his parents were two sets of vampires consisting of handsome men and women beautifully put together. These were individuals accustomed to money, power, and a life of ease, and it showed. She might have been intimidated by them except for one thing: she had Ianikut to her left, her grandmother to her right, and the Posse at her back. And every damn one of them looked good. Lifting her head high she sent them all silent thank-yous and returned her attention to the dais.

Now that she'd gotten past her nervousness and feelings of inadequacy, she noticed the man standing sentry over the king and queen. Seemingly carved of granite, he wore a kilt, the biggest fucking sword she'd ever seen, and a shitload of arrogance. This man could only be described as a barbarian. She didn't know what he was and she sure as shit didn't want to find out.

Though the expression in King Aleksandrovich's eyes didn't change, she noticed the brief flash of emotion. She wasn't sure if that look was because of her specifically or the Posse in its entirety and their contingent of guards. Considering the picture they made, she was betting it was all three.

Ianikut stood before the dais and faced the council...and then he looked to his right and smiled at his destiny before returning his attention to the front. His parents, Vsevolod and Bronislava, occupied the center throne. His paternal grandparents, Nikodim and Sofiya, were seated to the right of his father and his paternal great-grandparents, Vikenti and Anushka, were seated next to them. His maternal grandparents, Grigoriy and Viktoriya, were seated to the left of his mother and his maternal great-grandparents, Gavrie and Ustinya, were seated next to them. As always, Andrew Treunmhor stood guard over the reigning rulers. The Scot didn't blink nor did he move from his prone position yet Ianikut had no doubt that Andrew saw everything. Not a vampire, but nevertheless feared among his people and for good reason. Andrew Treunmhor was death to any who crossed him.

Ianikut's eyes settled upon his father and he sighed inwardly. For the first time in his life he faced this man as a subject rather than as a son. In this moment Vsevolod was not simply the papa who moonlighted as an executive chef or the husband who doted on his mother. Vsevolod Aleksandrovich was the leader of the most powerful and largest sect of vampires, whose rule went unchallenged, whose reign was marked with prosperity and marked by fairness, whose temper was legendary. Turning to Steele, he nodded before he and his brothers stepped forward and formally bowed.

As soon as Ianikut moved from Aloha's side, every male in their party stepped up. They moved with military precision, smoothly stepping forward effectively shielding Aloha and the other members of the Posse. Their move was noted by all in attendance. The vampire contingent collectively held their breath knowing that though Ianikut was of the law -- meaning that when necessary he acted as lawyer, judge, and executioner -- and was next in line to be ruler, that he was on the cusp of fracturing the powerful vampire kingdom. It wasn't simply the fact that he'd openly challenged the king, it was the fact that his brothers made it apparent that they all sided with him. Then there was the fact of whom he'd brought with him. Though the paranormals were few in number, they presented a problem of immense magnitude. It was obvious that these paranormals were not simply part of the masses, but part of the ruling elite within their spheres. To injure one was to initiate a full-scale war between vampires, berserkers, and shifters. Regardless of who won, they'd all lose.

Ianikut and his brothers remained kneeling until his father gave them leave to rise. "You and your brothers may rise, Ianikut."

"Thank you, King and Queen Aleksandrovich." Pausing, he held out his hand to Aloha. "I would like to present my wife, Aloha Carrington-Aleksandrovich."

"So this is the woman that you've thrown your life away for?" his father inquired.

Snarling, Ianikut's fangs descended and his eyes went pitch black. "King Aleksandrovich, you may stand in judgment of me, but you may not insult my zhená with impunity."

"Are you challenging me, Ianikut Maksim?"

"I will do whatever is necessary to protect not only this woman, but also her grandmother, her sisters that stand with her and the men that stand with them."

"I was hoping to appeal to your sense of duty, propriety, and reason."

"Then obviously, King, you do not know me for my sense of duty is to my wife and I make this proclamation with a sound mind and a sound sense of propriety. I do not wish to challenge you however," he said.

"Then why did you come here, Ianikut Maksim?" The king interrupted.

"Because my zhená deserves all the pomp that mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and every woman marrying into the Aleksandrovich lineage has received."

"Don't you dare put that woman in the same sentence as the women who sit on this dais and those who've sat here and gone on."

"How can I do anything less? Aloha has the same qualities as the women who've ruled with the past kings."

