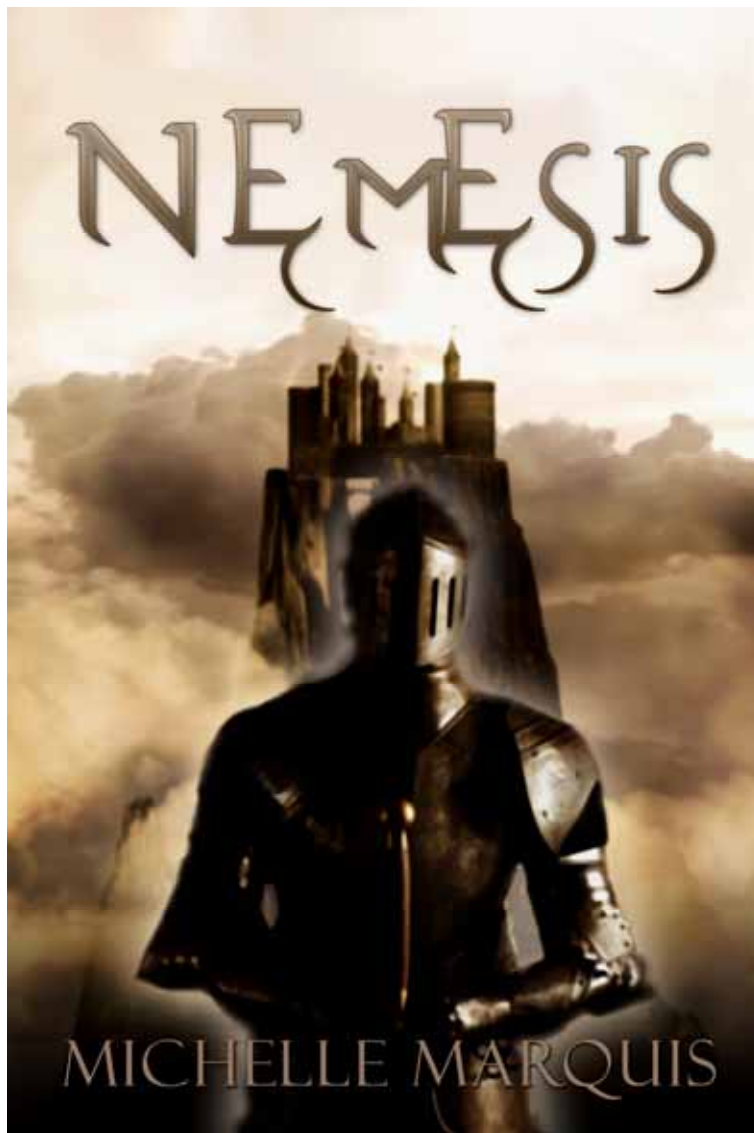


NEMESIS



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by

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To all the vampire fans

Chapter 1

The devil was coming to take her and his name was General Nemesis.

Ginger Mont Blanc paced by the royal stables waiting for the message she knew would come. The end had been rumored for weeks and all that was left was the official word. The word would come in the form of a royal messenger, a young man barely able to shave who would tell her the thing she feared most. He would say that two months after her carefully arranged marriage, she was now a widow. And the kingdom she was to help the young impetuous king rule? Lost. Bled dry by the Vampire King, Mortis, and his hellion of a general, Nemesis.

Ginger looked over at her ladies-in-waiting wrapped in their light blue cloaks, huddled together like frightened mice cornered by a hungry cat. And her? What did she look like to their young eyes? She imagined they saw what she was; a queen barely thirty without a king or a kingdom. Did they feel pity for her? Did they feel contempt for a queen who, despite all her power and titles, couldn't even save herself?

Her bodyguard drew closer. "A messenger comes, your Highness."

As she predicted, the messenger was young, but younger than she expected. He was a child; a boy of ten who already wore the expression of an old man. That's what witnessing death did to those unlucky enough to behold its carnage, it aged them. And Ginger should know because just like the boy, she felt aged beyond her years, like an old woman.

Before the messenger could open his mouth, Ginger held up her hand. "Please tell me my husband and king is returning."

The messenger ran dirty fingers through his blond hair and Ginger caught the faint scent of old sweat. He shook his head. "I'm sorry. He is dead, my Queen."

"And the other officers and nobles who rode alongside him?" she asked as her throat tightened.

"As far as I know, most dead," the messenger confirmed with a short nod. "Those who live have scattered to the four winds, my Queen."

Ginger wrung her hands. "How far is that devil general's army?"

"Less than a ten-minute ride behind me, my Queen. General Nemesis let me live so I could urge you to surrender peacefully."

Her bodyguard stepped forward protectively. "You tell that beastly scum Queen Mont Blanc will never surrender to him or any of his other half-dead brethren!" he snarled. The bodyguard turned to Ginger and helped her on her jittery mount. "You make your choice, boy. You can either come with us or wait for your new undead master to arrive."

"I beg you, my lord, don't run," the messenger said. "The general's men are as numerous as locusts in the field and without question, as ravenous! Please, surrender now and they might take pity on you."

Ginger hesitated. It wasn't that she feared for herself, but she certainly feared for her entourage. She would never forgive herself if they were killed trying to protect her, even if it was their job. "I want my ladies and the rest of you to stay," she said.

Kate, one of her ladies, rushed forward, her long brown hair loose around her shoulders and her eyes glassy with tears. What a beauty she was. "But, my Queen, what will become of us if we stay? We belong with you!"

"The general won't hurt you if you stay," Ginger said, stroking Kate's wet cheek. "I'm sure he'll let you all go. It's not you he wants, it's me." She turned her horse toward the dirt road behind the castle and smiled at her bodyguard. "I want you to stay as well, my faithful friend."

Her bodyguard shook his head. "No. I am with you until the end, no matter what may come."

"It's impossible for you to defend me," Ginger said softly. "You don't stand a chance against the vampire hordes."

"Perhaps not, my Queen. But I took an oath to you and your husband. Please don't ask me to go back on it now. I cannot."

"Okay then, let's go," Ginger said.

* * * *

Her scent came to him on a northward breeze, fueling the current of demonic lust that raged like a hungry lion in his

heart. She was close, so very close, and unknowingly traveling right toward him. His passion was growing, boiling, threatening to drive him to the very cliff of insanity if he didn't have her soon.

General Nemesis had been waiting for this moment for over two years, ever since he'd seen Princess Mont Blanc dancing with her betrothed at a costume ball one summer night. Nemesis wasn't much for the royals and their showy parties but he had been ordered to attend by his dark lord and master, King Mortis. The king had told him to watch the nobles, learn them, so that when the time came to lead the Night Army against the rival human kingdoms, General Nemesis would be ready. And so he'd attended out of duty, making sure to stay in the shadows and observe.

All night long he'd watched the humans and their drunken, clumsy seductions in the back gardens. He couldn't help it, they made him laugh. They reminded him of children, experimenting with sex without truly knowing its potent magic. And so it didn't take long for him to grow bored. He was just about to leave when he set eyes on *her*. The queen was tucked safely in a group of senior officials, charming the most powerful men in her husband's kingdom with her sharp wit. She was an unparalleled enchantress, laughing and talking politics, flirting here and there.

Ginger Mont Blanc wasn't a princess in name only, she was a goddess. Where other women were beautiful but empty-headed, she carried on brilliant conversations about war, politics, and the best way to govern. And somehow, during

the course of that night, as Nemesis listened in the darkness to her arguments, something extraordinary happened.

Nemesis fell in love.

No, a better term for it was became obsessed.

From that day onward, Ginger haunted his every waking moment. Nemesis couldn't get her out of his thoughts, masturbating for hours on end like a love-sick teenager. Then, when he couldn't take the hunger any longer, he decided to confront her alone and tell her how he felt.

Nemesis knew it was a mistake, but he couldn't stop himself. So every night he would wait in the shadows outside her bedroom and watch for an opportunity to get her alone. His time came early one morning, before the sun had begun its relentless ascent. Ginger walked out her French doors into the garden as her husband continued to sleep unaware. In her hand, Ginger carried some bird seed which she sprinkled on the ground as she walked.

That was when Nemesis revealed himself to her.

Thinking back on it, he must have been an imposing sight. She must have been terrified to see a seven-foot black vampire with blazing amber eyes and shiny black armor in her private garden.

Ginger had started violently. She dropped the seeds and opened her mouth to cry out but he was on her in a second. He covered her beautiful pink lips with his large hand and dragged her into the woods.

And that's where everything went wrong.

Ginger fought hard forcing him to hold her tighter. In that moment, as her hot young blood rushed through her

veins, Nemesis lost himself. Staring down into her lovely brown eyes, he wrapped the length of her dark hair around his fist and pulled her head back. His tongue laved her throat, picking up the racing pulse of her artery, and before he could stop himself, he had nipped her.

Sweet, metallic blood filled his mouth as Ginger swooned in his arms.

As she squirmed against his chest, he plunged his fangs deeper and felt her stiffen. A drop of potent sedative secreted from his teeth seeped into her blood forcing her muscles to relax. Her lush full breasts pillowed his chest driving him to new heights of arousal. But Nemesis soldiered his emotions back under his control and withdrew, but it was already too late. He had violated her and Ginger now feared and hated him.

But he never forgot her or the intoxicating taste of her blood. Countless nights he lay awake dreaming of her. He'd tried to cool his lust with other women both human and vampire but it was no use. There would never be anyone for him but Ginger. And now he was minutes away from having her all to himself.

Two riders approached up ahead, one a man Nemesis didn't recognize and the other his beloved Ginger. The man, he assumed, was Ginger's bodyguard. Although Nemesis sat mounted on his black stallion right in the middle of the road, he wasn't surprised they didn't see him. The night was so dark that a human could barely see a hand in front of their face. Nemesis, however, could see everything.

Ginger and her bodyguard were almost on top of Nemesis by the time they spotted him. Alarmed, they reined their horses up so abruptly that Ginger's mount reared up a few times. She quickly got it back under control glaring at Nemesis with all the hatred in her heart. Her rage was devastating.

The bodyguard pulled his sword and dismounted.

"Don't be an idiot," Nemesis said. "You're no match for my strength. What you're doing is suicide." He stared at Ginger and his raging hunger grew tenfold. "Talk your man into surrendering or I'll be forced to kill him."

Ginger tried to avoid looking Nemesis in the eye. He detected a slight tremor in her hand. "George, I command you to put up your weapon and surrender."

The bodyguard turned to look at her aghast. "But, my Queen, you must be joking! Don't you know what he has planned for you?"

"He's got me no matter what you do," she said with a ribbon of sorrow to her tone.

Nemesis might have felt compassion for her had he not been in such a state. He could hear her heart racing and smell the meaty aroma of her blood as it rushed through her veins. No mortal was going to stop him from what he wanted. He dismounted and advanced on the bodyguard pulling his own sword in the process. "On your knees."

