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THE CHOSEN
A TALE OF THE BLOOD BREED



**THE CHOSEN:
A TALE OF THE BLOOD BREED**

Blood Breed 1

Jenika Snow

EROTIC ROMANCE



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THE CHOSEN: A TALE OF THE BLOOD BREED

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So once again, thank you for purchasing this ebook legally and for not participating in e-book piracy.

With deep gratitude,
Jenika Snow

DEDICATION

First, I would like to thank all the readers. Without you guys I wouldn't be here. I would also like to thank everyone who helped put this book together. Without them this book would just be another dream. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my husband for his immense patience with me during this whole process and the encouragement he gave me in following my dreams. Thank you.

THE CHOSEN: A TALE OF THE BLOOD BREED

Blood Breed 1

JENIKA SNOW

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Prologue

Russia, 1400

Aleksei sat in the overstuffed chair by his mother and father's bedroom door. His mother just gave birth to his newest brother and sister. The castle bustled with servants making sure all the preparations had been completed for the twins' arrival. It was tradition for all Royal Bloods to pay their respects to the parents and the newest members of the Blood Breed. Young of their kind were considered the most precious beings life could give. Royal Blood young were even more so.

Aleksei wasn't one for sitting and waiting for things to happen. No, he was more of the type to go out and take action himself. As the oldest child of the Royal Blood, he was heir to the throne and therefore had to commit to certain duties as the next king. One day he would rule all of the Blood Breeds—a race of immortal vampires who lived amongst humans undetected.

Being only twenty-five years old, he was already being prepared and conditioned to be the next ruler of the throne. The Blood Breed were immortal, but even the king could only rule for so long. His

father could decide many years from now that he wanted to pass the crown down to him, and in that case, Aleksei would have to be fully ready to take on all of the responsibilities. Looking up, he saw his two youngest brothers run up to him. Covered in mud, the two young boys, aged ten and fifteen, were out of breath and laughing hard.

“Is it true, Alek? Did Momma have the babies?”

Being the older of the two, Luca always spoke first, even if Dorian was starting to talk. “Yes, little brother, she had the babies, a boy and a baby girl.” Aleksei didn’t suppress the smile that shaped his lips as Luca started jumping up and down at the news. He looked at Dorian, his young brother’s face a stoic mask at the exciting news.

“What’s the matter?”

Dorian looked over at him and crossed his arms over his chest as he sighed. “Nothing.”

Aleksei knew Dorian was jealous, but Dorian acted the same way when Luca was born and didn’t pay much attention to it. Didn’t children become upset to a point when new siblings were born? He ruffled Dorian’s hair, smiling when Dorian’s little hands smacked his away.

“When can we see them?” Luca ran up to Alexei, a huge smile covering his lips.

“We should be able to go inside in a short while.”

Ruffling up Luca’s hair, he watched in amusement as they began dueling with the sticks they carried. Watching them fight brought reality into his mind. The world around them was dying from disease and war. They didn’t have to worry about human diseases or minor injuries, but a massive injury could be the death of them. As always, the sun was not their friend, with the slightest ray burning their skin to the bone.

He brought his mind back to the present and looked around the spacious and elegant hallway where he sat. The Draukowski castle was carved right into the mountains, a protection that proved to be monumental. At the base of the mountain lay a hidden entry that led

into the thick forest and intricately placed gardens. A pond had been recently erected by the servants at their mother's request. Around the base of the mountain were small colonies in which many of the Blood Breed resided.

"My lord." Aleksei cleared his thoughts and turned around to see one of the servants bowing before him. "The King and Queen are requesting you and the young lords' presence." Bowing once more, the servant turned and opened the door. He kept his head bent until Aleksei and the two boys passed through.

The door shut softly behind them, and Aleksei gestured for his brothers to keep quiet. He kept them behind him and made his way toward his parents' bed. Long white drapes hung from a canopy around his parents' bed and shielded them from his eyes. He heard small whimpers before two identical cries rent the air. He smiled at how precious those noises sounded to him. Pulling the heavy drapes aside, he called out to his parents.

"Mother? Father?"

"Come forward, my sweet children."

Aleksei heard the weakness reflected in his mother's voice and worried for her. Pulling the drapes away, he looked at his mother, who held a small bundle. His father sat next to her, also holding a small bundle. Even though his mother appeared weak and pale, she was as beautiful as ever. Her dark hair fell in curls around her face, and her large blue eyes stared at him with love and compassion.

"Come look at your new brother and sister, my loves."

Aleksei walked to his mother's side and knelt on the floor to face her.

"This is your sister, Aniya."

He smiled as Aniya opened bright blue eyes that were identical to his mother's. He ran his fingers through her feather soft dark curls, smiling again as she made gentle cooing sounds. Already he loved this little girl and knew he would do whatever was necessary to

protect her. Kissing her lightly on the head, he moved over to his father and looked down at his brother nestled in the white silk blanket.

“This is Milo.” His father’s deep voice was rough and loud compared to the soft whimpers and cries of his mother. Milo’s hair was as dark as Aniya’s, but his eyes were black, just like their father’s.

Picking up one of his tiny hands, Aleksei brought it to his mouth and kissed the little fingers.

“Welcome, little one.”

He said his goodbyes as Luca and Dorian ran up to their mother and embraced her. He didn’t miss how his mother winced slightly before she set her features back to normal. Her features were much too pale, and Aleksei’s heart clenched with worry. She seemed so weak and small huddled underneath all of those blankets. Who was he to know any different, though? He knew childbirth was a long and grueling process, and he hoped she made a speedy recovery.

* * * *

Aleksei lay in his bed later that day, loving the feel of soft hands stroking over his bare chest. His cock stood at full attention, pulsing with pent-up need. Tatiana, one of his mother’s personal servants, moved her hands over his chest before she lowered them to what really needed the attention. Her long blond hair brushed against his skin, smelling of newly fallen rain. She stared up at him, her light blue eyes at half mast, and kissed his chest.

“Would my lord like me to kiss you here?” She grabbed his cock and stroked it from base to tip.

He growled deep in his chest as she moved below the covers. Her hot mouth slid over his cock, and her hands cupped his full sack. He was right on the verge of coming when a sharp knock sounded on his door. He gritted his teeth as he gently pushed her aside and pulled on a pair of leather pants. He ripped the door open, tension radiating off

of him in waves. A small man held his hands in front of him, his head bent in respect.

“Please forgive me, your highness. Your father is asking for you immediately.”

He didn’t wait for the servant to say anything further. Fear consumed him and made a tight knot in the pit of his stomach.

Rushing toward his parents’ chamber, he burst through the door, eyes scanning the room. His father knelt on the floor, holding his mother’s hand. He knew his father was saying something, but the words were muffled and low.

“Father?” Walking closer to his father, he saw his mother’s hand was as white as the marble surrounding the garden. Dread filled him when all the pieces fell together.

No, this can’t be right. My mother can’t be gone.

His heart pounded heavily in his chest as his father’s agonized face looked up at him.

“Your mother bled to death. I...I should have been here for her.”

Aleksei could do nothing but stare at his father in shock. His father turned back to his mother and brought her limp hand to his mouth, giving it a gentle kiss. He stepped closer and was able to hear the soft endearments his father whispered.

“She seemed fine after the twins were born.” His father took a deep breath and closed his eyes. “She started to say she didn’t feel right, that something was wrong. I thought it was just because she had the twins mere hours before.” His breath hitched, but his deep voice continued. “If I would have listened to her, just listened, she would still be here. I left for only a few hours...she had completely bled out from the delivery.”

Aleksei stared in horror at what his father said. His father stood and gave his mother one last kiss.

“The doctors said the twins’ birth took too much out of her. It’s my fault. I should have been here with her.”