"She's nothing like the women who've ruled here. Look at her! Look what she doesn't have, son."

"I am looking at her. Even when I close my eyes, I'm looking at her. When I look inside myself, I'm looking at her. When I look upon the miracle of life, the sea, the mountains that surround us, I'm looking at her. Even when I cease to be, the last image that my eyes will process is her and God willing the first thing I'll see when I cross over is her," Ianikut said as blood red tears trekked down his face.

"Regardless of what you say, you'll never receive my blessing for this."

"I don't expect to receive your blessing. I've already received God's and hers and I don't need anyone else's."

"Then again, why did you come here? To show her what she can't have or to show her what she's cost you?"

"Aloha didn't cost me anything; she's given me more than I ever expected to have. I married her before admitting the consequences because I know she would've left me had she known. That's the kind of woman that stands by my side. I brought her here to honor her as the men in this family have always honored their women. I will not offer her anything less because she does not deserve anything less."

"But what about you, Ianikut? Do you deserve anything less?"

"As long as I have her, I will always be a wealthy man, father. Judge me. Take what you will, I only ask for this empire's bond of noninterference."

“For someone who doesn’t need anything from me, you’re asking for a lot.”

“I only ask because as much as I loathe you in this moment, I still love you and I don’t want you to die by my hand.”

Andrew Treunmhor stepped forward upon hearing the young vampire’s threats. He couldn’t understand why a man would let a woman push him to this. It was ridiculous, nonsense, unheard of in his time. In his opinion women should be kept in their place: The beautiful ones in his bed, and the others in the kitchens or fields. They shouldn’t be heard unless they were singing his praises or shouting out their pleasure. He inwardly shuddered whenever he considered what the world had come to. Women holding power over their own lives and the lives of men. Regardless of his opinion, he had a duty to fulfill. Unsheathing his sword, he spoke for the first time in centuries.

“Ianikut Maksim Aleksandrovich, be still or you will die.”

“It will take more than you, Andrew Treunmhor.”

“I doubt it, but I do relish the challenge. I’ve had so few over the centuries. None who’ve lived longer than the few seconds it took for me to destroy them.”

Ianikut kissed Aloha and pushed her back. The men with him quickly closed ranks around her. Shedding his jacket and dress shirt, he called for his own sword and stepped forward.

King Aleksandrovich loathed this woman his son had chosen. He hated, detested, abhorred, and reviled everything she was: American, human, non-Orthodox, black. It was evident that this woman had a hold over his heir that was unbreakable because Ianikut was willing to concede everything for her, including the lives of his brothers, his own life, his money, his name, and his people. As angry as he was, he did not wish to take the lives of his beloved children but he would take everything else. He was about to call Andrew back when all hell broke loose.

Aloha loved Ianikut and every time she thought she couldn’t love him more, he did something to prove her wrong. This man was giving up everything and he was about to offer his life not for hers, but because she was insulted. She’d been insulted too many times to count and so the Regent’s insults didn’t hurt her but his callousness toward Ianikut almost brought her to her knees. Girding up her metaphorical loins, she planned her next move. It wasn’t that she wanted to outwardly defy him, she just didn’t want Ianikut to suffer anymore considering the callousness of not only his people but his family. Offering up a prayer, she asked for strength and courage and stepped in front of the man who would do him physical harm.

“I give my life for Ianikut,” she said in a clear voice. Though tears filled her eyes it wasn’t from the fear of dying but from the pain of being separated from him. She knew Ianikut was furious but she’d rather have him mad than dead. Before she could consider anything else, several things happened at once. Though it seemed to take forever, it played out as if in slow motion.

Her grandmother stepped in front of her making demands. "Step back, little girl."

Jack came out of nowhere and moved in front of her grandmother looking very much the avenging angel in her all black ensemble that looked like she'd just stepped out of the wild, wild west.

"Giving your life won't be necessary, Aloha," Silana said as she too stepped forward with the rest of the Posse.

"Yes, it won't be necessary because I'll take your life and his and then the life of your friends," Andrew said in a voice devoid of emotion.

"And you will die before you touch her," Ianikut said.

"Take that motherfucker down," Atlanta cried as she ran forward to take on Andrew.

The men may have been experts at planning military maneuvers, but they were novices in the face of such utter chaos started by a motley group of women who didn't know how to go down any other way except for fighting.