The bodyguard was torn, but as Nemesis drew closer, he made up his mind. He tossed his sword on the ground and went down on one knee. Seconds later they were all surrounded by vampire soldiers.

* * * *

Ginger clenched her fists so hard her nails dug into the flesh of her palms. In a moment of weakness, she glanced into the vampire general's glowing amber eyes and, not wanting to fall under his spell, quickly looked away. It took every ounce of will Ginger had not to fall under the influence of his stare. But Ginger knew she had to fight. For one more look into his magnetic eyes and she'd be lost. So she looked at everything, anything else, even the shiny ebony menace of his riding boots. She struggled not to panic at the ominous jingle of his spurs as he drew ever closer.

Ginger stumbled back right into the restraining hands of his men and gasped. Her bodyguard had been taken away by the soldiers so quickly she hadn't even seen him go. It didn't matter anyway. There was no one to protect her and nowhere to run.

Nemesis might have been many unsavory things: a vampire; a killer; and a rogue, but there was no denying he was the very image of masculine perfection. From his smoldering amber eyes to his dark chocolate skin, to his massive seven-foot frame, Nemesis was the very image of a victorious vampire general. His chest armor was hell's-gate black and outlined every detail of the muscular chest beneath. His pants too were black and only a hint darker than his large, decorated codpiece. The long, dark cloak that flowed behind him billowed in the evening breeze like a conquering flag mocking the vanquished.

The strong hands that held her were pushing her forward now, offering her to their demon general and she was falling by inches under his enchanting hex. Ginger struggled, twisting

her body back and forth trying to break free but she knew it was hopeless. Nemesis touched his lips to her temple and glided them down to her ear. "I've waited so long for this. Much too long," he said in a deep, seductive voice.

"Don't you touch me," she retorted. But her rebuke came out too weak, too breathy to be believed. A heavy scent of fresh black leather filled her nostrils chased by the faint aroma of orchids.

"Yes," he said in a low growl, "I will touch you. And if you don't behave, I'll make you love me for it." His lips were close enough to tickle her as he spoke raising gooseflesh on her skin. Wanting him was becoming a shameful agony and Ginger hated herself. Between her legs, her sex was hot and slick with want and she prayed he wouldn't touch her there to find out her guilty secret.

"I'm begging you to let me go," she said in a harsh whisper.

His large powerful hands cupped her face, lifting it up so he could rain delicate kisses onto her eyelids and nose. An ivory fang scraped against her cheek making her shudder.

"I cannot, Ginger," he replied. "I am bewitched by you and my desire is devouring me with every sweet word from your lips." Nemesis wrapped Ginger's long dark hair around his fist. "Kiss me and take the edge off my pain."

Ginger tried to wriggle out of his grip but found it impossible. Miserable and afraid, she did the only thing she could to resist him: she turned her face to the side and refused him the kiss. Nemesis touched his full lips to her jaw and kissed her with a heartbreaking tenderness. The thin goatee and

mustache around his lips tickled her flesh as his mouth traveled down the length of her throat. His mouth rested there for what seemed like an eternity, and then he took a step back.

“Take her down,” he told his men. Ginger was dragged to the forest floor twisting and fighting like a wildcat. Nemesis stood over her as an evil smile spread across his lips. His smile was dark menace showcasing his long, thick fangs. Someone from behind the general helped him off with his cloak and armor revealing a dark muscular torso perfect in every detail. Then the soldiers were all over her, unfastening her riding pants and stripping them off her hips as she screamed and fought with every bit of energy she had. But then, to her great relief, they stopped, leaving her shirt and underwear intact. Strong hands grabbed her legs and forced them apart as Nemesis knelt between her knees. Ginger fought harder, biting her lip to stop the tears that threatened to flow and hoping beyond hope that someone might come and save her from this disgrace. But deep in her soul she knew no one could.

Nemesis placed his huge cool hands on her left thigh, pulling a portion of her underwear away from the leg and dipped his head down. A second later came the sharp pinch of his teeth piercing her femoral artery. The suffering locked up all her muscles but was quickly followed by a wave of mind-numbing euphoria from the sedative in his saliva. Ginger could hear someone moaning softly and suddenly realized the pleasure sounds were coming from her. In the back of her mind a tiny voice told her to resist but the will had left her body.

Another hard pinch made her wince and she knew it was over. His saliva healed the wound the moment he withdrew. He'd taken his pleasure and his fill. All his men seemed to disappear into the shadows. Nemesis moved up over her on his hands and knees. His mouth was smeared with her blood.

Ginger looked away in disgust even though her sexual hunger burned in her like a raging fever. "You're a beast and a murderer."

"I'm a soldier," he replied. "When I kill, I do it because I have to."

"You killed my husband and for that, I will hate you forever."

Nemesis smiled showing long, white teeth. "Such devotion to a man you barely knew. How admirable. I think I'm jealous. But for the record I didn't kill him."

Frustrated, Ginger slammed her fists into his thick chest. "Get off me!"

Nemesis replied by lowering his body down onto hers and nestling his codpiece between her legs. A current of lust surged up from her pussy and right into her blood but she couldn't give in. She couldn't let this monster use his black magic to have his way.

"Don't you want me to please you?" he asked in a low, sugary tone.

Ginger let her sexual hunger fuel her rage. "No," she replied icily.

That seemed to take the villain off-guard. His amber gaze swept her face as if deciding what to do next. Ginger fully expected him to rape and murder her. She waited for the killing

blow. But instead he helped Ginger to her feet and handed her the riding pants that were stripped from her body earlier. She felt a little weak and lightheaded but was otherwise unharmed.

Afraid he would change his mind about raping her, Ginger dressed quickly. "What are you going to do with me?"

"What would you like to be done with you?"

"I want you to let me go!"

"To go where and do what? You'd starve. Your kingdom is gone, my Queen. Your king is dead. You've lived in the royal court all your life and know nothing of hard labor. Are you planning to get a job as a cook or a seamstress perhaps?"

"You're a cold, hard-hearted monster to mock me at a time like this."

He gave her an evil, toothy smile. "So they tell me."

She glared at him with renewed venom. "I'd rather die begging in the street than go back with you to be your whore."

Nemesis raised an eyebrow. "How very dramatic," he said with a sneer. "But I guarantee you that one night with me and you'd be begging to be my whore. It wouldn't be hard to turn your weak human heart."

"I could never love a villain like you." Something moved across his face and Ginger thought she might have hurt him. But then she dismissed it. Vampires were monsters with no feelings. Everyone knew that.

Nemesis grabbed his mount and placed his cloak in one of the saddlebags. "You don't realize it yet, but being with me is the best you could hope for."

“I have no doubt you possess many carnal talents, vampire, but I don’t care. I hate you, Nemesis. I hate you as my conqueror and nothing you do will ever change that.”

“Enough of this bickering. You’re mine now and I want you to be silent.” Nemesis pulled his armor back on and squinted at the sun just peaking up over the horizon. He mounted up and, with one effortless motion, scooped Ginger up on the horse in front of him. Then he reined the animal around and galloped off in the opposite direction.

Chapter 2

Nemesis rode over the moat and through the open castle gates clutching Ginger to his chest. Slightly weakened from his blood taking, she struggled with a subdued nervous energy. Nemesis had no doubt she would have been much more of a handful if he hadn't drank from her already. As it was, he had to struggle with the feral urge to bite her again as he imagined taking her withering body by force. The images of her beneath him, naked and vulnerable, almost overwhelmed him and he had to fight to calm his lust.

A young groom rushed forward to take his mount. Nemesis swung his leg over the horse's neck and jumped off, pulling Ginger with him. But before her feet could touch the ground, he'd swept her up in his arms.

"Put me down," she seethed.

Ignoring her dark mood, he lowered her to the cobblestones but didn't loosen his grip on her arm. "Come. King Mortis is anxious to meet you."

Ginger pulled her arm out of his grip with more force than he thought her capable of. "I don't need you manhandling me. I can walk on my own."

Two guards advanced but Nemesis waved them off. He gestured to an open archway that led to the royal throne

room. Ginger marched forward, her head held high and Nemesis followed close in her wake. They passed through an open passageway with royal guards stationed about every twenty feet. The guards snapped to attention as Nemesis passed. Then they were inside the magnificent throne room facing his master, King Mortis.

The king watched them with eyes as black as the night sky. His thin, cruel lips curved into a wicked smile. "Princess Mont Blanc. How kind of you to drop in for a visit."

Ginger approached the royal throne but refused to kneel. "I didn't come of my own will. I was kidnapped by your devil dog, Nemesis." She glanced over her shoulder at the vampire general. "I want you to know this beast murdered my husband as well."

Nemesis responded by forcing Ginger to her knees. She glared up at him but quickly turned her attention back to the king. "I assume you're planning to kill me."

"Why would you think that?" the king asked.

"You killed my husband, what use could I be to you?"

"Truthfully," the king said, "I didn't have any specific plans for you. Do you, Nemesis?"

"I want her for myself," Nemesis said, watching Ginger's shoulders stiffen.

Ginger tried to get to her feet but Nemesis kept his hand on her shoulder. She glanced back and glared at him. Then to the king she said, "No, please, your Highness. Please don't leave me at the mercy of the general."

The king gripped the armrests with long, thin fingers. "It's too late for your pointless begging. It is done," he said.

Mortis leaned back in his throne looking pleased. "You have been a gifted general and a faithful friend, Nemesis. If this is the woman you want, she's yours with my blessing."

"You cannot turn me over to this monster!" Ginger cried. She ducked under the general's grip and took a few bold steps toward the throne.

"Why?" the king asked, standing up and stretching. "Your husband is dead. We all know it and you admitted it yourself. Is there perhaps someone else who might want to lay claim to you?"

"No, but where is your compassion? General Nemesis is my husband's murderer. I beg you, your Highness, give me to anyone but Nemesis!"

Nemesis grabbed Ginger's arm and twisted her to the side so she could look him in the eye. "I told you before. I didn't kill your husband. Someone else did."

The king descended the steps. His dark eyes swept Ginger's face. "There you see? He didn't murder your husband, although he'd be well within his rights to do so. And as far as giving you over to him, I suggest you be a little more grateful. Nemesis at least claims to care for you. Any of the other officers in my army would have used you badly then given you over to their men for sport. I think I've done a great service to you, Ginger, considering you would have been a lot less trouble if I had just killed you."

Then the king stalked out of the throne room with his entourage following closely behind him.

Chapter 3

Nemesis brought Ginger into a long dining room with only one place setting at the head of the table. He pulled the high-backed chair out and gestured for her to sit. Her gaze searched his hard, attractive face. "I'm not hungry," she said.

"I've taken a lot of blood from you, Ginger. You should eat to keep up your strength." He waited a few moments but she didn't move. Then he added, "How will you escape me if you're too weak to walk?"