Aleksei felt hollow inside, not wanting to believe his mother now rested in the *Shadow Realm*. His father just stood there, looking down at the bed, and continuing to whisper in the Old Language. His mother was gone, and he knew his father would follow shortly after.

Once a *Chosen* died, the mated Blood Breed soon followed.

* * * *

Five years later

Aleksei sat in the garden, the stars shining brightly against the black sky. Milo and Aniya threw rocks in the pond, laughing as the small pebbles skipped across the water. Looking at the pond always reminded him of his mother. It made him smile yet made his heart clench with sorrow. He couldn't help but feel sadness when he looked at little Aniya. She was so small and fragile and resembled their mother so much.

Aniya turned toward him and smiled innocently. Her black curls bounced around her face, and her bright blue eyes shined with a happiness only a child knows. Milo, on the other hand, was busy searching for that perfect rock to throw into the water. His dark eyes were so much like their father's, his hair so dark it blended with the night sky. One day they would ask—wonder—where their mother and father were. Every time he looked at the twins, he couldn't help but remember the tragedy that had taken place five years ago.

No one had been able to find the king for two nights afterward. After meticulously searching for his father, he finally found him in the woods that touched the castle walls. He wasn't surprised his father had been drinking, but to find him completely drunk was a total shock. His father had, on occasions, drank to celebrate but never consumed so much that one could actually smell the liquor on him. He wasn't surprised, though—the loss of his *Chosen* undoubtedly broke his heart.

He called out to his father, but only silence greeted him. It was at that point he knew in his heart his father was gone. His father slumped against the thick trunk of the tree with an empty bottle in his hand. His attention focused on the bright moon that peaked through the large tree branches. His father threw the empty bottle against a tree and then finally spoke.

“Tonight I have lost my heart, my soul, and my living breath.”

Aleksei watched as his father brought his knees to his chest and rested his head against them. Minutes later he lifted his head and stared at Aleksei.

“How can you live without those things, son? I have a hollow ache in me that hurts and will never go away.” His father waved him off, his attention going back to the sky. He walked back to the castle as he heard his father weeping softly in the night.

The following night, Aleksei walked back out to the large tree trunk. He wasn’t surprised at what greeted him when he got there. All that was left of his strong and fierce father was white ash that occasionally stirred when a slight breeze whistled through the trees. His father let the sun take him without any regard for the children he left behind.

Bringing himself back into the present, Aleksei looked back at the children playing by the water. He thought about Luca and Dorian, as he frequently did, and hoped they were doing well. They had gone away to train as warriors, an age-old tradition all Blood Breeds completed.

It was necessary to know how to defeat the enemy, whoever they might be. War raged all around them, not only in the human world, but also in the *Otherworld*. Rogue males—*Bloodless*—started to infiltrate villages and kill innocent humans, making their mark and causing humans to speak of “devils” and “demons.” Their numbers needed to be strong if they were to defeat their rouge brethren and prosper. The *Bloodless* would know who their ruler was and would bow down and surrender.

Chapter One

Stone Brooke, USA, present day

Lana rolled over and blindly grabbed for the ringing phone. She knew who it was calling at this ungodly hour because no one in their right mind but Kayla would.

“Hello?” Clearing her throat, she pulled the phone away as Kayla’s annoyingly chipper voice rang through.

“Rise and shine, princess!”

She pulled herself up on the bed and squinted at her alarm clock. “Do you know what time it is?”

“Of course I do! You always act like I’m calling you at four in the morning instead of seven.”

“That’s because it feels like four in the morning when you call me.” Yawning, Lana grudgingly crawled out of bed and headed toward the bathroom.

“I have some news that will brighten you up, that is if you don’t have to work this weekend.”

“I don’t know, Kayla, there are things I should do at the house since I have some free time.”

“I swear, Lana, you are the most antisocial person I know. When you’re not at school, you’re either working or studying. You never do anything anymore. Please, will you go out this weekend? For me?”

Lana couldn’t help but laugh at the pleading in Kayla’s voice. “Wow, beg much?” She really did need to get out relax. She had been so stressed with school she became a recluse. She breathed out,

knowing Kayla already knew she had been convinced. “What could possibly be better than hearing your voice so early in the morning?”

“You’re hilarious. Anyways, my friend Nadia works at The Night Phlox and can get us in.”

“Who?”

“Nadia. You know, she hung out with us a few times. Long brown hair and really thin.”

“Oh, yeah, the one who looks like a runway model. Anyways, why would I be excited to go to this club? Isn’t it a members only club?”

“I thought we could celebrate you getting your BSN. Think of it this way, if we get too trashed, you can medically assist us.” Kayla snorted and continued. “I mean, who wouldn’t want to go to a place like that? Live like one of the ‘beautiful’ people. Besides, I already got the tickets, so you have to go.”

Lana couldn’t see herself going to a place like that. The reviews had been phenomenal, detailing the exquisite interior and posh amenities.

“I don’t know. What am I going to wear?”

“Oh, please. I’ll come over early Saturday, and we will throw something together. I’ll bring some dresses over if you can’t find anything. Besides, Kaleb has taken a short leave and said he would go out with us.”

Kaleb was Kayla’s twin brother and in the Special Forces. The three of them grew up together, and Kaleb was like her brother.

“So? Are you going to come out or be a party pooper?”

She could hear the underlying excitement in Kayla’s voice and decided, against her better judgment, to let Kayla lead the way.

* * * *

Aleksei leaned against the one-way mirror that lined the whole upper level of his club, The Night Phlox. Dawn was approaching, and

he could feel it in his bones, that tingling feeling that told him of the rising sun. The last of the clubbers were leaving, and the staff was making the final preparations for closing time. He made his way toward his private elevator in his office and placed his hand on the sensor. A familiar buzz sounded, and the elevator doors opened silently. Stepping inside, he pushed the button for the basement. There was one level below the basement, and below that was a catacomb of tunnels that ran the length of the city. Back when he decided to branch out to the States, he built the tunnels when Stone Brooke hadn't even been developed. Those tunnels were used by members of his kind to travel during the daylight hours.

He stepped out of the elevator and walked through the lightly lit concrete garage to the silver H3 that waited in the corner. All of the windows were completely tinted and wouldn't allow any UV light to filter through them. All of the Blood Breed vehicles were built like this, and even though they would be protected in the vehicles, no one deliberately stayed out in their cars after the sun rose.

Getting in, he started the Hummer and turned up the stereo. The soft notes of Beethoven filled the interior. Pulling out of the garage, he could see the sun starting to rise in the distance as he headed to his home in the mountains.

Aleksei sat on the edge of his bed and ran a hand over his hair. He arrived home just as the sun was making its ascent into the sky. He could feel the heat and the UV rays from the ball of fire clear down to his bones. His skin felt tight and itchy, and his head pounded. He kicked his boots off and lay back against the rumpled silk sheets that covered his bed, and breathed out deeply. He hadn't been sleeping very well and he was feeling it. He willed the lights off and closed his eyes, sleep consuming him almost immediately.

* * * *

The dream always started off the same, the darkness so thick it wrapped around him like a blanket. Aleksei knew it was a dream because his eyes couldn't penetrate the darkness like they should have. Always in the dream he could never move or speak—like an unseen being held him in place. A light penetrated the darkness, and the scene change into one so familiar to him. He walked into a cave and looked down at a large pool of blood.

They split up to hunt down the horde of Bloodless that wreaked havoc on the neighboring villages. He didn't know it then, but it had all been a trap to separate the warriors and weaken the strength they had together. He fell to his knees in front of the pool of blood, the liquid so thick and red. He knew the blood was Dorian's, knew that his brother's life had been taken. Even in the dream, his throat grew raw at the image of his dear brother's life being taken. He dipped his palm into the blood and threw his head back, the next scene playing through his mind in slow motion.