Before Andrew could engage with Ianikut, Aloha's grandmother made her way to the dais and was in the middle of giving Ianikut's mother a set down the likes of which she'd probably never witnessed in her long life. "What kind of woman lets her man deny her child? I don't know how you can call yourself a lady much less a woman. There is no way I'd lay up under a man that has done everything within his power to hurt my child. I hope you burn in hell. If that ignoramus beside you that you call a man and your husband doesn't want those beautiful boys, I'll take them. They don't need your last name. They can have mine. Now since y'all obviously don't know how to treat children, I'm going to take my children and go home."

An angry Andrew appeared before Sojourner to prevent her from getting too close to the King and Queen. Meanwhile, equally angry Ianikut, Steele, Iain, and Hannes were busy trying to keep hold of their armfuls of women without hurting them. Reign was engaging in subterfuge. Jack was keeping an eye on her and Jack was straight kicking ass. Silana was busy trying to protect her grandmother from the wrath of the vampires and her grandmother was just as busy ignoring Silana. In fact, she had her Bible out waving it wildly at the group on the dais. When Andrew dared touch Sojourner, Silana had turned around and gave him a crotch full of size eleven wide before braining him with a goblet that had been nearby.

Seeing that oaf touch her grandmother went straight to Aloha's head. Suddenly, she found the strength she needed to break free from Ianikut. Running in the direction looking for a weapon, she was something bad getting ready to happen. Ianikut saw this and used his speed to get there first knowing that if Andrew hit Aloha she'd die and if she died he'd kill every living thing here.

Andrew didn't get a chance to do anything because Ianikut came flying across the room. Ianikut slammed Andrew's head into the marble floor and before Aloha could scream the two men commenced to fighting. Watching the two sweaty, shirtless, heavily-muscled, long-haired alphas fight might've been an enjoyable spectacle if it weren't for the fact that they were literally beating the fucking life out of each other. It was like a no holds barred cage match, street fight, all the greatest movie beat downs rolled into one.

That's when the situation went from bad to worse. Candlesticks, goblets, vases all became weapons as the Posse threw whatever they could get their hands on. In the middle of the brawl walked Indy.

Miraculously, nothing touched her. Debris landed at her feet, errant punches only touched air. She walked in a blanket of protection and as if guided by the hand of God, the sunlight shown directly on her. Reaching Aloha, Atlanta, and Victorious, she grabbed them up and led them to the one place that was safe. She walked them outside corralling the other members of the Posse as she progressed. Before she could shepherd the last one out of the door, a flying candlestick hit Victorious.

And Iain lost his whole damned mind. Shaking the bottle that he'd been drinking from, he opened his jacket and pulled out a flask. "I will kill everybody in this motherfucker. I might not have any kind of power but I did take chemistry and biochemistry and I'm Southern so I know how to blow shit up. I'm going to need everyone to get the fuck away from those women -- especially mine. You can use your little preternatural speed and strength but unless you motherfuckers can control gravity and inertia and the two other people who have combustible liquids it's going to be game over."

It's funny how one crazed ass Southern boy with a high-powered explosive commands immediate attention. Everyone stopped mid ass-whipping.

"Iain," Indy attempted to negotiate.

"Indy, I want the girls away from here and by here I mean Russia. I want them on Southern soil. And when they're there, you call me."

Victorious tried to stagger to him but the head injury slowed her down and Jack prevented her from progressing. "Iain, baby, come with us."

"I want you home, Victorious."

"Iain, please."

"There will never be a time when I negotiate with you about your safety, Victorious. You can use that brilliant lawyer mind all you want but like the Negro spiritual says: I shall not be moved."

"Iain, what are you going to do? It's an eleven-hour flight back to Georgia."

"I'm probably going to kill a whole bunch of vamps because I figure that they're going to try something."

"I don't want you to die."

"And I want you to live, so go home. Your sisters will take care of you."

Indy had had enough. "King and Queen Aleksandrovich, you don't have to stop this but you should. Look at this once immaculate room. Now, look at the occupants. Open your eyes and really look at the devastation that happened in under three minutes. Your heir and your sentry are almost dead. Your other sons are over there in various states of beat down. You got shifters and berserkers wilding out all over this place. Now you can let this go on but none of you will recover from an hour of this much less years of all out war between you. What kind of empire will be left for you to rule and for the rest of you to live in? If y'all want to kill each other, that's fine, but these women are going out of here. Even now, they carry life within them and all the rest of you are doing is trying to find ways to end life."