Ginger knew he was teasing but he meant it. Was she that transparent that this stranger could read her so clearly? She decided this was not the battle she wanted to fight and sat down. Nemesis grabbed a decanter and poured her a glass of red wine.

Ginger stared down at the shiny silverware and adjusted her knife. There were two: one a butter knife and a sharper one for meat. She played with the idea of plunging the sharp one into Nemesis's chest but even if it worked, what would be the point? He was immortal and if he got angry enough, he'd just give her over to another vampire. Only this time she might not be treated as well. Better to wait for an opportunity to escape. But even if she was lucky enough to escape, where would she go? Her kingdom was probably overrun with vam-

pire nobles by now, raping and pillaging their way through the castle. A moment of despair filled her. Then the butler came in and placed a plate in front of her. On it was a juicy steak, a small helping of carrots, and a generous amount of mashed potatoes. Ginger's stomach growled.

Nemesis sat in the chair directly on her left. His amber gaze swept over her face searching for a hint at her thoughts. "Eat." His voice was smooth and dark like black silk and although Ginger wanted to resist him, her mind quickly surrendered.

She picked up her knife and fork and tried the steak. The meat was cooked to perfection, dissolving in her mouth. Ginger forgot herself, cutting piece after piece off and wolfing down the steak like a hungry field hand. If Nemesis was surprised by her poor manners, he didn't let on. The vampire general chose instead to watch her with a cool, reserved calm.

Ginger finished off almost the whole meal before she pushed the plate away sleepy and full. "I didn't realize I was that hungry."

Nemesis smiled. His thick, long fangs rested on the outside of his lower canine teeth making him look more like a wild animal than a man. Ginger tried to look away but his amber gaze caught her and held her attention.

"I am very hungry too," he said in a low menacing tone. The statement held a heavy sexual note that wasn't lost on Ginger.

"Surely you could have any woman you wanted, human or vampire. Why me?" she asked.

Nemesis leaned in close, his lips barely touching her cheek. "Because I love you and find you exciting."

"Even though I've said that I hate you and could never love you back?"

"Never is a very long time. You may change your mind."

Ginger shook her head trying to clear it. "I won't."

He caressed his lips over her ear, nuzzling her hair back.

"Kiss me."

"No," Ginger said, biting her lower lip.

"Just once." He placed his finger against his full lips.

"Please. Right here."

Her heart sped up and an ancient need flooded her senses. Her pussy throbbed gently with a quiet but insistent need. Refusing him was torture. "No."

Nemesis replied by placing a gentle kiss on her temple. He dragged his lips down over her cheekbone and stopped at the border of her upper lip. His large hand moved under her jaw and turned her to face him. Ginger licked her lips without thinking and his tongue slid out to caress hers. She moved her tongue back into her mouth even as she ached for him to keep kissing her.

"This is no fair," she said in a breathy whisper. "You're bewitching me."

"Just like you have bewitched me," he replied. Then his mouth claimed hers, planting a deep, steamy kiss on her that made her swoon.

Overwhelmed by his potent sexual power, Ginger placed her hands against his chest. "Please, Nemesis...don't."

He broke the kiss but didn't move away. "Can you imagine my big, thick cock stroking and filling you, Ginger? Can you hear the sweet agony of your own pleasure in my bed? If you surrender, I promise to do everything you enjoy."

With his decadent words came burning sexual images of the two of them together. Ginger was lying under him, her long pale legs wrapped around the general's pumping hips, her moans filling the room with lustful, frantic cries. Ginger had never thought her body could be this charged and the mere effort of holding her lust at bay was killing her.

His hands grew bolder, finding her erect nipples through her blouse. Nemesis pinched and rubbed them, and when they responded, he unbuttoned her blouse and slid his hand inside to massage each fleshy mound in turn. Ginger pushed him back and stood up to escape him. But the general was far too taken with his lovely captive. With two powerful strides, he swept Ginger up in his arms and carried her out of the dining room and up the stairs.

Nemesis brought her to an enormous guestroom that had been prepared for him and threw her on the bed. Ginger scrambled off and rushed to a corner of the room.

"Your resistance is hopeless," he said, unfastening his armor and letting it fall to the floor. "I can smell the need on your flesh."

"I don't care how my body feels," she said, glaring at him. "My mind will never surrender to you. You're nothing to me but a monster masquerading as a man and I will never care for you!"

Nemesis stopped unbuttoning his uniform. "I could take you by force." It was a nasty threat but Ginger was pretty sure he didn't mean it. If he wanted to, he'd already had the chance and didn't follow through. The statement was revenge for hurting him.

"You could, but then I would surely hate you forever."

"What difference does it make? You already hate me. What have I got to lose?"

Ginger swallowed the huge lump in her throat. "No, I misspoke. I don't hate you. I just said that because I was afraid. I resent you, but I don't hate you. But if you rape me, I will."

"Games. Always games with you." The vampire hesitated for a moment then walked over to the heavy drapes and closed them against the night. Then he finished stripping down to his underwear and climbed into bed. "Very well, Ginger. I will not force you to do anything. You are safe, for tonight anyway." He pulled the blankets back and patted the mattress next to him. "Come, let's get some sleep."

She took a cautious step toward the bed. "You promise you'll leave me alone?"

"I don't need to promise," he said. "I stopped, didn't I?"

Ginger got into the bed and pulled the blankets over her trying to slow down her pounding heart. She swallowed the lump in her throat. "Thank you. Good night, Nemesis."

A cruel laugh tumbled from his chest. "It's a good night for one of us, anyway."

Chapter 4

Ginger climbed out of bed the moment a few weak rays of sunlight seeped in through the drapes covering the windows. She dressed as quietly as she could, doing her best not to wake Nemesis. But to her great surprise, he didn't stir once. Instead his huge powerful body lay still just as if he were truly dead. The sight of him lying so still was chilling. Curious if she could bring a little more light into the room, she went to the window and partially opened the heavy drapes. But then she remembered hearing the servants covering the outside windows with heavy wooden shutters just before sunrise. The shutters kept out almost all light and could only be opened from the outside, a necessary precaution to keep sleeping vampires safe.

Next she tried the bedroom door. To her astonishment, it was open. Ginger slipped out into the hall trying to adjust to the darkness. When she'd arrived a few hours ago, the whole castle had been full of lights but now it appeared they had all been extinguished so the vampires could sleep.

I'm sure I could just walk out the front door if I wanted to. Ginger descended the winding staircase remembering when Nemesis had carried her up them. She remembered what it felt like to be almost helpless in his arms. The feeling of being to-

tally at someone's mercy was a strange narcotic. An unexpected thrill filled her, surprising her with its charge. Was she really attracted to that colossal vampire general or was she just responding to his supernatural power?

A moment later she was at the huge wooden front door only this time her luck ran out. It was locked. Ginger reasoned it was probably locked to keep others out, not so much to keep her in. She was fairly certain she didn't rank very high on King Mortis' list of priorities.

Ginger used her freedom to explore the castle, starting from the oak-paneled dining room she'd eaten in last night, to the huge royal kitchen. As she entered the kitchen, she was startled by a young maid on her hands and knees scrubbing a stain off the stone floor. The maid had a bucket next to her with soapy water that gave off a fresh clean scent. At the sight of Ginger, the maid sat back on her ankles and dropped the scrub brush into the water.

"Is there something you need, my lady?" the maid asked.

Ginger noticed an angry red mark on the woman's neck. She forced a nervous smile. "No, no, thank you. I was just looking around the castle."

The maid nodded. "Very well, ma'am. But do be careful around the top floor. The whole floor is the king's bedchamber and he's a very light sleeper. He'd be most upset if you accidentally woke him."

"I'll be careful and thanks for the warning," Ginger said. She was about to turn away when she thought of a question the girl might know the answer to. "Excuse me, but do you know where General Nemesis lives?"

The maid got up and wiped her hands off on her apron. She moved to a large window with thick bars. Interestingly enough, this one didn't have wooden shutters and Ginger reasoned that it was because there were no vampires down here in the servants' living space.

With a short, stubby finger, the maid pointed to a large stone mansion several yards away. "That's his home, my lady."

Ginger stared at the mansion and thought it suited the general. "That's quite a house for a military man."

"It was a gift from the king," the maid said, returning her attention to her scrub brush and bucket. "The general has brought his Royal Highness many victories."

"What do you think of the general?" Ginger asked. "Is he an honorable man?"

The maid took the brush out and started working on the spot again. She looked deep in thought as she dipped the brush in the bucket two more times and worked the spot into a soapy lather before answering. "As far as I know of such things, he is, my lady. But he is also a hard man."

"What do you mean by that?"

The maid started working the brush in a slow circle. "I think he's seen a lot of suffering in his time. I also think he's a very lonely man." She dropped the brush back into the bucket and wiped the floor with a nearby rag. The stain was gone and the maid nodded her approval of the area. She grabbed the bucket and dumped the dirty water down the drain, putting the bucket in a utility closet. "There were rumors though. Rumors that he was crazy in love with a woman but I've never

seen him with anyone for more than a few days, so I doubt there's any truth to them."

"Do you know the woman's name?"

The maid shook her head. "Ginger something-or-other. I'm not sure. But I do know she wasn't from here. She was some high-ranking noblewoman as I recall."

"Has he ever been married?" Ginger asked.

"A few times before his change, as I've heard," the maid said, leaning back to arch her back with her hands on her hips. "But they've all passed now."

"Weren't they vampires too?"

"No. They were all human like him."

"Children?"

"Grown and gone on to their own lives, my lady," the maid said. She gave Ginger an amused wink. "Do you fancy him?"

Ginger drew in a deep breath. "Um, no, I was just curious about him."

The maid dropped her head in a curt nod. "Well, if there's nothing else..."

"No, no," Ginger said. "I'm sorry to have bothered you."

The maid disappeared into the servants' rooms and quietly closed the door behind her. Ginger wanted to explore the castle more but she too was starting to feel the effects of her long night. She toyed with trying to escape but knew there was no place to run away to. *I wish Nemesis hadn't been right about that.* So, for now, she'd just have to stay until an opportunity presented itself. She climbed the stairs and returned to the bedroom where Nemesis lay unmoved from where she'd

last left him. The bright white sheets were covering his hips and Ginger could just make out the impressive outline of his cock. That thing had to be at least twelve inches fully erect. Her cheeks grew warm with excited shame.

Not wanting to be totally naked in his bed lest he get the wrong idea, Ginger stripped down to her blouse and underwear. She eased back into the bed and froze as he rolled onto his side. His beautiful amber eyes opened, regarding her with their animal cunning.

“You came back,” he whispered.

“Only because I had no place else to go,” she replied.

He reached out and toyed with a lock of her dark hair, wrapping it around his index finger to make it curl. “If you’re truly unhappy with me, I can take you back to live in your old castle.”

“So I can be attacked by one of your men? No thank you.”

He chuckled. “You would be protected.”

“Why would you do that for me?”