He could see it as if he had actually been there, witnessing his brother's death. It had been a trap. Unable to stand anymore, he ripped his hand out of the blood and roared out so loud stones fell from the ceiling. The room became dark once more, the scene changing yet again. Another cave came into view with a dirt floor—no blood, and rough, uneven stone walls.

He tried to move forward, but it was as if an unseen force kept him rooted. Dorian stood in the center of the cave, his body tense and ready for any threat. Rogue males gathered around him in a tight circle, their weapons held high. They didn't attack all at once—no, they fought Dorian one by one, giving him minor cuts and making him slowly weaken from the blood loss. The injuries were small but numerous—his body having a hard time healing itself. Dozens of Bloodless stood back, waiting for their chance to join in. Aleksei tried to go to him, tried to yell, but he could do no more than watch in horror.

Dorian was a strong and cunning fighter, but the fact that he was alone while dozens of the deprived males circled him proved to be too much. Aleksei saw movement from the corner of his eye from a darkened corner. A Bloodless walked out, power clinging around him and showing he was the horde leader. He held a sword in his hand as he stepped behind Dorian. He raised the sword high, the metal flashing against the light of the candles, and swung it down. Just as the blade would have made contact with Dorian's neck, he ducked and swiftly came up, bringing his own blade across the horde leader's face. The wound went from his forehead to his chin, blood making a fast trail down his face. The horde leader hissed and raised his hand, halting his minions from attacking. His features were distorted as he smiled at Dorian, his teeth sharpened and stained.

Dorian and the horde leader clashed together, swords clanking against each other and new wounds being created. All at once, his minions swarmed in and took down his brother. Dorian struggled fearlessly, but there were too many of them, and soon they had him belly down on the dirt.

"Look at me!"

Dorian refused to look up at the horde leader and spit on his boots. He squatted on his haunches and gripped Dorian's hair, making them face-to-face.

"It's a shame you are not the king. No matter, though. Your death will cause your brother great pain and us a small measure of delight. Mark my words, Aleksei will soon be falling before my feet to lick my shoes clean. And when I have him on the ground like you are now, I'll slice his throat like I am going to do to yours."

Dorian smiled a purely evil smile and spit in his face. "Try all you want, but my brother is far stronger and fiercer than you. It is you that will be licking his boots clean before he throws you out into the sun."

In a flash of movement, the leader took a dagger from within his boot and sliced Dorian's neck open.

* * * *

Aleksei sat up in bed, breathing heavily and sweat rolling off him in rivulets. One of the reasons he didn't sleep was because the dreams had become a more frequent visitor in the last months. It was nearing the anniversary of Dorian's death. Every year for centuries, Aleksei relieved the horror of letting his brother down. Some tried to reason with him that it wasn't his fault—that he hadn't even been there, but when it came down to it, Aleksei felt responsible for Dorian's death.

He threw the sheets off and sat on the edge of the bed. He let his head hang between his shoulders and ran his hand over his sweat-dampened hair. He couldn't remember how he had gotten to his room or gotten out of his clothes. Maybe if he found the *Bloodless* who killed Dorian, he could find some solace with his life. He searched the ends of the world for the killer, but to no avail. He could never stop until he found the one who killed Dorian. It didn't help matters that all he had was the horde leader's lingering scent that was left in the cave. That one scent was all he needed to find his brother's killer.

He pushed himself off the bed and walked over to the bathroom. He turned the spray on and adjusted the temperature so it was near scalding—just the way he liked it. He let his head fall under the spray and let the hot water wash away the remnants of his memories.

* * * *

Aleksei sat at the head of a long rectangular table in the lower level of his club. He wasn't looking forward to this meeting, but it was inevitable. Sitting on either side of him were Blood Breeds whom he trusted with his life. Luca and Milo sat closest to him, his actual Blood Brothers. Dimitri sat next to Milo, his black hair and piercing green eyes making him look fiercer in the dim glare of the overhead lights. The last three, Nikolai, Damien, and Garrik, sat at the end of

the table, not moving or saying anything. On the other side of the table were the Lykens—the beings who were making his warriors so twitchy.

“I don’t know why we have to be here with these *dogs*.” Garrik grumbled the statement like they were the filthiest creatures.

Growls erupted from the Lykens, but everyone stayed where they were when Aedan, pack leader of the Lykens, raised his hand.

“Garrik, it would be wise to bite your tongue. The Lykens are here on peaceful terms, and so we will treat them as our guests.” Aleksei didn’t like the idea of the Lykens here anymore than his boys did, but the fact remained that they had to find some kind of peace together if they were going to live in the same vicinity.

The Lykens requested property from the Blood Breeds years ago, wanting to branch out their clan in the bordering mountains and forests that lined Stone Brooke. The Lykens and Blood Breeds were like oil and water, always clashing with one another. When it came down to it, Aleksei had to weigh the pros and cons of allowing them Stone Brooke territory. The Lykens would prove to be a very powerful ally if the need arose. So he granted a few hundred acres that were strictly for the Lyken clan to do with what they wanted.

Aedan leaned back against the leather chair, strumming his fingers along the oak tabletop. “I asked a meeting with the Blood Breeds because there is a problem that I don’t think you are aware of.” Aedan’s Scottish accent was thick and held anger as well as irritation.

“What is this you speak of?” Aleksei’s voice was rough and all but demanded an answer. “There can’t possibly be something so significant going on that we do not know about that would warrant a meeting called by the clan.”

“Obviously this problem has been going on under your nose. Do the Blood Breeds not read the human newspapers anymore?” Aedan held his hand out and let Liyam, his second in command, put the thick *Stone Brooke Times* paper in his hand.

Aleksei scanned over the front page quickly. The story was about a supposed serial killer, possibly related to a cult, who was going around killing young women. His instincts told him no human was capable of committing a crime such as this. The killings seemed too precise, too planned, and reeked of the *Bloodless*—Blood Breed rogues. All the victims fit the same physical description, drained of blood, and their clothing ripped precisely as if the killer was searching them for something. He could understand a rogue draining the victims dry, but ripping their clothing seemed out of place even for them. He put the paper down, his brain working to try and unravel what was going on. In the next instance, something monumental occurred to him. He stared at the far wall in shock, trying to not let his emotions and realization show too much on his face.

“Aedan, thank you for bringing this to our attention, but you and your boys can leave now.” This was the Blood Breed’s domain, and therefore the Lykens would have to follow his command whether they agreed or not. The Lykens stood in unison, each one waiting for their orders from Aedan. They walked toward the door, Aedan stopping and looking back at Aleksei.

“I don’t know what the fuck is going on here, but you better get it under control. We have our females and young that walk Stone Brooke’s streets, and I would hate to have something happen to them. You know what that would do to our alliance.”

Aleksei knew Aedan wasn’t stupid, and he knew the Lyken leader sensed the change in Aleksei, but they were not a part of the Blood Breed. The *Bloodless* were not their concern, and a stare is how he would respond to Aedan. He looked down at the table, staring at the front page of the newspaper again. He didn’t know if what he thought was correct, but if it was, then the three female victims were just the start of the massacre.

“Boys, we need to go to the Royal Scrolls, now.” Aleksei stood and pointed at Nikolai first. “Since you’re head of outer security, I want you to set up extra security around the club itself and around the

perimeter of the property. I want Jaisin, Icezack, and Sergei to lead the security just outside the property. Garrik, I want you, Adrik, Youri, and Mekhale to do rounds inside the club. If what I think is happening, then we have a serious problem on our hands.”