In spite of Iain holding an explosive. In spite of a slobber-knocker taking place in the home of the Aleksandrovich family. In spite of everything, all anyone heard was that Victorious, Atlanta, and Aloha were pregnant.

Though Bronislava and Vsevolod argued telepathically, she'd remained silent. Contradicting him in front of others would cause him to lose face. Like many women, she'd been trained to submit to her husband in vampire matters. Smiling, she was sure that Ianikut's woman didn't know the meaning of the word submit or care about saving his pride if she thought he was wrong. Though she wasn't sure how she felt about Aloha just yet, the fact that she loved her son was enough. Regardless of how Vsevolod felt about her, she and two of her sisters were pregnant and pregnant women were never to be harmed for any reason.

Rising from her throne, she spoke aloud. "All of you, stand down." Descending, she walked over to the Posse and used her own body as a shield. All of the other powerful women in the room smiled at her and followed her lead. Gracefully, they rose and joined her in offering protection to the human women. None would dare challenge them in this matter -- not even their husbands.

"Vampires, Andrew, retract your fangs and surrender your weapons," she commanded. Waiting until they did so, she addressed Iain.

"Iain, this morning has been full of violence, please let us do as the pastor suggested and cease. Won't you give me the bottle?"

"I'll come to you. Please remain protecting my woman."

"As you wish," she said as she waited for the young man to set the bottle down.

"Victorious, you're going to have my baby?" Iain said in wonder.

"Angel moya, you're pregnant?" Ianikut whispered.

"You carry my child within you, Your Excellency?" Steele inquired.

"Oh my goodness. I get six new sons and my little girl is going to give me a great-grandbaby," Sojourner cried.

"We're going to be aunts three times over!" Zuri screeched. "We have to go shopping for new wardrobes and baby clothes."

"They need to be examined by a physician considering the last few minutes," Jack said.

"We need your agreement to the noninterference," Silana demanded. "We have a family to see to. Victorious, Atlanta, and Aloha, you need a nap."

“But we’re not tired,” all three of them whined simultaneously.

“I don’t recall asking if any of you were tired. I said you need a nap.”

“You three heard Silana, now hush before I take a switch to you.”

“Grandmother,” Aloha whined.

“Fascists” Atlanta pouted.

“Yeah, what she said,” a suddenly sleepy Victorious rejoined.

Ianikut dragged his battered body up and walked over to his woman. He wanted to snatch her to him but he was covered in blood. Looking at her tenderly, he spoke. “You’re going to nap as soon as we get on the plane.”

“No,” his mother said. “They’re going to nap now. Clean yourself up, Ianikut, so that you may see to your lady. I shall remain at her side until you return.”

Addressing Sojourner, she inquired. “Is that acceptable to you, ma’am?”

“I’m keeping the boys, but yes, that will do...for now.”

Chapter Twenty-nine

Less than an hour later, things had settled down. The bodyguards were housed in adjoining houses on the immense estate. Steele’s and Hannes’ kin were in the dining room with Ianikut’s brothers downing food like it was going out of style. Aloha, Atlanta, and Victorious were ensconced in bed firmly held in the embraces of their men while they napped. Though Zuri wasn’t tired, she laid next to Hannes enjoying the feel of him surrounding her while his magic fingers massaged her hip. Reign walked the castle grounds with Jack doing recon. Indy, Silana, and Sojourner were being treated to a Russian Tea.

Silana enjoyed the tea, and while Indy and Sojourner engaged their hostesses in debate, she gained permission to take over the kitchen. Cooking is what she did when she was in deep thought. Changing into a short-sleeved, black wrap dress and slipping into some flats, she made her way to the kitchen. Finding an apron, she tied it around her as she pulled out various ingredients. Spotting several bags of chocolate chips, she decided to make cookies and chocolate chip pecan bars. Elbow deep in flour, she was surprised when Andrew walked in. They looked each other over though neither offered a word. He looked at her with contempt, and she wasn’t sure if it was because she’d kicked him in the nuts or for some other imagined slight.

“This is one of the two places where women belong,” he said.