“I told you Ginger,” he said. “I love you. I’d do anything to make you happy.”

Ginger bunched up the pillow and sighed. “I’m as happy as I can be under the circumstances.” She shrugged. “I guess I’ll just stay with you.”

“Wise choice,” he said. “Have a good sleep, my love.”

Chapter 5

When night fell Nemesis awoke. He half expected Ginger to be out wandering the castle but he was pleased to find her in the room rummaging through a large trunk. He slipped out of bed and pulled his pants on but she paid him little attention.

“What’s that?” he asked.

Ginger pulled out a pair of black riding pants and a clean shirt. “Some of my things. A couple of servants were kind enough to bring extra clothes until I can arrange to have all my stuff moved.” She gathered up her wavy dark hair and tied it into a bun. “Could you turn around please?”

“There’s not one square inch of you I haven’t seen,” he replied amused.

“That may be true,” Ginger said, placing her hands on her hips, “but I would appreciate a small amount of privacy.”

Nemesis turned his back on her. “Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Behind him he could hear the rustle of Ginger’s clothes as they fell to the floor. The effect it had on him was immediate and unexpected. Images of her naked young body rushed through his mind and a potent desire roared to life. His thoughts turned to licking every pale curve and hollow as he

searched the landscape of her flesh for the rushing current of her life's blood. "Ginger?"

"Yes, Nemesis?" she said, her voice catching as she jumped on the floor trying to get her riding pants on.

"Are you dressed yet?" he asked.

"Not quite."

"Then stop for a moment please."

The activity behind him ceased. "Why?" she asked. "What's wrong?"

"I'd like to look at you." His erection was stone, a weighty rock in his pants.

Ginger hesitated then sighed. "Okay."

Nemesis turned around and stared at the most captivating woman he'd ever met. His hands ached to touch and caress her and his fangs throbbed with the need to penetrate her soft flesh. She was dressed in just a plain white bra and her unbuttoned riding pants. Her fresh shirt rested over the arm of a nearby chair. Intelligent brown eyes watched him with a teasing curiosity.

He stalked toward her, his heart pounding in his chest like a war drum. Then he enveloped her in his arms, cradling the back of her head with his palm and nuzzling the velvet skin of her throat. "If you only knew the witchcraft you stirred in my blood," he growled, fighting to keep himself from driving his fangs into that thick, flowing artery just under the surface.

To his surprise, Ginger ran her hands through his short, black hair and rested her cheek against his temple. "Where is my husband's body?" she whispered. "I want to attend his funeral."

Then Nemesis knew. Her affection was an illusion. She wanted something from him. As a queen, Ginger knew that the death of any king, even a vanquished one, required a certain amount of respect and ceremony. The king would be laid out in the village church for his old subjects to mourn, and then a large funeral procession would lead him to his final burial ground. After all that was done, King Mortis would officially lay claim to all the old king's possessions and land. It was a common enough practice but he wasn't sure why Ginger would want to see her dead husband like that. Perhaps she needed it to accept he was really dead. Nemesis took a step back from her. "He's lying in state at the church. Mortis is planning his funeral for tomorrow."

"I'd like to go and pay my respects," she said.

As foolish as he knew it was, Nemesis was jealous. She was toying with him trying to gain the upper hand by manipulating his emotions. "What purpose would that serve?"

"Are you denying me the right to say goodbye to my husband?"

"This is madness. Are you really that devastated by his death?" Nemesis asked.

Ginger gave him an icy stare. "Yes, yes I am. He was a good man and a great king. He deserves at least a last visit from me."

Nemesis moved over to where a clean uniform had been laid out for him. He didn't consider himself an impulsive man, but his lust was quickly dissolving into a jealous fury. "How touching." He slipped on a white T-shirt. It looked very bright

against his dark brown skin and strained tight around his biceps.

Ginger's dark gaze flashed with sudden anger. "Why can't you just admit you killed him?"

"Because I didn't, but by God I wish I had."

"No one else would have had the skill! My husband was an experienced soldier. I find it hard to believe anyone but you could have bested him in a fight."

"I'm flattered." Nemesis said with a wicked grin. "But you think too much of your young king. He wasn't the fierce warlord you imagine."

"So you admit you were there when he died! You saw who killed him."

Nemesis pulled on his black uniform jacket and fastened the silver buttons. "I was there."

"Who was it?" she demanded.

"What difference does it make? He's dead and none of this is going to bring him back," Nemesis said. "You have a new life now, a better one."

"I have a right to know!"

Nemesis stormed over and grabbed her around the waist. "All right, I admit to capturing him. But I wasn't the one who killed him. I brought him before King Mortis. The king delivered the death blow and drained his blood. There, satisfied?"

Ginger's eyes were glassy. "You're as much a murderer as your wicked king."

"I'm a soldier," he said, correcting her. "And as long as we're uncovering the truth about everything, why don't you ask what he offered me to save his sanctified hide?"

Ginger shook her head, impatiently rubbing moisture from her eyes. "I don't care what you say. You're full of vicious lies. I can't tell when you're telling the truth or when you're deceiving me. So what's the point of revealing hurtful things? I won't believe you anyway."

"You should, Ginger. You should care very much about what I have to say." A pregnant silence filled the room. "Ask me what he offered!"

She struggled to free herself from his grip. "Let me go! I don't want your filthy hands on me!"

"It appears you're afraid to know the truth about your beloved husband. Very well then, I'll tell you what he offered. He offered to whore you out to me, however and whenever I wanted." Ginger stared at him horrified. "Yes, that's right. Your noble king and husband was more than willing to pimp you out to the enemy to save his throne, and *that*, Ginger, is how much he *really* loved you." Nemesis let go of her and she turned her back to him. He thought he heard her sob and his broken heart twisted in emotional agony. "Now finish getting dressed and I'll take you to see your dead Mister Wonderful."

Ginger collected her strength and turned back to him defiant. "After we visit the king, I'd like to talk to King Mortis. This situation has become intolerable."

"No," Nemesis said. He'd had enough of this.

"Why not?"

"Because the subject is closed. You're not going to beg the king for another master. I'll never let you go so don't bring it up again."

Ginger picked up her shirt and pulled it on. A small muscle twitched in her cheek. "Fine then."

* * * *

Ginger had hurt him and she was glad. Damn that vampire if he thought the seduction of his war prize was going to be easy! But the truth was she did feel a little guilty for how hard she'd been on him. After all, he could have raped her over and over again by now and he hadn't.

Ginger was no child.

She knew, as did all the other noblewomen and commoners alike that powerful men engaged in wars all the time. Sooner or later, the mortal ones died in them. It was true of many of the kingdom's highest ranking women and it was true of her, even if she was a queen. Guilt came from the notion that what Nemesis had said about her was true: she barely knew her husband when she married him. Had she grown to love the king in the short time they'd been married? No, he was as much a stranger to her in death as he was on the day they met. She wanted to feel agony at his death but all she felt was anger; anger that he'd died and left her at the mercy of vampires like King Mortis and Nemesis. She felt anger too that there was no security in her present position. Despite what Nemesis said, Ginger knew he might tire of her. And if that day came, he'd pass her on to one of his officers without a second thought. Unless she gave him what he wanted: her in his bed.

Suddenly the need to see her husband wasn't as pressing as it had been. Ginger glanced at Nemesis as they rode through the outskirts of her old kingdom and marveled at the

perfection of his good looks. "I've changed my mind," she said, breaking the cool silence between them.

Nemesis glanced at her. "About what?"

"I don't care to see my dead husband nor do I wish to see King Mortis."

Nemesis reined up his horse and stared at her. His amber eyes reminded her of a cat about to pounce. "You've wasted a good portion of my evening with this nonsense. Why the sudden change of heart?"

Ginger decided to extend the olive branch. "Because I've been thinking about what you said and you're right. I didn't know my husband very well and, as much as it shames me to admit it, I didn't love him."

Nemesis gave her mocking applause.

Ginger glared at him. "You're making it very hard to like you, General."

"I'm just surprised, especially after that emotional performance an hour ago. I was looking forward to all kind of hysterics at the church."

"Sorry to disappoint you."

"So what would you like me to do with you now?"

"I think," Ginger said, "I'd like you to take me home to your mansion."

"And then?"

Ginger shrugged. "We'll see."

Nemesis smiled, his sharp wicked teeth looking long and menacing. "As you wish, my lady."

Chapter 6

Nemesis showed Ginger around his mansion then concluded the tour by bringing her into the master bedroom. The bedroom was huge and took up half of the second floor. Ginger was as nervous as a young bride but her body yearned for the general with a heady, compelling desire that simply would not be denied. Not interested in wasting any more time, the vampire pulled her into his embrace and drugged her with his decadent spell. Ginger reveled in the gentle caress of his lips on her throat. A tender sigh escaped her as her hands traveled up the solid fortress of muscle that sculpted his back and arms. To tempt her further, Nemesis stripped off his uniform jacket and tossed it carelessly on the ground. Through the open window Ginger could hear the street vendors calling out the final offers of the night, their voices hoarse and worn from a long day's business.

Nemesis picked her up and carried her over to the bed. He laid her down on the white silk sheet and grinned. He started his seduction by kissing her forehead, then the tip of her nose, and finally her waiting lips. The kisses were slow and lingering and Ginger couldn't help but be lost in their flirty promise. Ginger returned his kisses by pushing her mouth against his with such passionate force she cut her lower lip on

one of his fangs. A sting from the cut and his tongue was running over the wound healing it almost as fast as it had appeared.

Ginger smiled and stared into his blazing amber eyes. "I'm so confused by all of this," she said. "I don't know if what I'm feeling is real or a reaction to your vampire charms."

Nemesis dipped his head down and nuzzled her jaw. "Does it matter?"

"No," she confessed in a light whisper, "I guess it doesn't."

Nemesis moved his large powerful hands over her body with the firm confidence of a man who had known a lot of women. His fingers nimbly unbuttoned her blouse, his lips dragging kisses along every inch of skin he exposed. Then he stripped off her riding pants and panties. He placed two plump pillows under her buttocks and settled himself into the valley of her thighs.

His tongue wiggled into her pussy once, twice, teasing and exploring her most intimate place with unrestrained pleasure. A moment later his fingers tickled her swelling clit, opening her up to flatten his tongue against the delightful nub. Ginger's back arched and she gasped. Her body sang with competing pleasures as shockwaves of carnal delight rippled up through every nerve ending.

Nemesis tore away every emotional barrier she tried to erect, coaxing her through several devastating orgasms before moving up over her to claim her lips. Ginger wrapped her quivering legs around his powerful hips inviting him into her drenched and aching pussy. The vampire eased inside her, his

enormous cock stretching and filling her sex. Ginger cried out, her voice a mingling of surprise and need, fueled by the savage intensity of her approaching climax. Her peak slammed into her mind like an oncoming freight train. It destroyed her defenses and laid her soul to waste. Ginger wanted to hate him, wanted to banish Nemesis from her heart forever as her enemy, but she couldn't. He'd done something to her no other man had ever done: he'd gotten in. Perhaps Nemesis had done it with black magic, but he'd done it, and Ginger was more confused than ever.