Aleksei and his warriors stood around a large circular table. They made their way down to the lowest level of the club, which housed the old scrolls and all the archives of the Blood Breed’s history. He had several thick, leather bound books laid out in front of him and flipped through the old, cream-colored pages quickly. He breathed roughly and stared at the page he had been searching for. He traced the tattered page and read aloud the Russian words printed on the paper. “Волосы темно, глаз свет, семян, она будет нести, ребенка на ночь. Полумесяц солнце где он должен родиться, хорошее и зла, обе стороны должны быть порезы. Быть Великих, много питания он проведет, король выносить все остальные – то, что должно быть объявленной.” He ran a hand over his hair and stared at each warrior. “Boys, we might have a major problem here.”

“You have to be wrong. Are you sure?” Luca stared at him with horror etched into the hard planes of his face.

“You know what I say is true, little brother.”

“Hair of dark, eye of light, the seed she will carry, the child of the night. The crescent sun is where he shall be born, good and evil, two sides shall be torn. To be the great, much power he will hold, a king to rule all others is what shall be foretold.”

Aleksei looked up as Dimitri spoke the old scroll verse in English. Years ago, before his father died, he spoke of a premonition that came to him in a dream. All Blood Breeds possessed a certain *gift*, precognition being his father’s. He wrote his visions in the old scrolls for all members of the Blood Breed to know. One night he spoke with Aleksei of a vision that came to him in a dream. In the dream, a dark-haired woman with light eyes would bear a son from the Blood Breed line. This child would hold the Blood Breed’s future in his hands and be able to control all that was otherworldly. The child’s future was

shrouded in a mist as to whether he would rule all from the side of light or the side of evil.

The rogues were definitely searching for something. The only problem was he didn't know what that something was. His gut told him everything that was happening was a coincidence. No Blood Breed would commit such an unforgivable crime as taking a human's life. No, these crimes were committed by a *Bloodless*.

"I believe my father's premonition is coming true. They are searching for this female who will carry the child that will rule over all others." All Blood Breeds knew what the old scrolls foretold. Even the *Bloodless*, who once had been members of the Blood Breed, knew. "Boys, tomorrow night we will be hunting down some *Bloodless* for a little information. Gear up and prepare yourself for a long and enjoyable night."

* * * *

He sat there staring at all his minions. They were on the floor and on tables—really anywhere they could be as they fed and fucked. He was their horde leader—they were his minions, but they were also called the *Bloodless*. A rather degrading name if anyone were to ask him. He had a name once long ago, but now he was just called Lord D. If his mood was pleasant, he might let one of the females he fucked call him Lord and Master D. On any other occasion, watching females get fucked would have been a nice way to kill the time, but not now. Things were changing, monumental things that were about to take place. A prophecy had been spoken by an oracle long ago. She spoke of a monumental event happening, one that would forever change the world.

When he found what he sought, all would bow before him and know him as their true king. He would soon be the rightful ruler of the Blood Breed, and all would kiss the very soles of his boots.

Chapter Two

Lana cursed under her breath as she juggled the bag in her hands and unlocked her front door. Kicking the door open with her foot, she quickly walked into the kitchen and set the grocery bags on the breakfast counter. She shut the door, pushed play on her answering machine, and sat on the couch. The robotic voice played from the machine, telling her she had one new message. Before the message played, she already knew it would be Kayla—it was always Kayla.

“Lan, hey, you home? Guess not. Anyways, I’ll be over at about five tonight. I told Kaleb to pick us up at your house so we wouldn’t have to worry about driving home—in case we get drunk.”

Looking at the clock, she decided she had enough time to take a little nap before Kayla showed up—knowing Kayla, they would want to stay out all night. She lay down on the couch and let the heaviness of sleep wash through her.

Lana was at the place, a twilight that had her floating on the edge of consciousness. A loud thumping noise slowly penetrated the haze of sleep that consumed her. As she came slowly awake, she was aware of muffled voices rising up around her. She rubbed her hand over her eyes and stared at the ceiling. More banging continued, and it was then she realized it was coming from her front door. Someone called her name—a deep voice that was all too familiar. Kaleb.

“Lana, open this door right now or I’m going to bust it down!”

Confusion flowed into her, and she got off the couch and opened the front door. Kayla and Kaleb stood on the other side, Kaleb’s fist held high as if he were about to pound on the door again.

“What?”

“Lana, I told you I was coming over at five so we could get ready. When you didn’t answer I got worried and called Kaleb.” Worry laced Kayla’s voice, her expression matching that emotion.

“We didn’t know if you were hurt or unconscious in there. I was ready to break the fucking door down.”

“Kaleb, watch your language!” Kayla turned a disapproving stare at her twin. “When you didn’t answer I got so worried. Haven’t you read the paper?”

Lana watched as Kayla dug through her oversized tote bag to pull out a newspaper and hand it to her. She turned around and sat on the couch, hearing the door shut softly behind her. She stared at the front page, her eyes growing wide at the headline.

Murders in quiet Stone Brooke.

Was she reading it right? People being murdered in Stone Brooke?

“So far, three murders have been reported in the quiet, secluded city of Stone Brooke...All female and young...victims had dark hair and light eyes...officials are not saying that they are linked together, but that any women between the ages of eighteen and thirty should be cautious when they go out.”

Lana skimmed through the sentences, horror taking a stranglehold on her.

“Victims clothing was shredded beyond repair, as if the person(s) were trying to find something...Drained of blood”

The last sentence had Lana holding her breath. According to the paper, the victims had been drained of blood, but there was no sign of where it went. They suspected it was cult related, but they had no solid evidence, and investigations were still being held.

“I can’t believe this. Do you know any of the victims?”

“The victims’ names haven’t been released.” Kayla walked over and sat on the couch next to her. “Hey, I didn’t mean to freak you out or anything. I was just a little worried.”

Lana turned her attention to Kaleb, who leaned against the counter. His arms were crossed over his massive chest, and he had a blank look on his face. People dying probably didn't affect him to the point it did her. He was in the Special Forces and probably saw death all the time. Kayla's hand rubbed up and down her back. She looked at her best friend. Her big amber-colored eyes shined back at her with concern.

"Really, it's okay. I really didn't mean to scare you. The police say they have it under control and that the perpetrator is probably already gone." She watched Kayla stand and walk over to her bags. "Come on, we still have to look beautiful for tonight."

"Are you crazy? There could be a killer out there, and you want to go out and party?"

"Well, I see it this way, Lana. We can both stay here and think about it all night, or we can go out and enjoy ourselves. Why stay here and worry about something we have no control over? Think about it, the killer isn't going to be stupid enough to strike again when it's all over the papers."

"Maybe it's not a good idea that we go out tonight, Kay." Kaleb pushed himself off the counter in a move that looked lethal yet graceful. "Lana doesn't look up to it. We can just go out together the next time I come up."

Guilt passed through Lana as she glanced at both of the twins. He was on leave for a short time. Who knew when he would get leave again? She couldn't ruin this night for them.

"I'm fine, really. It all came as a shock to me." She walked over to the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of water out of the fridge. "You're right. No one would be stupid enough to attack with the spotlight on the murders." She walked out of the kitchen and toward her bedroom. "Come on, let's get ready." She could hear their whispered words and stopped in front of her room.

"I don't know. She seems a little rattled. Maybe you shouldn't have shown her the paper."

“Kaleb, it isn’t like she wouldn’t have seen it eventually, anyways. We were all a little rattled when we read the paper. She’ll snap out of it. We just need to get her out of the house and having a good time.”

“I don’t know. It doesn’t help that all of the victims had dark hair and light eyes—like her. If you were in her shoes, wouldn’t you be freaking out also?”

“Stop being so melodramatic. Half the women in Stone Brook have dark hair and light eyes. You’re not doing any good by pointing out the fact.”