“Mr. Treunmhor, is there something that I can do for you?” she asked without ceasing her motions.

“There are only two things a woman can do for me.”

“Give you tips on how to catch a good man or hook you up with something snazzy from her wardrobe?”

“You would not dare speak to me like that if...”

“I’m trying not to speak to you now, but you won’t shut up.”

“You would do well to treat me with the respect I deserve.”

“If I treated you with the respect you deserve, I’d run you through with your own sword.”

“Despite your great size, I doubt you could lift my sword.”

Oh no, this motherfucker didn’t call her out about her weight. Sure, at five feet ten, 185 pounds, and a size eighteen she couldn’t be described as petite, but still she cut a fine figure. “Treunmhor, not only could I lift your sword, I could lift you. See us women of great size, we frequently work like men.”

“Well perhaps if you were smaller and less like a man no one would expect you to work like one.”

Okay, this motherfucker was getting closer and closer to death with every word that fell from his succulent pussy-eating lips. “Well, if so many men stopped acting like bitches, we women wouldn’t have to do the work most of y’all are too lazy to do or clean up the mess you made in your carelessness.”

“In my time --”

“I don’t know what time you hail from or what country you’re from but it’s obvious that whenever and wherever it is, y’all don’t have good sense because if you did, you’d know not to mess with a Southern woman. Soft boys like you go missing all the time.”

Leaning over her, he taunted her. “There’s nothing soft on me.”

Silana had been married to a man who enjoyed intimidating anyone he perceived as weak. She’d learned the hard way how to deal with men like that. Stepping closer to show that she wasn’t intimidated she said her peace, “Be that as it may, there’s nothing on you that I’m afraid of including that monster sword you carry around.”

“It’s good of you to notice how well-endowed I am.”

Silana smiled. Andrew knew good and damn well that she spoke of his fifty-one inch broadsword with jewels decorating the cross guard, pommel, handle, and quillons -- not his personal endowment.

“Well, I couldn’t help it especially after my foot became intimately acquainted with it.”

“You are foolish to taunt me.”

“And you’re a fool.”

“You should be silent, woman.”

“Unless you want to be addressed as ‘dead man walking’ you need to address me properly. You may

address me as Counselor Toussaint or Ms. Toussaint. Those are your only choices.”

Andrew had never met a woman of African descent. And he sure as hell had never met a Southern woman. Or a woman who was so unimpressed with him. Then again, he’d never had a woman assault him. His cock still ached from where she’d kicked him, and his head was still sore from where she’d slammed a goblet against his skull. This woman wasn’t afraid of him at all and that disturbed him -- not because he wanted her to fear him -- but because he wanted to ride between her thighs in spite of her size, her complete disrespect for him as a man, a highlander, and a force to be reckoned with. That admission rocked him to the core and before he did something he regretted, he snatched two of the cookies she’d placed on a tray and stalked from the kitchen. He might not know what a counselor did or where in the hell the South was, but he knew good food and the kitchen smelled only slightly less erotic than a woman’s nectar.

Chapter Thirty

Ianikut lay beside his angel and watched her sleep. Caressing her with gentle touches, he laid his hand protectively over her stomach. Leaning down, he kissed the top of her forehead and rearranged her blanket before leaving their bed. Retrieving his clothes he quickly dressed and left the room. Stopping outside of the door, he smiled noting Jack, a few berserkers and a few shifters standing guard in the hallway. Before he had a chance to say anything, Jack spoke.

“We got it. Go do what you have to do.”

Smiling, he walked downstairs to find his father. Zhenechka met him en route and dragged him to the kitchen. It was obvious that Silana had been in one of her baking moods because the kitchen was full of baked goods...and males enjoyed those goods.

“Where’s father?”

“Still getting told off by mother. He’ll be along in a bit. She’s bound to run out of insults to sling at him.”

“In what lifetime? It takes a lot to move her to anger but once you do, so not pretty.”

“I’m going to find him because I’m ready to end this and return home.”

Ianikut stood still and listened for his father. Locating him, he walked to the library and knocked firmly and waited for him to bid him to enter. Vampires were a frisky lot and he didn’t need the trauma of seeing his parents in an intimate position.

“Come, Ianikut Maksim.”

“King, judge me so that I may take my family and leave.”

“We are not being formal now, son. You don’t need to address me as King. Papa will do.”