Then, with her body still shaking from the effects of her last orgasm, Nemesis plunged his fangs into her throat. The pain was sharp but faded quickly as the sedative seeped into her blood. Then Nemesis pumped his still erect cock inside her faster. Ginger was consumed by the most intense pleasure she'd ever known. He was growling against her neck, his climax overtaking his desire to be tender. Ginger felt like the room was spinning. She closed her eyes. A second later she passed out.

Chapter 7

Nemesis rode up to Ginger's old castle surprised there wasn't more damage to the imposing fortress. It had taken his men two days to conquer Ginger's husband and finally seize the castle, longer than it took them to vanquish most human armies. He would have thought the castle to be in more disrepair from all that carnage. But the stone fortress looked as impenetrable as ever.

In fact the village itself that surrounded the castle didn't look too worse for wear either. Hungry shopkeepers had repaired their storefronts and food carts, yelling into the street for anyone interested to buy their wares. It wasn't too surprising most had chosen to remain open well into the night since their new overlords were nocturnal. But now instead of selling mostly food, they sold blades and animals for blood. The animals served to feed those vampires who thirsted for something a little different than human blood.

Around the corner from the castle was a long deserted convent which Nemesis had ordered converted into a hospital for the wounded soldiers. Nemesis had just received word the hospital renovations were complete so it was time for his inspection. He stalked inside and scanned the rows and rows of

beds. One of his men, Captain Deveaux came forward and bowed his head in respect.

“My lord,” he said in greeting.

“This is impressive. You’ve done well, Captain.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“How many enemy casualties?” Nemesis asked.

“About two hundred humans,” the captain replied.

“We’re doing all we can for the worst of the wounded, sir, but the doctors could sure use more nursing help.”

Nemesis nodded. “I’ll see what I can arrange.”

A human officer with a bandaged leg hobbled up to them with a crutch under his arm. “May I speak to you, General?” The man looked like he’d come out the back entrance of hell. His dark hair was damp with sweat and his brown eyes were bloodshot and glassy. Nemesis could smell the infection festering in the man’s leg.

“You may speak freely,” Nemesis said.

The man wiped a film of sweat from his upper lip with the back of his hand. “Some of the men are afraid you’re only helping us to turn us into...” He let the sentence drop.

Nemesis knew exactly what he meant. “You can reassure them that turning them all into vampires is not our intention. They are prisoners of war, nothing more and nothing less. You can tell them that we’ll do everything we can to heal them. Once they are well enough, they can choose to either swear loyalty to King Mortis or serve some time in the local prison. Turning someone into a vampire isn’t a punishment, it’s a gift. We only bestow that gift on those who are more than willing to accept it.” He squeezed the man’s shoulder

good-naturedly. The man winced. "Besides, if we turned every human we conquered into vampires, we'd have no one left to feed on."

Captain Deveau laughed. "Only a human could fear such foolishness. You should all be so blessed as to be turned by us."

"Did you have any other questions?" Nemesis asked.

The man looked shaken. "No, sir. Thank you." He limped off and Nemesis wondered if the man would live to see the sun rise.

A fleeting second of pity filled him as he watched the man go, then he turned his attention back to Captain Deveau. "Are all the enemy soldiers accounted for?"

"Not all, my lord," the captain said. "There is one we cannot account for. His name is Commander Croix and apparently he was the king's cousin and close friend."

"You've questioned all the castle servants and the villagers?"

"Everyone, sir. The only thing they all seem to agree on is that there was a Commander Croix in the king's army. Unfortunately no one has seen him since the last battle. My guess is he's found a safe place to hide while he tries to organize a rebellion."

Nemesis grunted his agreement. "Assign one of the men to lead a platoon in conducting searches of the outlying cottages. Maybe we can scare up some leads on his whereabouts."

"Yes, General."

"I'll expect a full report tomorrow night, even if you find nothing," Nemesis said. The captain agreed and Nemesis

slipped out of the hospital into the cool night. If there was an enemy soldier sneaking around, he might try to contact Ginger to enlist her help. Nemesis wasn't naive enough to think she would be loyal to King Mortis but, apart from jailing her, there wasn't much he could do. Jailing her would destroy her spirit and he refused to do that, even if it meant she might turn on him and his vampire king. He was her enemy after all.

Nemesis would just have to wait. No use in solving a problem that didn't exist yet.

* * * *

When Nemesis walked into the bedroom, Ginger was waiting for him. She had been lying on the bed propped up against the headboard reading but, upon seeing him, she marked the page and placed the book on the nightstand.

"I'm bored," she said.

Nemesis removed his armor and placed it on the stand. "I'm sure I can think of ways to entertain you."

Ginger frowned. "I'm sure you can, but I need something meaningful to do with my time. I'm not used to sitting around waiting for all my meals to be brought to my room. I feel like a prisoner here."

He sat on the bed next to her. "Well, I had to make sure you wouldn't run away."

"Honestly, Nemesis, where would I run to? You said so yourself, I have no place to go. This is my home now."

"What kind of work did you have in mind, your Highness?"

She searched his amber eyes and found hidden laughter there. “What about helping in the stables? Despite what you seem to think, I’m not afraid of manual labor.”

“I had something else in mind,” he replied.

“Like what?”

“How would you like to work at the new hospital? There are plenty of wounded human soldiers and the doctors are complaining they don’t have enough staff. That seems like something more rewarding than cleaning stalls all day.”

“That would be fantastic! When can I start?”

“How about first thing tomorrow morning?”

Ginger rewarded him with a big, affectionate kiss. “That would be perfect. Thank you.”

Chapter 8

Ginger went to the hospital after sleeping in most of the day. It was now a little past noon and she was excited to begin her new job. She wasn't being lazy; it was just that her internal clock was morphing from a daytime life to an evening one. The change had started the first night she'd spent with Nemesis and had continued every night thereafter. At this rate she'd be on the same schedule as the vampires around her. Ginger wondered if that was a good or a bad thing.

The hospital was crammed full of sickbeds. Not surprisingly every patient was human and Ginger moved slowly past the cots as wounded men reached out to her for comfort. She found the doctor at the rear of the facility supervising the day's medication. He was double-checking the trays before the medical assistants went out and administered each patient's medicine.

Ginger stood in the doorway but no one seemed to notice her. She cleared her throat. "Can I help?"

The doctor's reply was to shove a silver tray into her hands. Ginger took it obediently and watched as the doctor placed a slip of paper down on the tray with a person's name and topped that with a cup of pills. The doctor filled her tray

then gestured for her to go out and give the medication. The day took off from there.

When she wasn't cleaning wounds and administering medication, she was reading to patients and changing bedding. The day melted into evening and before she knew it, the evening had turned into midnight.

A local merchant had brought sandwiches and placed them in the pantry at the rear of the hospital. Ginger helped herself to one and sat on the stone steps leading to the back alley. The alley didn't smell as bad as she thought it would. She could only detect the semi-sweet odor of burnt garbage in the air. Compared to all the old blood and bile smells she'd been assaulted with all day, it was a welcome change.

Nemesis emerged from the darkness like a panther on the prowl. "Enjoy your day?"

A surge of happiness filled her, a most unexpected reaction. "It was grueling."

"But the doctor says you were fantastic."

"He's just being kind. I had to be taught everything. I'm afraid I was more of a burden than a help."

Nemesis sat down next to her. "Nonsense. I watched you. You worked hard and never refused to do anything they asked of you, no matter how unpleasant. You should be very proud of yourself."

Ginger finished her sandwich and licked her fingers. "Can I ask you some questions?"

He leaned back and rested his elbows on the raised step behind him. "Certainly."

"Do you like being a vampire?"

“Yes.”

“Who created you?”

“King Mortis. I was a Moorish general named Tariq fighting the Visigoths in what is now Spain when I sustained a mortal wound. In all the confusion my men didn’t realize what had happened and rode away to finish off the enemy. Mortis had been traveling through the region and came to my rescue. Impressed by my bravery in the face of death, he changed me just as I was close to the end. He welcomed me into his vampire kingdom and taught me to live as an immortal. I’ve served him ever since.”

“Why did he conquer my kingdom?”

Nemesis shrugged. “You wouldn’t have known this, but your husband was on a Crusade. He believed vampires were devil spawn and it was his mission to rid the world of us. So he and his men busied themselves hunting down innocent vampires at night and killing them. They raided homes and defiled them with garlic and religious relics so no other vampire could ever inhabit them again. It didn’t take King Mortis long to know what needed to be done. I’m just sorry you got dragged into it.”

“Why? You wanted me and now you have me.”

“True,” Nemesis said, “but I didn’t want you this way. If you were to be mine, I wanted you to come to me of your own free will.”

Ginger turned to look him in the face. “But you took my blood by force twice. If you truly cared about me and what I wanted, why did you do that?”

"I know and I'm sorry. It was never my intention to force myself on you but you must understand, Ginger, bloodlust is a powerful thing. I don't know of any vampire, Mortis included, who can resist its burning pull. My desire for you only makes the bloodlust worse. I would love to tell you that it will never happen again, but I can't." He stood up and arched his back, stretching. "Come, you've been working a long time. Let's go home and get some rest."

"Wait, before we go I want to know one more thing and I want a completely honest answer," she said.

Nemesis waited. His amber eyes aflame with smoldering lust.

"Where do you see this relationship going? What are your long-term plans for me? Am I to be your sexual plaything until you get bored?"

Nemesis laughed. "Well if you must know, I was hoping to convince you to become my wife."

Ginger felt like the wind had been knocked out of her. She opened her mouth but didn't know what to say. "I...I don't know."

"I didn't expect an answer right away. There's no rush. You have plenty of time to think about it. But you wanted to know my intentions, and now you do."

"Would I have to become a vampire too?" she asked.

"No, but that would be the best way for us to spend more time together. We are not completely immortal but I will age much slower than you." He reached his hand down and helped her to her feet. "But let's not worry about all that tonight. You have another long day and night tomorrow. Let's go

home, make love, and tomorrow you can give some serious thought to what you want to do.”

Chapter 9

The next night Nemesis came to pick her up a little after midnight. Ginger was glad to see him, which surprised her. He brought her an elegant gray dapple mount with a gentle disposition and a rocking gait. He'd also brought her a block of country cheese and some crusty bread. Ginger mounted up and rode alongside him while greedily unwrapping her meal. The cheese was delicious with a creamy texture and the bread was fresh. Ginger tried to say thank you with her mouth full but it came out muffled.

Nemesis laughed. "Why don't you swallow first?"

Ginger chewed and swallowed. "Everything is delicious. Thanks." She ate a few more bites. "I guess I didn't realize how hungry I was."