As Lana heard everything they said, she thought back to the paper. She hadn’t even realized the fact all three of the victims had dark hair and light eyes. It was just a coincidence, though. Hell, Kayla was right. Half the women in the city fit that description. No, she walked into her room and opened up her closet, seeing if she had anything wearable.

“Are you sure you want to go out? I mean it’s okay if you don’t. We can all just order pizza and hang out.” Kayla stood next to her and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“I really do want to go out. I know Kaleb is only here for a short period of time, and I want to hang out with both of you guys.” That was all Kayla needed to hear. One minute she was looking concerned, and the next she had a full smile on her face.

* * * *

It took them about an hour to get ready, and now they sat in Kaleb’s truck heading toward The Night Phlox. Kayla decided to wear a pink dress with matching jewels around the collar. Kaleb wore the same clothes, dark blue jeans and a graphic style tee. Kayla brought several dresses she wanted Lana to try on, but Lana opted to find something in her closet. So here she sat, feeling out of place wearing a dress she wore years ago to a wedding. The light blue dress

matched her eyes nicely—which was the whole reason she bought it in the first place. The straps were thin and accented her slim shoulders and arms. The empire waist did nicely to show off what little of a bust she had and made her actually look like she had hips. She found the dress in the back of her closet and the matching shoes piled under a stack of blankets. She felt silly and overdressed, but Kayla assured her she looked fine and that there was a strict dress code anyway.

So now they sat in Kaleb's truck he kept at Kayla's place for such visits. She stared out the tinted windows and watched as the city of Stone Brooke came alive for the evening. Street lights flickered on, and people were already seated behind restaurant windows. Students walked around in their Stone Brooke University sweaters, smiles on their faces and carrying bags from the local shops. The club was on the outskirts of Stone Brooke, but no more than twenty minutes from the small house Lana rented. The city passed by her like a dream—the lights flashing past her eyes like fireworks in the sky. It was hard to believe there was a killer out there who took innocent lives. Shaking her head, she pushed the thoughts away that would just haunt her for the rest of the night.

The Night Phlox didn't look like a club at all from the outside. The actual building was historical and resembled a large plantation house more than anything else. Large marble pillars supported the front of the house and added a classic touch to the building. Professional landscaping surrounding the property, each tree and shrub manicured to perfection. The old building had been bought and completely updated and renovated. The club sat atop a hill and had a winding driveway to reach it. The mountains peeked from behind the club, which made it a picturesque scene.

Kaleb pulled up to a large iron gate that blocked the driveway and slid three tickets into a silver box. The tickets were sucked in, and then a soft beep sounded. The huge gates opened for them without the slightest creak or groan. The driveway started off straight and then curved up the ascending hill. At the top of the hill, they drove around

the circular driveway and pulled behind a BMW. A thin teenage boy in a pressed black suit walked to the driver's side of the truck and opened the door. Lana's door was opened next by another young boy in the same uniform. He held his hand out and assisted Lana and Kayla both out.

They were both escorted to the front of the building, where Kaleb handed a young boy some money and the keys to the truck. They stood there for a moment, not sure what to do as the truck's taillights faded off.

"Good evening. I am Alex, please follow me." He did a sweep of his arm toward the large wooden double doors and led the way.

They followed him up a few marble steps and were surprised when the double doors opened of their own accord. They entered a small sitting room that had a plush couch and a few identical chairs lining its walls. The walls were painted a deep red, and the flooring was a shiny marble. They walked through another set of double doors and entered yet another sitting room.

"When you are ready, you may enter through that door." He pointed to a brushed metal door across the room. "If you would like to relax before entering, there is a small bar in the corner. Enjoy." With that, he bowed and left them alone in the room.

The three of them made their way toward the door, Kayla taking the initiative and opening it. Lana's mouth dropped open at the room that was revealed.

Chapter Three

Lana sat at one of the many small, wrought iron tables situated throughout the club. When they first entered the club's main floor, she had been speechless. The inside was huge, with a vaulted ceiling and an impressive moonlit hunting scene painted on its smooth surface. Intimate, four-person tables were situated around the club as well as plush, velvet love seats placed in seductively lit corners. An ornate glass and crystal chandelier hung from the middle of the ceiling, and the light bounced off the jewels, casting rainbows throughout the room. A large dance floor sat in the middle of the room, numerous bodies gyrating together to the sounds of the latest hits. A bar on the other side of the room took up half of the wall, and a waterfall of red water flowed behind the bar.

Everyone at the club dressed like they were going to a formal ball. She was thankful Kayla insisted on her wearing something that at the time seemed too dressy. Even though the club's patrons were dressed elegantly, that didn't stop them from rubbing themselves on each other. On the other side of the room stood a large, polished copper door with two hulking bodyguards stationed on each side of it.

She looked at the war-painted ceiling and noticed dark glass circling around the whole upper perimeter of the club. Hearing Kayla's light laughter drawing closer, she glanced to her side to see Kayla and Kaleb making their way through the crush of bodies.

"I haven't seen this many hot-ass guys in the same place since that time I stumbled into that all male revue years ago." Kayla giggled at her own comment, and Lana rolled her eyes.

Kayla set an impossibly large glass in front of her, the neon blue liquid splashing over the sugared side. “What did you order me? This cup alone must hold three drinks.” Lana said as she eyed the concoction. Lana picked it up with both hands and took a small sip. She set the cup down and coughed from the potency of it.

“That, my dear, is The Night Phlox’s house drink. Kaleb, what did they call it again?”

“Drink of the dead or something like that.” Kaleb looked at Lana with a bored expression. “I don’t know what the whole hype is about. This place looks no different than any other club.”

It was Kayla’s turn to cough and sputter as she set her cup down and eyed Kaleb. “Like you would know. What do you have to base this place on, anyways?” She took another sip of her drink and turned toward Lana. “Tonight is all about you, Lan.” She held up her glass and motioned for Kaleb to do the same. “Congratulations for getting your BSN. You’re going to make a kick ass nurse.”

“Thanks, but I still have to take and pass the NCLEX.”

Kayla waved her comment away. “You’ll rock it like you do every other test you’ve taken.” Kayla turned around, drink in hand, and watched the gyrating bodies on the dance floor. “Oh, lord! Look at that guy over there!” Pointing a finger straight ahead, Lana rolled her eyes and wanted to tell Kayla that pointing her finger really didn’t help.

“There has to be twenty different guys where you’re pointing. Which one exactly? And by the way, try not to be so obvious.”

“He’s the impossibly huge muscled man with the really blond hair. His back is to us.”

“If his back is to us how can you even tell he’s hot?” Lana scanned the crowd, trying to pinpoint which one Kayla spoke about. Finally spotting him, she could definitely appreciate the view. “Wow, I guess he *doesn’t* need to turn around to appreciate the view.”

“He looks like a tool to me.”

Lana looked over at Kaleb with her eyebrow raised. “Where’s all this hostility coming from? Don’t want your little sister appreciating the meat?” She smiled as Kayla started to laugh. Lana turned and looked at Kaleb, her amusement dropping by his expression. His face was set hard, and she could see his jaw tensing. “What’s wrong? I was just kidding.”

“It’s nothing. Like I said, he looks like a tool to me.”

Kaleb had always been protective of Kayla but never showed this kind of anger over something so minimal. Lana thought it best to just drop the subject all together. “I have to use the restroom. Do you want to go with me?” She placed her hand on Kayla’s shoulder when there was no response. “Hey?”

Kayla’s attention was focused on the blond she eyed before, but now it wasn’t a one-sided stare. He faced them fully, his gaze completely focused on Kayla. Lana dropped her hand and decided Kayla and Kaleb were acting way too weird tonight. She stood and was about to walk away when Kayla turned to her with a dazed expression.