“And will you call my zhen, daughter?”

His father didn’t speak but his silence was answer enough.

“Until such time as you can, I will call you King. Judge me now please.”

“When are you leaving?”

“I’ve already called for the limos and alerted my pilot. I’m waiting for your judgment.”

“You are my son. Nothing will change that. I don’t like that woman and I don’t know if anything will change that, but I admire the way that you fight for her. And I also admire the way that she’s willing to fight for you. You’ve changed. I want to blame it on America, but I know that you’re not easily influenced. I also know that you’re too powerful to kneel at another vampire’s feet -- even if I am that vampire. It’s unprecedented for a vampire to amass such power so quickly. Go back to your America and rule as leader of that continent as practice for the day that you will rule as King over all vampires.”

“I have no wish to rule over all vampires. I simply want to be left in peace.”

“I will leave you in peace, but today you have created a legend not just in vampire lore but in paranormal lore. If you want peace, you have to be willing to fight for it. This morning you just became the most dangerous vampire in history and you will remain so if you continue to keep good company.”

“I will not return here. There are too many variables that I cannot control.”

“Then I will come to you, son.”

“You will not upset my zhen, or I will end you.”

“I expect no less but I will mind my manners. You mind what I said about power, son. Secure your empire and you secure your woman. If even one man thinks that he can hurt your woman, she will be in constant danger. Remain just, but when necessary do not hesitate in your retribution.”

It startled him to hear his father talk to him thusly but he did not show surprise. He remained calm, bowed and took his leave.

I look forward to the day that I can again address you as father.

And I look forward to the day that I have earned that honor.

Ianikut quickly returned to his woman. Even brief separations caused him anxiety and it was even worse now that he knew that she carried his child. He was going to be a papa. His heart damn near beat out of his chest with that revelation. Bowing his head, he thanked God for this blessing then prayed for the safety of his woman and his child before settling down to watch her wake.

Chapter Thirty-one

Aloha woke slowly. For a moment she didn't know where she was but upon feeling the familiar comfort of her husband beside her, she smiled and snuggled into him being careful not to pull his hair too hard. She loved that man's hair, but not as much as she did the man. Sighing, she replayed the events of this morning. Ianikut had honored her in so many ways. The realization of what he had surrendered for her humbled her. Though he'd told her the possible consequences, the scene in that great room had brought it home for her. This man loved her. Regardless of how long she lived or how senile she became, she would never forget his impassioned speech about seeing her. Tears filled her eyes and though she didn't make a sound, she knew Ianikut knew she cried for he held her tighter.

"I love you, angel. *Ya tebyA lyublyU, angel moya .*"

"I know, Ianikut. I really, really know now. I love you," she cried.

"Why do you cry?" He asked as he kissed the top of her head.

Turning over, she looked him in the eye as she answered. "Because I've never been so honored and after this morning, I know without a doubt that I have never been so loved. Ianikut, you looked your father in the eye and gave it all up for me."

"I told you, Aloha. You are my destiny. *Vy -- moja sud'ba .* I need you. I love you. I can't live without you. *Ti nuzhnA mne. Ya tebyA lyublyU. Ja ne mogu zhit' bez vas .*"

"I was so sick when I saw with my own eyes what I was costing you. When I looked in your eyes, all I saw there was love and determination. There was no regret, no hesitation, there was only me. And I knew in that moment, that I would gladly die for you."

"Thank you, angel. Speaking of that, you will never again place yourself in danger."

"I didn't know that I was pregnant, Ianikut. I would never put our baby in danger."

"I am not talking about our child. I am talking about my wife. You are never to put my wife in danger again. Angel, do you know what would've happened had Andrew or any male struck you?"

"You would've been really pissed."

"I would've left no male in this house alive such would've been my anger."

"Dude, even your brothers, your father?" she asked.

"No one, angel. I would be beyond reason. I was beyond reason when I merely saw the danger you'd placed yourself in."

Seeing the truth in his eyes, Aloha pushed him to the bed and laid on top of him. Gently tracing the contours of his face, she kissed him gently. "Only if you're in danger."

"Never again. You are a woman, Aloha. I am a man."

"Yes, you are. You're my man and you can demand all you want but I will never sit passively while you're in danger."

“Angel,” he growled.