He smiled and she caught a glimpse of long sharp teeth. "How was your day?"

Ginger let out a big, theatrical exhale. "Crazy busy. But you know what? I'm really starting to enjoy it. Oh, not the suffering of course, but I really like helping people. When I was a queen, I never would have been allowed to get my hands dirty. Princesses plan dinner parties and other royal events. They *visit* hospitals but never work in them. Who knew I was missing out on so much?" She gave him a suspi-

cious glance. "But then you probably know about how I used to live."

Nemesis nodded. "You lived in a gilded cage, like all royalty."

Ginger finished off her bread and cheese. She gestured to his canteen. "Can I have some water?"

The general handed it to her and Ginger took a few big gulps. "Thanks." She gave it back to him. "How would you feel if I wanted to seek more medical training at Bishop's Convent?"

"I thought you wanted to finish your work here at the hospital?"

"I do. I mean later on." She avoided looking at him by braiding her horse's mane. When he didn't speak, she shrugged. "It was just a thought."

"Bishop's Convent is a two-hour ride away. I'd have to send a bodyguard with you. But I think if that's really your passion, you should pursue it."

Ginger stared at him with her mouth open. No one had ever given her a choice before. She'd always been told what her duty was and that was that. This was so...unexpected. "Are you serious?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"Um, I guess I just thought you wanted to keep me around to drink my blood and have sex with me."

He laughed and it was deep and sexy. "Those things are great but they're not the only reason I want you around. I love you, Ginger. I only want two things: for us to be togeth-

er and for you to be happy. However you find happiness is up to you but I've already found mine."

She grinned. "I think I've found mine too."

Chapter 10

They arrived back at the castle in the early morning hours and Ginger was surprised she wasn't more tired. She prepared for bed slowly, choosing a blue silk nightgown from the many fine clothes Nemesis had bought for her. Outside the servants were closing the shutters against the dawn that was still a few hours off. Ginger nestled under the fluffy comforter and watched her lover as he too prepared for bed.

Nemesis didn't just enter a room, he overwhelmed it. From his soaring seven-foot frame, to his large sculptured muscles, he was an imposing sight. Ginger was mesmerized by the way his body broadcast power. It reminded her so much of a bull: a calm, strong exterior with just a subtle hint of danger. But by far his most alluring feature was his face: an intriguing mix of sexuality and villainy. It amused her to think that not so very long ago she had feared and hated him. What did she feel now? Dare she call it love?

The vampire caught her watching him and smiled. "What are you thinking?"

The smooth baritone of his voice moved over her skin like a caress. A slow, warming arousal began to awaken her. "Nothing really, I'm just thinking that you're more attractive than I originally thought."

His amber eyes sparkled with heat. "Perhaps I just take some getting used to."

Ginger grinned. "Perhaps." Vivid images of Nemesis taking her in his arms and ravishing her flashed through her mind. "How is it you can claim to love me when you never knew me before my capture?"

"I did know you," Nemesis said. "While spying for the king, I'd often listen to you discussing your views with the other nobles. I may not have agreed with all your views, but your arguments were sound. I like to think I fell in lust with you first and fell in love with your mind later."

Ginger laughed and threw a pillow at him. He deflected it then tossed it back onto the bed next to her. Nemesis climbed under the covers and lay on his side watching her. "Do you forgive me for abducting you?"

"You don't deserve it, but yes."

"Kiss me," he whispered.

Ginger placed her hands on either side of his face and touched her lips to his. The kiss began sweet and gentle but the longer it lasted, the more feverish her hunger became. She slipped her arms around him and let her hands glide along the knotted muscles of his shoulders and back. Her caresses roamed lower and lower until she was able to cup the firm roundness of his buttocks.

Nemesis exhaled in her ear sending shivers down her body. Her nipples rose to firm peaks and Ginger pressed them into his chest. Nemesis changed, his sexual excitement electrifying the room with its potent energy. His hot mouth devoured her lips in kisses so full of carnal hunger they left her

breathless. Liquid passion pooled between her legs making her channel ache to be filled.

Ginger was lost, possessed by a desire so consuming she couldn't have fought it if she tried. With fumbling hands, she tried to grab his enormous cock and guide it into her but he moved her hand away. "Please, Nemesis, I want you inside me."

"Not yet." He reached down and found the moist center of her suffering. With a touch full of witchcraft, his fingers danced over her swollen pussy. He separated the plump petals and found her clit, tickling the tiny nub with maddeningly light strokes.

Ginger tossed her head back and moaned. Her hips found their rhythm, rocking back and forth to compliment his touch. Each tickle brought her higher and higher until Ginger thought she just might go mad from the searing need. Her tense fingers dug into the vampire general's flesh, desperate as they gripped him. Her mind was awash in a passion that only he could quench. And right at the moment when Ginger thought her climax would come and wash over her in sweet relief, he stopped.

Hot fury filled her. She was just about to get angry when Nemesis mounted her, pushing her quivering thighs apart and teasing her with the head of his cock. Ginger gasped and squirmed beneath him, her tongue darting out and licking her parched lips. The helmet tip slipped into her easily, opening and stretching the passage for the long, hard shaft. Ginger gripped his shoulders and let out a short scream. Nemesis rocked his hips into her, lifting her buttocks off the bed and

rotating his hips in an agonizingly slow circle. A chorus of pleasure assaulted Ginger's body. She whined, begged, and groaned. Meaningless words escaped her, muffled by her wrenching climax which took much too long to subside.

Then the vampire rolled her until her head was hanging off the side of the bed. Once he had her in position, and with his cock still buried deep inside her, he plunged his fangs into her throat. The claiming brought on another orgasm more intense than the last. Ginger cradled her lover's head as he drew blood from her. She was losing herself in his fervent passion, letting her mind surrender to him in ways she never would have considered before. All pain and fatigue drifted away on a sea of bottomless and dueling pleasures. And when Nemesis finally peaked, Ginger let herself slip into a sweet and dreamless sleep.

Chapter 11

The next afternoon, as Nemesis slept, Ginger went to the hospital and got right to work. She walked into the back room which served as the medicine dispensary trying to ignore the smell of old blood and disinfectants. Ginger remembered the first couple of days at the hospital awash in unpleasant scents but she'd been here so long now she was used to most of them.

As she read the doctor's orders for the day, she reflected on how happy she was working here. Every day was a new challenge and adventure and she marveled at how different her existence would have turned out if Nemesis had never come into her life. Ginger had no doubt she never could have been this content if she'd remained a queen. Oh of course life as royalty would have been one of privilege, but no substance. Now, for the first time in her life, she wasn't a ruling king's wife, she was just Ginger. Her future was her own and Nemesis had encouraged her to find that future, no matter where it may lead. There was an amazing amount of satisfaction in a mate who was so supportive.

One of the medical assistants came in looking haggard and rushed. The lines around his mouth seemed too deep for such a young man. Ginger guessed all the death and suffering might

be getting to him. "Excuse me, my lady, but there's a man out in the alley who wishes to speak with you."

Ginger nodded. It was probably a friend or family member of one of the patients coming to check on their progress. "I'll just be a minute." She went out into the alley and glanced around.

A man with a dark brown hood and cloak stepped out from a doorway. He eased his cloak back and Ginger caught a partial look at his face. It took only a moment to recognize him as one of her deceased husband's most trusted commanders. "Commander Croix? What are you doing here?"

"I escaped the vampire hordes, my lady, and have been working diligently to raise an army against them," the commander said in a harsh whisper. "I was most shocked to hear you were alive. When I heard how you'd been captured, I feared the worst." He frowned and his face grew more severe. "I'm so sorry about your husband."

"Thank you, William. But forgive me if I'm a little confused. I thought all of my husband's men had either been killed or surrendered."

"Not me. I'll not become a mindless slave to those vamps. I'll fight them to my last breath. That's why I risked so much to come and see you, my lady. I knew you'd feel the same and want to avenge your husband's death."

Ginger frowned and glanced at the ground. How could she tell him the truth? She wanted no part of this and she knew he would never understand. "Yes, yes, of course."

"I hear tell that you're being held by that devil dog, General Nemesis?"

Ginger nodded, her cheeks burning. *Why can't I just tell him the truth about Nemesis and me? Am I so ashamed of our relationship?*

If Commander Croix suspected anything between her and Nemesis he didn't let on. "That's perfect for our cause! I understand it's a risk, but would you be willing to give us information on his nightly movements?"

"Um, I don't know. He's kind of private. He doesn't tell me much."

"We don't need much information to be effective. All I need is a place and time where he'll be alone. Then, when he least expects it, I have the perfect weapon to destroy him. I may lose my life, but at least our king will be avenged. Better still, King Mortis will be at a serious disadvantage without his general to guide him."

"You're very brave, Commander, but..."

Commander Croix searched her face. "But what?"

Ginger chewed her lower lip. She lifted her gaze and looked him in the eye. *Might as well get this out in the open.* "But I don't consider General Nemesis my enemy anymore."

"Oh, my lady, can't you see what he's done to you with his infernal power? He's tricked you into believing you're in love with him. But I beg of you, don't be fooled! He's a devil snake, that one, and is not above using all the powers of hell to deceive you. Surely you can't believe you have fallen for your husband's killer?"

Ginger shook her head trying to clear it. "He didn't kill my husband. He says King Mortis delivered the killing blow."

"That's probably true, but isn't the king's general just as responsible as the king himself?" William asked.

Ginger was getting very confused. *Was* she betraying her kingdom and her husband's memory by succumbing to the vampire's seductive power? What if her feelings for Nemesis weren't real but just an illusion brought on by his considerable power? "I...don't...know..." Ginger stammered. "I need some time to think."

"What is there to think about?" Commander Croix said. "Is this evil man not the one who destroyed everything you swore to protect? Are you saying you owe nothing to all those soldiers who died trying to defend *your* kingdom? How can you throw your lot in with this horrible, unnatural animal?"

Ginger turned to go back inside. "I've got to get back to the hospital. I'm needed inside."

"Can I come by and see you again in a few days?"

"Yes," she said, immediately regretting it. She stopped and grabbed the doorway. "No. Oh, I don't know. I thought this damned war was over."

"As far as I'm concerned, it will end when Nemesis and his bastard king are both truly dead and rotting in the ground. I'll give you twenty-four hours to decide if you're with us or not."

Ginger didn't answer. She just slipped inside feeling dirty. What was she going to do now? Did she have the heart to turn her back on Nemesis and betray him even if she *had* fallen under his love spell? What was the right thing to do and who did she owe her love and loyalty to anyway?

Chapter 12

Nemesis walked along the cobblestone street of the village pleased. Modifications on all the buildings were complete and vampire nobles were already moving in. It would be good to report good news to the king on all that had been accomplished since the conquest. Ginger seemed to be adjusting as well and he was delighted she'd taken so joyfully to her new job as a medical assistant. He hoped she followed through on seeking further training because it would be helpful to have more medical staff for the humans under the king's rule.