“What? Sorry, I was just thinking. Lost in my own little world, I guess.”

“I said I’m going to the bathroom. Do you want to go?” Kayla shook her head as she scanned the crowd. “Okay, never mind. You two are acting crazy tonight.”

“I’ll be back. I need some fresh air.”

Lana watched with brows knitted in confusion as Kayla made her way slowly through the throng of people. “Do you think we should go with her? Make sure she’s okay?” Lana looked over at Kaleb, who held the beer bottle in a tight grip.

“No, she’ll be fine here.”

How could he possibly know something like that? Murders were happening in Stone Brooke.

“It would be a fruitless attempt to try and follow her, anyway. She wouldn’t welcome our company right now.”

He made no sense, but if he felt calm with Kayla walking around by herself then Lana wouldn't go against his judgment. He was highly trained as it was, deadly even. "Well, okay." She made her way past him when his large hand lightly grabbed her wrist.

"Be careful, okay?"

"What? I'm just going to the bathroom." She didn't know what had gotten into them tonight, but their behavior bordered on bizarre.

"I know, but things are different now, more dangerous."

"I'll be fine. You should be more worried about Kayla than you are about me. She actually went outside."

He didn't let go of her wrist, just stared into her eyes with concern. "She can take care of herself. You, on the other hand, are very fragile and vulnerable. Be careful, okay?"

Fragile? Vulnerable? She wouldn't have used those two words to describe herself, but okay. "I'll be back soon." She thought his worry was a little overboard and hoped her words placated him. He visibly relaxed, gave a nod, and let go of her wrist. She stood there for a moment searching for the bathroom or any sign that would point out where to go.

Lana hurriedly used the facilities and washed her hands in the sink, looking at her reflection in the mirror. She stroked her finger over her cheek and under her eyes. She ran her fingers through her hair and was surprised her curls were still alive and bouncing. She left the bathroom and couldn't help the worry that settled in her chest at the thought of Kayla alone outside. Kaleb might feel content his sister could take care of herself, which was so not like him, but Lana couldn't get the news reports out of her head. She scanned the thick crowd of bodies dancing, trying to see where the exit was.

* * * *

Aleksei stood at the tinted two-way window that framed his second floor office. He looked down at the club scene before him, the

revelations of earlier tonight making his blood boil. He needed a good fuck tonight, a hard fuck with a female who didn't mind if he was a little dominant. He scanned the throng of people below, the sex pouring off of them in waves of arousal and lust. It coated the air so much that he could smell it through the thick glass. He shoved his hands in his jean pockets, his heart thumping to the beat of the song playing through the speakers. He was about to turn away when something, or more so someone, snagged his attention.

Sitting at one of the tables was the most beautiful creature he ever laid eyes upon. He stared at her, unable to draw his attention away from her. Her dark hair cascaded around her face in soft curls. Her body was small and petite, fragile in its appearance but beautiful nonetheless. Her lips were full and pink—the perfect lips for doing delicious things. She wasn't what he usually went for. He normally liked his females a little curvier with wide hips he could grip while he pounded into them. His eyes roamed over her small breasts and thin frame. She was far too delicate for the aggressive things he was accustomed to, but he bet she was a wild cat in bed—the innocent looking ones usually were.

He couldn't imagine why he felt this way. He never felt such a strong, instantaneous lust for a female before. His fangs lengthened, and his cock thickened in anticipation of having her—from just staring at her. He couldn't remember the last time he fed. It had to have been a while if a female was making him have this kind of reaction. He just needed to take her vein as he took her between her thighs, and all would be good.

Usually, he just fucked the females and left, but when he was forced to feed off of them, when he let his hunger grow too strong and he couldn't control himself, he fed from them. It was a very intimate act, even more so than the actual act of having sex. He tried to avoid it, but sometimes he couldn't. That had to be why she was having this effect on him. There was no other explanation for his insane

emotions. It would probably be best if he did it tonight, though. He would need all his strength tomorrow night when they went on a hunt.

He continued to stare at her, hypnotized and enthralled by her. The dress she wore left nothing to the imagination, and he wondered if she did it purposely to draw attention to herself—to make a male want her. The very idea of another male going near her made him fist his hands and grind his teeth. His cock already strained against the fly of his pants, reminding him of what it wanted, what he *needed*. He felt his eyes start to change, going from their normal blue to completely black. He couldn't control himself, emotionally or physically, and that was a dangerous combination.

He could have found a willing female easily, but he knew the end result would be the same—wanting that one small female who had his cock screaming with arousal.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to get his body under control. It didn't help much, but he was able to get his eyesight back to normal and make his fangs retract. His cock, on the other hand, got harder and more insistent in its demands. He brought his hand to his crotch and rubbed his dick. He continued to rub himself as he watched her, his eyes dropping to half mast as his lust intensified. She stood, her long, slender legs perfect for wrapping around his waist. He growled low in his throat when he saw the male she sat with grab her wrist. He could easily hear their conversation even through the thick glass that separated them. The male's words were caring and affectionate, and Aleksei calmed slightly. She walked away, the sway of her ass so tempting it made his mouth water. He already anticipated what her blood would taste like, sweet and addicting, like her pussy would no doubt be.

* * * *

Lana pushed the exit door open and was greeted with the cool night air as it stirred the hair around her face. Her surroundings were

what she expected to find behind the massive club structure. A large pond sat ahead of her with thick trees lining three sides of the sparkling water. The moon shone high above, the stars reflecting from the water's pristine surface like thousands of diamonds. She looked around, trying to spot Kayla. It was dark, but the moon illuminated enough of her surroundings that she could see fairly well. The only noise that penetrated the air was the gentle lap of the water kissing the shore.

She called Kayla's name a few times but got no response. She walked toward the pond and sat on one of the many benches. The wind blew lightly, giving the air a little chill and causing goose bumps to form on her skin. Leaves rustled, and branches swayed as the wind continued on its journey. She was about to get up and search for Kayla when faint laughter came from the woods. Male and female voices sounded not too far away, the sounds coming closer and closer.

Kayla came out of the woods as graceful as a deer, laughing and talking with a man—the same man she pointed out earlier. They stood close together, not touching but still seeming intimate. As the two of them stepped fully out of the woods, they both stopped talking at the same time and looked at her.

"Lana, what are you doing out here? You really shouldn't be alone out here." Kayla took a step forward, her brows knitted in confusion.

Anger spiked in Lana at that moment, and she didn't try to hide it. "It's not safe out here for me?" She looked at both of them. "You run outside, and I find you prancing out of the woods with some strange man, and *you're* telling me it isn't safe?" Lana pointed at the man and shot him a dirty look. He was so much bigger up close than when Lana saw him in the club. "I should tell your brother about this. He would be thrilled." She didn't mean to sound so childish, but she couldn't believe how stupid Kayla had been.

"Calm down. I didn't run off with some stranger. This is Adrik. He works security at the club, and I've known him for years. Once I

saw his face I was shocked at first. It's been years since we saw each other." She looked up at him, and Lana could see an unfamiliar emotion play across her features. "Kaleb probably didn't recognize him at first. Adrik's changed quite a bit."

Lana felt the tension leave her body but only marginally.

"Come on, let's go inside." Kayla tried to take Lana's hand, but she lightly shook her head.

"I want to sit out here for a little while. The club was getting crowded, and I need a little fresh air."

"She'll be fine. The club's property is secured, and nothing will breach the perimeter." Adrik spoke to Kayla, completely ignoring Lana in the process and pissing her off.

"I'm right here. Oh, and by the way, I'm a grown adult, and if I want to stay outside by myself for awhile, I don't need your consent." It probably would have been wise to go back inside, but she was starting to feel cramped and hot in there. Adrik had said it was safe out here, and if Kayla trusted him Lana felt secure in her decision.