“Ianikut, let’s not fight about this. Keep yourself out of danger and in turn, you’ll keep me out of danger.”

“Angel, I won’t argue about it. Just know that I am your shield and your sword and if danger comes too close to you, I shall destroy it...completely, even if it means wiping out an entire lineage.”

She gasped and before she could speak, he kissed her protests away.

Ianikut didn’t want to argue the point further. He simply wanted to love his woman. Growling low in his throat he slipped his tongue between her succulent lips and feasted on her sweetness. Sliding a hand under her shirt he found a breast and kneaded it before taking it into his mouth. Using her moans to guide him, he covered her with kisses and although he marked her, he made sure she only felt pleasure. Though she attempted to take the dominant position, he growled her into submission and feasted on her. Only when she thrashed beneath him did he take her. Sliding home, he hissed and using gentle strokes touched every place within her that gave her the most pleasure. This was for her. His body was not only her shield but a tool for her pleasure and right now he wanted her to lay back and feel how much he wanted her, needed her, loved her.

“Ianikut,” she groaned through the first wave of orgasm.

“Yes, angel moya?” he whispered thankful that she was his and awed by her beauty.

“I love you.”

“And I love you.”

“Are you ready to go home, angel?”

“I’m always home whenever I’m with you, Ianikut.”

Ianikut closed his eyes so she didn’t see his tears. This woman brought him to his knees with her beauty, her honesty, her loyalty. She deserved to see what she did to him so he opened his eyes and showed her his tears. “Thank you, angel moya.”

“Never thank me, Ianikut. Just keep loving me,” she said as she stepped into his embrace.

“That won’t be a problem. Get dressed, angel, so that we may take our leave. I am most anxious to return to our home. If you don’t mind, there’s a gown I’d like you to wear. If you don’t like it, I understand.”

“I’d wear it even if I didn’t like it because you selected it for me, Ianikut.”

“What if it were a nun’s habit? Would you still wear it?”

“Yes, Ianikut. I’d still wear it.”

“After our bath, I’ll send someone in to help you dress.”

“I want my grandmother.”

“As you wish, angel.”

* * * * *

Both Sojourner and Aloha gasped when they glimpsed the gown that Ianikut had selected. Though Aloha was overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness of such a gift, she knew that Ianikut must’ve truly outdone himself because few things made Sojourner Carrington sit up and take notice. Ianikut hadn’t simply selected a dress willy-nilly; it was obvious that he’d selected a world-class designer. She wept when she read the note that was attached to the satin hanger. It read: For you, angel moya. Regardless of what you wear, you will always be my princess. Trust him to remember her admission about finding a dress to make her feel worthy to stand at his side.

Ivory in color, the gown featured spaghetti straps and a daring décolletage. The lining was blood red and would be visible through the slit that stopped mid-thigh. In shock, she stepped into the gown and sighed. It hugged her body and caressed her skin. And there wasn’t simply a gown, but a silk wrap and matching shoes. The ivory T-straps were decorated with diamonds.

Standing in front of the mirror, she stared at her reflection as her grandmother oohed and ahed. Surely, that woman in the mirror was not her. This woman was beautiful. A knock at the door drew her attention away from the mirror. Ianikut walked in looking even more devastating than usual. Dressed in a black tailored suit, for once, he wore his hair loose. It wasn’t his unbound hair that made him more handsome. It was the fact that she knew without a single doubt how much this man loved her.

“Ianikut.”

“Angel moya, you are beautiful.”

“It’s the dress,” she said only to be cut off by Ianikut kissing away her protest.

“It is you,” he said as he turned her around and fastened a diamond and ruby necklace around her neck.

“Ianikut,” she sighed.

“Angel,” he purred.

Ianikut’s mere presence turned her on so good. Neither noticed her grandmother slip from the room, then again, right now all either of them noticed was their desire for each other. “Kiss me, Ianikut. Kiss me,” she begged as she pulled him down and took his lips. They kissed for long minutes. When they pulled apart, Ianikut pulled her tighter to his chest and whispered in her ear.

“Bare your neck, I want the taste of you filling my mouth.”

“You just had a taste of me,” she smiled.

“And it will never be enough. Bare your neck or spread your thighs because I want a deeper taste,” he

growled.

Aloha creamed her panties on the spot. "Ianikut, everyone is going to smell my arousal."