A rider trotted up, his stallion snorting and tossing its head at the abrupt stop. Nemesis was pleased to see Captain Aster. Aster had been instrumental in the rebuilding efforts making sure among other things, all the windows had shutters. It certainly wouldn't do to have the vampire nobles burned the first night they moved in. Nemesis placed his hands behind his back. "I'm just admiring your handiwork. Very impressive."

Aster bowed his head in respect. "Thank you, General. But I have something important to discuss with you."

"Something wrong?"

"I'm afraid so sir. Is there someplace we can talk in private?"

Nemesis gestured to the newly reopened library. "How about in here?" Aster followed the general inside until they found a vacant office. The room was elegant but severe with hand-carved oak furniture and dark red drapes. Outside the night was cool and peaceful and blanketed in inky darkness. Nemesis sat on the edge of the desk and studied Aster. The captain had been in his early thirties when he'd been changed by King Mortis. His dark hair was a little longer than was fashionable but neat and clean so Nemesis didn't scold him. "What seems to be the problem?"

"I wish I didn't have to be the one to tell you this but it's about your lady, sir. A few hours ago one of the sentries on the village wall spotted her talking to someone he thinks might have been the fugitive officer we've been searching for. They spoke for a few minutes and the man left. The guards tried to track him down but he seems to have eluded them."

It didn't surprise Nemesis that the missing officer risked himself to contact Ginger but it did stun him she gave him the time. He'd hoped they were getting closer but perhaps she was just humoring him. A heavy knot settled in his stomach and his throat tightened. Was Ginger capable of such deception? He didn't want to believe it. "Did the sentry catch anything of what they said?"

Aster ran his fingers through his thick hair. The captain looked tense. This probably wasn't good.

"Yes, sir. He said they were discussing a time and place where you might be alone. The soldier said he had the means to destroy you. He wanted Lady Mont Blanc to provide a schedule of your movements."

Nemesis felt his chest tighten like it was trapped in a vice.
“Did he?”

“I fear your woman might be dangerous, General. Do you love her so much you would risk your life to keep her?”

“I must love her that much. I’ve been a trusting fool in everything else so far, why not this too?” *If Ginger is willing to betray me, I must know the truth.* Nemesis slipped off the desk and arched his back.

“What are you planning to do?” Aster asked.

Nemesis gestured toward the door and Aster lead the way out. “I guess I’d better go and have a talk with her. She deserves a chance to defend herself.”

“And what if her intention was to help those assassins dispose of you?”

Nemesis rubbed the back of his neck. “I don’t know, Captain. I really don’t know. But whatever she says, I do know I haven’t the stomach to kill her. I’ll just have to think of something else.”

Nemesis arrived at the hospital a few minutes later and asked Ginger to join him for a ride. She must have known something was up because she was quite nervous, fidgeting with her reins and looking at everything but him. Nemesis led her away from the village, through the forest and down to the beach. Ginger hung back, taking her time. She was much quieter than he expected her to be on such a mysterious journey. He could sense her apprehension and was glad; he wanted her to worry about his intentions. Finally he settled on a quiet spot with a fallen tree and far enough up the beach so

the waves wouldn't bother them. He tied his horse and waited for her to join him.

Ginger rode up but stayed mounted. He waited for her to dismount but she didn't make a move to get any closer than she was.

"Do you think if you ran from me, I couldn't catch you?" he asked, staring out at the rising moon shining over the sea.

"No, I know you could catch me."

"Then why so cautious?"

Ginger took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I think you're angry with me."

"Why would I be?"

"Because someone must have told you who came to see me this evening," she said. Now she did dismount. She tied her horse close to his. Ginger folded her arms under her breasts and watched the waves.

Finally they were getting somewhere. He wondered how much she was going to confess.

"Who was your visitor?" he asked.

"Commander Croix. He was an officer in my husband's army."

"What did he want?"

"He wanted me to give him information on your movements so he could lure you into a trap to kill you. He said you had bewitched me with a vampire spell and that I couldn't possibly be feeling what I was feeling. He said it was a parlor trick and I was being used. He made me feel like a traitor to my people."

Nemesis turned to look at her. "Your people? What has he ever done for your people except show them a certain way to die? The war is over and there is peace now. We have restored schools and hospitals, and spent countless resources healing the sick and injured. Everything the humans feared we'd do we haven't done. In fact we've done the opposite. How is it we are still the enemy?"

"I didn't agree to anything if that makes you feel any better."

"Would you have helped him? Did you believe all his bullshit about vampire black magic capturing your heart?"

She gave him a sad smile. "No."

Nemesis stood up and grabbed her by the shoulders. He had to know the truth. He had to know if they had a future together. "I love you, Ginger, with all my heart and soul. I swear it. But there is one thing I need to know and I need complete honesty. Do you love me?"

Ginger shook her head. Her lower lip trembled. "I don't want to but I do, Nemesis. I do love you."

"Then help me catch this would-be assassin. Help me bring him to justice."

"What are you going to do with him?" She broke free of his grip and paced, hugging herself to ward off the sea's chill. "I don't want him killed. I have enough guilt. I couldn't deal with that too."

"Then I give you my word I won't kill him. But he will probably be exiled and I can't account for what will happen to him after that," Nemesis said. "Deal?"

Ginger touched his cheek with her warm hand. “I have a better idea. Let me try and talk to him first. If he won’t listen to me, then you can exile him. Okay?”

Nemesis didn’t like the proposition but he understood her concern for the commander. He decided a compromise wasn’t such a big thing to ask. “Okay. But if he won’t listen to you, he’s mine.”

Ginger hesitated then nodded. “Deal.”

Chapter 13

The next afternoon Ginger rushed to work a little less confused than the night before. She did love Nemesis, no doubt about that. But she also felt a sense of duty to protect the commander from doing something foolish. She hoped he'd show up this evening so she could talk some sense into him.

Eager to begin her busy day, Ginger raced into the back room to review the doctor's orders when she stopped. There before her, stacked floor to ceiling, was a bunch of wooden crates. Ginger spotted the doctor and two nurses prying the lid off one.

"What's all this stuff?" she asked.

The doctor smiled at her. "Medicine."

"Nemesis brought it," one of the nurses added.

Ginger took a moment to stare. "Wow, this stuff must have cost a fortune. Did the king pay for it?"

The doctor lifted out some sterile bandages and morphine bottles. "I understand Nemesis paid for it." He gave her a curious glance. "We thought you knew about this."

"Well," Ginger said, feeling slightly overwhelmed by her lover's generosity, "he did mention something but I never imagined..."

A nurse came in grinning. "Ginger, there's a young man in the alley who'd like to speak to you. Should I tell him you're busy?"

"No. I'll be back in a minute." Ginger left the room and came out into the alley. Commander Croix stood there, his cloak wrapped tightly around him. "You look thin," she said. "Would you like something to eat?"

"No, thank you. I've come for your answer. Are you going to help us or not?"

Ginger folded her arms. "I am not. And there's something else you should know. Nemesis knows about your plot and the only reason you're not in jail right now is because he agreed to let me talk to you first."

"You told him what we discussed?"

"Yes, because I think you're wrong. Nemesis does care about me and he cares about the men who were wounded in battle. He's doing all he can to care for the soldiers in addition to rebuilding the village. The only thing you can offer us is more of this horrible, unwinnable war. No one wants what you have to offer."

"I should have guessed." The commander sneered. "You're blinded by his power. You've allowed yourself to become his zombie slave."

"I have not! I love him and it has nothing to do with the fact he's a vampire. In fact, it's been harder for me *because* of what he is. But I've learned to overlook what he is because his actions have shown me he is sincere." Ginger stopped to take a few calming breaths. "I want you to surrender to him."

“Are you out of your mind?” Commander Croix said, his eyes widening in terror.

“Nemesis has promised me that he will not harm you. The only thing that will happen is you’ll be exiled.”

“I don’t want to be exiled from my own territory!”

“I’m afraid you don’t have much of a choice. He *will* find you and he *will* capture you and your coconspirators. Why not make it easy on yourselves and give up peacefully?”

The commander glared at her and turned around to leave. But just as he took his first few steps, he saw that he was surrounded by vampire soldiers. He went to pull his saber but Nemesis stepped out from the darkness and placed his hand over the commander’s.

“That would be foolish,” the vampire said.

“Not nearly as foolish as trusting a woman,” the captain said, casting a vicious look at Ginger.

“Ginger is trying to save your life and the lives of your men. Someday you will understand that.” Nemesis twisted the commander’s hands behind his back and bound them.

“What are you going to do with him?” Ginger asked.

“Lock him and his men up for a few days. Then we’ll take them to the border and send them on their way.” Nemesis turned his attention to Commander Croix. “But understand this, if you ever come back, you’re dead. Do you I make myself clear?”

“Yes,” the commander hissed. “I understand you, General.”

Chapter 14

It was good to be home.

Ginger walked into their bedroom feeling like a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders. Nemesis followed her mischievously pressing his body into her. She was so happy things were finally falling into place. She laughed then turned around to face him with a playfully stern look. "General Nemesis, you stop that."

He placed his hands on either side of her face and kissed her. "Make me."

Ginger's heart pounded. He was so damn sexy. She caressed his hands as they caressed her cheek. "Maybe I don't want to."

Nemesis dragged his lips along hers in a tender caress. His fingers moved up into her hair and gently pulled a handful of it back from her face. Deep amber eyes searched hers with warmth and kindness. "I love you, Ginger." Then he picked her up and laid her down on the bed, climbing on top of her. "I want you to be my wife."

Ginger kissed him passionately, her tongue daring to caress his long deadly fangs. "I've been thinking about that. Would I have to become a vampire?"

"Of course not."

“And what would you do as I aged and you didn’t?” she asked.

“You’d always be as beautiful to me as the first day I saw you. You’re more to me than a beautiful woman. You’re a fascinating person who is just beginning to build her life. I want that for you, Ginger; I want you to explore your full potential.”

Ginger traced the hard planes of his face. Her body had begun its slow burn, crackling with lust that would grow and grow until he took her in a storm of hungry need. She couldn’t wait. “You know, no one has ever said they wanted me to be happy before. No one has ever asked me what I wanted. Ever since I was a little girl, words were tossed around like duty and honor and I never understood what any of it meant. I was expected to marry the man my noble father chose for me and be the happier for it. I was to birth children until I couldn’t anymore and then just settle into a life of ceremony and comfort. But the funny thing is I thought those things would be wonderful.

“And then you came along and destroyed that life.” She smiled and shook her head spreading her hair across the pillow. “God, how I hated you for taking away my safe world.” She paused remembering how confused and frightened she was not having others to tell her how to live. “Then when you let me work, I suddenly realized that you hadn’t taken away my freedom, you had given it to me.”