"Okay, but don't be too long. You have your phone?"

"Yes, I have my phone and will call you if I need to."

Kayla gave her one last disapproving look before she turned and walked away. Lana watched as the two of them headed back into the club, Kayla giggling at something Adrik said. She sat back down on the bench and watched the water continue to lap at the shore. The wind continued to rustle as the time slowly seeped by.

Chapter Four

“Don’t you read the papers?”

Lana jumped at the deep, accented voice that came from right behind her. She stood quickly and turned around. Her heart pounded in her chest, and her whole body tingled with adrenaline. The man in front of her had his hands up, palms facing her in an act of surrender.

“I’m so sorry. Please forgive me for frightening you. I only meant to wonder if you have not read the news.” He dropped his hands and smiled. “You should have an escort with you since times are not safe right now.”

She took a few steps back and eyed him. His size alone startled her. He was impossibly tall, at least a foot taller than her five foot five. His large body was packed with muscle and clearly defined through his shirt. His dark hair was cropped short, and his eyes looked light, maybe blue, but it was hard to tell. He placed his hands in his pockets, making his forearms bulge out. The first few buttons of his shirt were left open, giving her a glimpse of smooth skin. She felt silly just staring at him, but she was unable to tear her gaze from him. She drew her eyes away from his body and up into his chiseled face. He was gorgeous. She shook her head at how closely she was examining at him. Never had she felt so compelled to stare at a man before—to look at his body like she couldn’t control herself. She felt drawn to him, everything inside of her blossoming at the very sight and smell of him. She inhaled and actually closed her eyes. Oh yes, she could definitely smell him. The breeze gently stirred around them, his scent enveloping her.

* * * *

Aleksei hadn't meant to scare the human female, but her fear poured off of her in waves of distress. His cock got impossibly hard from being in such close proximity to her. She smelled incredible, like sugar and honeysuckle. It had been ages since he took a human female—they were so very fragile. He smiled as her eyes roamed over his body, her arousal becoming thick and coating her. It smelled heavenly, and it took all of his willpower not to pounce on her right then. Even though she was aroused, he knew it wasn't because of his *allure*—a Blood Breeds pheromone that made them irresistible to humans. There was something very different about this female—something that made all logic leave his brain.

When she opened her eyes, the pupils were dilated, lust reflecting back at him clearly. He inhaled deeply, knowing the arousal she felt was completely natural, totally untainted by his *allure*. He opened up his mind, probing her thoughts as to what she was thinking at that moment.

A wall blocked his entrance to her thoughts, something that never happened. Her mind was a blank slate, white in appearance to him. Occasionally, he could see a word here and there pop into her mind, but he really had to concentrate. Never in his long existence had he come across a mortal or otherwise who could block their thoughts from him. That was his *gift*, the one special talent he was born with.

Like all Blood Breeds, he was born with a special trait—his was the ability to read minds. All it took was a light probe of their mind, and he could see their whole life before his very eyes. He knitted his eyebrows together and focused all his concentration on the female. Again, all he got was the blank canvas, occasionally one of her thoughts crossing through his mind.

Have never been so aroused.

Gorgeous.

Stop staring at him.

He could grasp what she was getting at, but he should have been able to hear every detail of her mind and see every image she had ever seen. This intrigued him. He shook his head and cleared his own mind, losing the concentration he built. He shouldn't be concerning himself with flukes of nature since there were much bigger problems to worry about. He needed to fuck her and feed and then go hunting for *Bloodless*. All he needed was one night, no, not even one night, just a few hours to fuck her and feed from her. His cock throbbed through his jeans, and his fangs pricked the bottom of his lip. The metallic taste of his own blood slipped over his tongue, causing his need for her to increase. He could smell her blood flowing through her veins—a heady combination that had his cock giving a mighty jerk in his pants.

“What is your name, *milaya moya*?” His desire and hunger were so thick he couldn't help but speak in his native language.

* * * *

Lana's whole body relaxed. Her limbs and muscles went lax at the sight and smell of the man in front of her. He asked her something. Her name, maybe? Her brain was hazed over in a lovely state of euphoria that she honestly had to ask herself that question.

“Your name, my sweet, what is it?”

She shook her head to clear the aroused haze and spoke in a mere whisper.

“Lana, my name is Lana Alexander. Wh-what's your name?” Was that her voice that sounded so sultry? He was so close to her now that she got a full, concentrated dose of his scent, and it was intoxicating.

“Aleksi Draukowski.” He swept a hand behind him, gesturing toward the club. “This is my club.” His smile wasn't forced, just a sexy lift of his lips.

She hadn't heard anything he said aside from his name. Standing so close to him made her feel so feminine. His big body dwarfed hers,

and she closed her eyes at the arousal that washed through her. Her vagina started to get wet, dripping into her panties as the fabric rubbed against her skin. Her nipples tightened against the lace fabric of her bra, the friction doing nothing but heightening her senses.

“What’s wrong with me? I’ve never felt this strongly for someone before.”

“I could say the same.”

He brought his hand up and gently ran the backs of his fingers down her cheek. She closed her eyes and turned her head into his embrace. It shouldn’t have felt so good, and she shouldn’t have gotten wetter by the simple act of his fingers touching her skin. She moaned aloud, not feeling the slightest bit of embarrassment by her actions.

“Come inside with me. I have an office upstairs where we can be alone.”

His voice brushed along her senses, causing her skin to prickle with awareness. “I don’t even know you. Why would I go anywhere with you?”

“You’re safe with me. You can ask anyone.”

She didn’t know why she fought these feelings she was having. They felt too good. He was so close to her, his body heat wrapping around her and taking the chill away. His hands rubbed along her bare arms in slow caresses like he was imprinting each cell to memory.

They stared at each other, her breathing growing quick, his steady and strong. His head dipped, and she held her breath. The only sound she heard was the pounding of her own heart. She couldn’t think as his lips pressed gently, but forcefully, against hers. He coaxed her mouth open with his tongue, and she couldn’t stop the moan that left her throat. He didn’t stop, just swallowed her moan and gave her one of his own.

His tongue swiped at the seam of her lips, the wet hotness of it making her womb clench and a fresh stream of wetness coat her sex. His tongue touched hers, and she couldn’t help but press her breasts into the hardness of his chest. He was skillful and erotic with his

ministrations. She placed her hands on his biceps and squeezed her fingers against the tight, bulging muscles just under the fabric. His mouth felt so good, the pleasure so excruciating she couldn't even imagine what sex would feel like with him—even if she had no experience in that department.

“Come with me inside, and I will make you feel so good.”

She let her head fall to the side as his mouth trailed hot kisses down her throat. He buried his face against her neck, and she inhaled as he growled low and deep. It turned her on. That one sound shot straight to her clit. He ran his tongue over her frantically beating pulse, his teeth lightly nipping at her skin. He wrapped his arms around her waist, gently stroking up and down her back. She thrust her breasts more firmly into his hard chest, letting her stiff nipples run wickedly over the fabric.

“You smell so good. I can smell your arousal, and it's driving me crazy.”

His voice was a deep growl, and she shivered from the sound. She should tell him no, but the fact that she never felt this strongly about another person couldn't be ignored. She just met this man, true, but there was something about him that made this feel so right. It was like they fit perfectly, a silly analogy, but a true nonetheless. She nodded at his question and breathed out as his tongue ran over her neck once more. He pulled away, and she suddenly felt bereft, cold and alone. He took her hand, his warmth seeping into her skin and washing the cold away, and led her toward the club.

Chapter Five

Kayla looked at Lana, who sat on the bench. She should stay with her even though Lana didn't want company. Adrik's warm hand wrapped around her own and led her to a small door on the side of the club's building.