"Good," he said as he sank his incisors into her and took a few sips.

Exiting the room, Aloha was surprised to see Ianikut's brothers waiting for them. As soon as they reached the center of the hallway, they surrounded her and Ianikut in an obvious display of protection. Aloha thanked them and placed her hand on Ianikut's arm and walked down the stairs. At the end of the stairs, she was surprised that every vampire in attendance kneeled as they passed. Instead of heading straight to the door, Ianikut stopped before the dais and took her hand. She had no idea what was going on and tensed up before Ianikut whispered a reassurance in her ear.

"All is well, angel moya."

Trusting his words, she settled down and watched as all of the women descended and walked toward them. Offering her a curtsy, his great-grandmothers each gifted her with a single rose.

"Treat her well, Ianikut," his great-grandmothers ordered.

"I know of no other way, Great-grandmothers," he answered.

Next, his grandmothers offered her a curtsy, before they also gifted her with a single rose.

"Protect her," they ordered.

"I can do no other," he responded.

Finally, his mother stood in front of her and carefully settled a tiara on her head. "Love her," she commanded.

"With everything within me," he promised.

"May peace grace your life and your home," she said.

"Thank you, Mother," Ianikut answered before gently kissing Aloha.

Aloha was speechless. All she could do was nod. She looked to Ianikut for guidance. He wore a pleased expression. Picking up his mother, he hugged her and spoke in Russian. Though she was nowhere near fluent, she knew he spoke of love. Ianikut repeated the process with each of his grandmothers. Finally, he nodded to his grandfathers and father, put his hand in the small of her back and took his leave.

Once they were settled in the plane, she asked. "What the hell just happened?"

"We were married, vampire style."

"I don't recall getting to say anything."

"Because it is the duty of the male to ensure his woman's happiness, protection, and well-being. It is I who must promise these things."

"What do I do?"

"Accept my love and protection."

"That freaking kicks all kinds of ass! I'm going to love being married to a vampire -- even one who's a Duke fan."

Epilogue

The Posse, the vampires, the berserkers, the shifter, and that crazy-ass Southern boy sat around the fireplace in Ianikut's house and mulled over the king's words.

"I had no idea that it would get this big," Ianikut admitted.

"Yeah, that's how Aloha got pregnant in the first place," Reign tossed out to ease the tension.

"You are so dead when I get up from here."

"Careful, Aloha. You know I'm only friends with you because of your plasma."

"Like we're only friends with you because of your hat collection," she said, sneering at the conquistador hat that Reign had perched on her head."

"I totally understand that. Aloha?"

"Yeah. I may be friends with you because of the plasma, but I'm your sister because I love you."

"Me too."

"Yeah, what she said," the rest of the Posse threw in.

"So what do we do?"

"We get some dry erase boards and help you guys plan your empire. I'm going to need a title though, and an office with a ficus tree, a parking space, and one of those globes that has a hiding space inside."

"You need property," Zuri said. "You need privacy and a good amount of acreage."

"And escape routes," Jack added.

"And traps," Iain offered.

"You seem to be taking this well," Ianikut said.

“What other choice do we have? Our women come first. They are happy here. They love their sisters. It is our duty to see that they remain happy,” Steele answered. “And since I shall be seeing your face regardless of whether I want to or not, we may as well make the process as painless as possible. And again, we are still not friends.”

“You’re right, berserker. We’re not friends, but like the Posse we are brothers. Gentleman, again, I thank you.”

“And again, it is not necessary,” Steele said.

The normally silent Hannes spoke. “We need our own men. Men that can be trusted. Not a lot of men, just a handful of dangerous men who aren’t motivated by money, thrills, or prestige.”

“Finding men like that might prove to be the most difficult task,” Silana stated, not knowing that at that very moment, none other than Andrew Treunmhor was landing at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

THE END

Jayha Leigh

Jayha Leigh uses her actual name as a pseudonym just in case she ever wilds out. She needs her ego stroked several times a day due to a mild case of megalomania. Her hobbies include: indulging her delusions of grandeur; plotting the destruction of all who oppose her. Her favorite color is Carolina blue, her favorite song is the MNF Jingle, her favorite season is football season, and her favorite food is dessert. She loathes luxury boxes at football stadiums, under wire in bras, diet anything, single-ply toilet paper, and people who refer to themselves in the third person.