His soft lips claimed hers. Eager to feel his strong body against hers, Ginger peeled her clothes off trying her best not to interrupt the kiss. He chuckled and, when she was naked,

let her undress him. Nemesis moved his hands along the landscape of her flesh, pausing to tickle and tease her erect nipples. He took his time arousing her, dancing kisses along her breasts and belly, sliding them down to the moist center of her pussy. He lingered there, his long tongue exploring, drawing out her passion like no other man could.

Ginger reached down and stroked his short, coarse hair. And in that moment, as her body began its relentless ascent to a breathtaking climax, she knew what she wanted. There was no doubt in her mind. Ginger wanted to be a vampire with a passion she usually only felt for him. She'd been thinking about it off and on for a while but now she was sure. "Nemesis?"

He stopped the carnal kisses to look up at her. "Yes, beloved."

"If I wanted to become a vampire, would I still be able to have children?"

Nemesis climbed up from between her legs, his eyes glowing with a savage hunger. "You'd have to have them before the change."

"Oh. Well...um...I mean, could you father them?" she asked nervously.

He stroked his hand through her hair. "No, it's been too long for me. But the kingdom is full of human men who could father your child. I'm friendly with a number of soldiers who—"

"I don't want anyone's baby but yours."

Nemesis caressed her throat. "I promise you, I would treat it like my own flesh and blood."

A lump rose in Ginger's throat. He would too. He was just that kind of man. "Never mind. It would be different if it was your child."

"I'm sorry," he said with a genuine ribbon of sorrow in his voice.

"Make me a vampire."

"But I thought you wanted children some day."

"I do but there are plenty of orphans in the world. We can always adopt and raise the child as our own," she said. She arched her neck and closed her eyes. "Go ahead. I'm ready."

Nemesis chuckled and ran his fingers along the main artery. "Maybe we should wait a year or two. There's no rush and you might change your mind in that time."

"I'll never change my mind about wanting to be with you."

Outside the sun was rising. A few thin golden rays bled through the heavy wooden shutters. "I'll tell you what. If you still feel the same way when I wake up tomorrow night, I promise to do it."

"I won't change my mind," she assured him.

"Okay, but let's just give it that long."

Ginger sighed. "I guess I'll just have to wait then."

"I guess you will."

Chapter 15

Nemesis woke up as darkness fell. He rose from the bed to get dressed and was pleasantly surprised to see Ginger there. Usually she was already gone to the hospital by the time he woke up. She was sitting in a wing chair and like him, she was naked.

The sight of her lovely pale flesh ignited his hunger causing his cock to grow very hard. Her dark eyes flickered down to his now fully erect cock then returned to his eyes. A tiny grin played at the sides of her mouth and her rich scent grew heavy.

Nemesis turned so she could get a good look at his long powerful body. "Is something wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. I was just waiting for you to make me a vampire."

Nemesis chuckled. "It's more complicated than that. There's a ceremony and the king has to approve. You should also know that there will be others in attendance."

"Others?"

"Yes, Ginger. The blood ceremony is a blood ritual that takes all night. You will be bitten and touched by everyone who wants you."

Ginger's eyes widened. "So it's kind of like an orgy."

“Similar to that. Yes.”

“Would that make you jealous?” she asked, blushing.

Nemesis walked over to where she was sitting and knelt down. “A little. But it’s necessary if you are to be accepted by them all. The real question is, are you sure this is what you want? Once you do this, Ginger, it cannot be undone.”

She took his hand in hers and caressed it. “I’ve been thinking about this since you first captured me. First I feared you’d turn me, and then I started to fear you wouldn’t. I’ve had a lot of time to think this over and I’m as sure as I’ve ever been about anything in my life. I want to be like you, Nemesis. I want us to share your world together.”

Nemesis lifted her out of the chair and kissed her. “Okay. Let’s get dressed and go talk to the king. I’m sure he’ll be happy to grant your wish.”

* * * *

“So you’ve decided to join the family?” King Mortis said.

Ginger kept her head bowed as she knelt before him.

“Yes, your Highness.”

“I assume Nemesis told you what was involved?”

“He gave me an idea of what to expect, yes, sir.” A few vampire nobles standing near the king’s throne smiled showing sharp teeth. Ginger’s pulse raced and her stomach tightened.

“You cannot back out once we begin the ceremony,” the king added.

Ginger nodded and glanced at Nemesis standing by a huge window. Behind him the moon was a large silver coin. “I

know. I assure you, my liege, I'm ready. I have been ready for a while now."

The king looked at Nemesis. "And you're sure this is the woman you want for your eternal bride?"

Nemesis gave Ginger a warm reassuring smile. "I've never been surer of anything in my life."

Mortis stood up and descended the steps leading to his throne. "Very well then," he said in a voice that was all black silk. "Let us begin." He walked up to Ginger and caressed his hand along her cheek. Ginger laid aside her fear and looked up into the vampire king's dark eyes. Within them there was every black sin and forbidden pleasure. Within seconds she felt her muscles grow slack as she tilted her head back to offer the king her neck. All around her, eager hands were unbuttoning and removing her clothing, peeling each garment off her flesh then stroking the exposed skin with feather-light touches. Ginger's lips parted and a gentle sigh escaped her.

Mortis placed his hand on the back of her neck and cradled her head in his large palm. Then his cold lips touched her windpipe making her shiver. His tongue and lips moved along the flesh of her throat, pausing here and there to feel the frantic pulse just under the skin. Although she was barely aware of them, other vampires were touching her too. One kicked her legs apart and feasted greedily on her plump clit, another pinched and toyed with her nipples delighting in how responsive they were, yet another explored the tight threshold of her anus with his fingers. Each sensation was an unexpected delight and Ginger's passion soon built into a desperate frenzy.

Then Mortis plunged his fangs into her neck. He wrapped his arms around her and bit deep, lowering her to the floor as he did so. Another sharp prick on her wrist and Ginger looked over to see a vampire drinking there. Every pleasure and decadent experience blended into one another until Ginger was vaguely aware of how loud she was moaning. Nemesis joined the others, pushing aside the vampire licking her pussy and entered her. His cock slid in slowly, wringing new delight from her with every swollen inch. Others joined in to help him, pulling her legs apart farther so he could gain deeper access. One vampire female came up behind the general and began licking and sucking his balls.

Ginger climaxed several times throughout the night as her body grew weaker from each vampire feasting. When she couldn't get up off the floor, Nemesis picked her up in his arms and gave her a deep passionate kiss.

"How did I do?" Ginger asked.

"You did very well, beloved," Nemesis said. "The king is pleased and so am I. Rest now. When you wake up, you will have your new life."

Ginger tried to smile but sleep was taking her quickly. "I'm so happy, Nemesis. I love you."

"I love you too, more than you will ever know."

Chapter 16

Nemesis carried Ginger to one of the king's guestrooms to watch her die. As her body gave up the life it had coveted for so long, her lips grew dusty gray and her complexion almost translucent. Her neck and wrists were sprinkled with puncture wounds both large and small. They were dark pink, swollen and looked painful. Nemesis reached out and rubbed them as if he could make the blemishes go away with just a touch. A blade of anguish ripped through his heart. Although he knew this was the process it was difficult to watch someone he loved go through it. *Oh, Ginger! Perhaps I should have stopped you from doing this.*

Her breathing, which up until now had been weak and shallow, stopped. Normally the reawakening didn't occur until the next night but King Mortis was an old and powerful vampire who could create a new creature in a matter of hours. Nemesis clutched Ginger to his chest waiting for her to awaken. He was glad he'd taken the precaution of feeding himself before her initiation was complete, at least now he'd have some blood to offer her.

Then her cold body shuddered and a halting breath lifted her breasts. Nemesis cradled her like a sick child, desperate to make sure she knew he was there for her. Ginger shook one

more time and her eyes opened. Nemesis gazed into those beautiful dark eyes and felt his love and passion burn high. Although dark brown before, her eyes were now an inky midnight blue that drew him in and captured his mind. Nemesis had to tear his gaze away so he wouldn't ravish her on the spot.

"Why do you look away, my love?" she asked. "Am I not attractive to you anymore?"

Nemesis grinned. "Exactly the opposite. I loved you before and didn't think I could love you more, but now..."

"Go on."

"Now you are irresistible."

Ginger smiled but a moment later her lovely brow wrinkled. "I'm so hungry."

"That's normal. Tonight I feasted enough for both of us." He placed his hand behind her head and lifted her mouth to his throat. "Drink."

Her cool hands gripped his shoulders. Baring her teeth, she drove them into the artery and drank like an infant at her mother's breast. As she drank her fill, Nemesis could feel their souls joining, fusing together into something more complete than either one could have achieved alone. An annoying pain spread through his veins and he knew she was drawing too much, so he firmly pushed her away.

Ginger's skin had a warm peaches-and-cream blush. Where only a few moments ago her lips had been pale and lifeless they were now red and full. She glanced around the room taking in all the new sights and smells. "This is incredible," she whispered.

“So you’re not sorry you did it?”

Ginger tenderly kissed him. The feel of her lips on his was the most wonderful form of torture and Nemesis thought his heart would explode from happiness. Then she pushed him back on the bed and explored his flesh with a newfound boldness. Her mouth, now hot with the blood he’d given her, moved over his stiff cock eagerly. Cupping his balls, Ginger worked her mouth up and down the broad shaft. The sensation was the most perfect pleasure Nemesis had ever known. She worked him to orgasm and wasted no time climbing over his still erect member and guiding it into her.

Their passionate coupling lasted until the sun’s golden rays seeped in through the closed shutters. Ginger snuggled against his thick chest tracing a nipple with her long thin index finger.

“What do we do now?” she asked. The question amused him with its childlike innocence. Everyone who first changed thought everything would be different and were surprised to find out that they just went on with their lives. No magic, no fairy dust, just life in a more enhanced form.

“Now we move on with our lives.”

“Are we married?”

Nemesis stroked her hair and rested his cheek on top of her head. “Yes.”

“Can I still go to school to become a medic?”

“Of course, and anything else that strikes your fancy.”

She considered this for a moment. “Oh.” Then she added, “What ever happened to Commander Croix?”

Nemesis shrugged. "He cooled his heels in jail for a while then we took him and his men to the border and let them go. Hopefully they won't be back."

"What if they do?"

"I doubt they will but if they do, I'll deal with them when the time comes. Are you worried?"

Ginger laughed. "No. They don't scare me. I'm hopelessly and deliriously happy. What about you?"

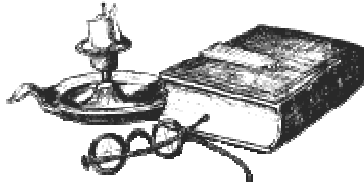
Nemesis kissed the top of her head. "Me too, Ginger. Me too."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle has been writing science fiction erotic romance for a few years now and can't think of a better way to have fun. She has several credits to her name, including the novella *The Love Machine* published by Whiskey Creek Press Torrid.

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