"She'll be fine, I promise. This place is the most heavily guarded facility in all of Stone Brooke."

She looked back at Adrik and smiled, knowing what he spoke was true. It was still so surreal she was standing next to him after all of these years. He changed so much from the last time she saw him it was like he wasn't even the same person. He never had been one of those scrawny boys she went to high school with, dwarfing all those other guys tenfold, but now he was immense. He was still tall, but even more so. His muscles were so defined he must work out daily. He was taller, also, if she could believe that, making her crane her neck just to look into his eyes. His hair was still the same pale blond, but was longer than it used to be, just barely touching his shoulders. It was disheveled, like he just got out of bed and didn't care what his hair looked like. It was sexy as hell. His eyes were still the same pale blue she remembered, but they now seemed guarded, like he saw too much throughout his life. She should have recognized him right away, but he seemed more intense, more dangerous now.

He placed his hand on a sensor that changed from black to blue before it gave a soft click. He still had her hand engulfed in his as he opened the door and led the way. They stood in a small sitting area, and he led them to an elevator that was off to the side. He once again

placed his hand on a sensor—the same process outside repeating itself.

“Where are we going? I should probably let Kaleb know where I am.” She looked at him and noticed his jaw had gone tight. She should have known bringing up Kaleb wouldn’t have been a good idea.

For reasons unknown to her, her twin and Adrik had never gotten along. They had once been civil with each other, but one night that changed. Kaleb never talked about Adrik and certainly never wanted to hear about him. After whatever altercation they had, Adrik stopped coming by, had just disappeared without even a single look back. It had broken her heart. She should be furious with him for how he left, but when she first saw him after so many years, she couldn’t help the joy and longing that washed through her. She had loved Adrik, but he had never felt the same about her. He treated her like a younger sister, but she always wanted more. She told Kaleb about how she felt about Adrik, but he just stared at her and never responded. She had only been sixteen years old at the time. She had so many questions for him, the biggest one being why he left.

“He knows you’re okay, don’t worry.” Adrik stepped out of the elevator when the doors finally opened, still holding her hand.

The room was modernly decorated with a leather couch on one side and a large plasma screen television across from it. A small kitchen sat just ahead with a hallway to its side. An arched opening let her see into the kitchen without having to walk any farther. Stainless steel appliances adorned the kitchen as well as a small, dark wooden table and matching chairs.

“Where are we?” If this was anyone else other than Adrik, she would have assumed they were trying to get laid.

“This is a room I use at the club in case I can’t...get home.”

In case he couldn’t get home?

She wasn't stupid. That was guy talk for when he got laid and didn't want to take the time to go back home. She would be lying if she said it didn't bother her.

She stared at him as he started to pace around the living room like a caged lion.

"What's wrong?"

He had gone from being happy and relaxed to being angry and tense. She stood by the door as he continued to pace, finally stopping and staring at her. As she watched him, she felt herself falling in love with him all over again. It was stupid for her to let that emotion present itself, but her love for him had never died. She was being foolish, though. He made it clear all those years ago how he felt about her. She remembered that horrible night like it happened yesterday.

* * * *

She was eighteen when she finally got the courage to confess her feelings to Adrik. It was a lost cause with Kaleb, but in the long run, she needed to do what was best for her, even if her twin wasn't pleased about it. Kaleb told her hurtful things about Adrik, things he knew would cut right to her heart. How he had women all the time—so many in one week that Kaleb lost count. She yelled at her twin, even cursed him, but he just looked at her with a sadness in his eyes. He told her he didn't mean to hurt her, but that was just the way things were with his kind. It confused her, and she didn't know what he meant by that, but she was furious and stormed up to her room. She called Adrik, telling him she needed to see him right away.

Shortly after that call, she knew it was Adrik who knocked on the front door. Kayla knew Kaleb would be angry she called Adrik, but she wanted her brother to be just as upset as she was. She opened her door and listened as Kaleb and Adrik started talking. They kept their voices so low, she hadn't been able to hear anything, just deep rumbles that sounded angry. Loud footsteps came up the stairs, and

she quickly shut the door. She smiled as Adrik knocked and then entered, his presence making her heart skip a beat. He always made her feel this way, a joyous bubbling inside of her body.

There was so much she wanted to tell him, so many emotions that coursed through her every time she stared at him. Everything froze inside of her, those words that would tell him how much she cared for him stuck in her throat. He sat down on the bed next to her and stared at her with regret in his eyes. Maybe he did care for her with more than just brotherly love? Had this been a mistake?

Maybe when he brushed her hair off her shoulders or smiled at her in that special way meant he really did care for her, or was it just wistful thinking on her part? He just sat there, staring at her as she told him how she felt, laid her heart out for him. He just sat there, running a hand over his face and breathing out deeply. Was she an idiot for telling him those things? What if she just ruined the special friendship they had? She tried to tell him to forget about what she said, that they could just be friends. As stupid and childish as she felt, she didn't care, the feelings he caused her to have were nothing she could just blow off. He looked at her after she said that and told her they would always be friends, forever. And then he got up, gave her a kiss on the forehead, and walked out of her room and out of her life.

* * * *

He hadn't called her or seen her after that, and for a long time she blamed Kaleb for Adrik leaving. After the years passed, though, her emotions got better, and she was able to date guys and actually enjoy herself. She never told Lana how she felt for Adrik. Lana didn't even know about Adrik, for that matter.

So here she stood, staring at him as he watched her and feeling her anger finally rising to the surface. "Where did you go? You didn't even say goodbye. How could you just leave like that after everything I told you?"

He stood there, a stoic expression on his features. He ran a hand across his face. That spiked her anger up another degree.

“Answer me! I deserve to know, or was I nothing to you?” He winced at her last question, and she felt satisfaction from his reaction. He sat down on the couch and motioned her over to sit down, too. She hesitantly walked over but didn’t sit next to him. She sat down on the leather chair across from him and folded her arms over her chest.

“Kayla.” He said her name in a whisper, and her heart flipped in her chest. It was the same way he said her name all those years ago—right before he left. “I don’t know what to tell you. I can’t explain why I left. All I can say is that it was for the best.”

“Without even a goodbye? I thought we were friends. I poured my heart out to you, laid it on the table, and you all but chopped it up.” She tried to control herself, but her emotions were starting to come crashing back on her. She would not cry, she would not cry. She said the mantra over and over again, willing herself to be strong. She spent too long wondering what happened to him. “Kaleb wouldn’t tell me anything, but I know he knew why you left. Did you leave because of all those things I told you?”

“Oh, Kayla, no, love. You have to understand that if I stayed, I would have just hurt you. You were too young for me, and my life was too complicated. We come from far different backgrounds.”

“Did Kaleb tell you to leave?” She stood up then and placed her hands on her hips. “Well, did he?”

He sighed and nodded.

“And you actually listened to him?”

“Yes and no. Your brother loves you and was only trying to protect you. Believe me when I say if there had been another way, I would have taken it.”

She was hurt and scared, and not ready to go through this heartache again. She couldn’t be friends with him—her feelings were just too strong.

“Well, Adrik, it was really nice to see you again, and I hope our little visit hasn’t complicated your life even more. Maybe I’ll see you around.” She turned and walked toward the elevator but remembered he needed to activate the sensor. “If you wouldn’t mind opening the elevator for me, I’d like to leave now.” She kept her back toward him but heard his footsteps stop behind her. His arm brushed past her as he placed his hand on the sensor. He was so close to her she felt his body heat, and it made her throat go dry. There was a soft click as the elevator opened. She stepped inside and turned back around to stare at him. She pushed the ground button and waited for the door to close.

“Kayla, please know that I did—that I do care for you, so very much.”

She gave a small smile but didn’t say anything, didn’t trust herself to not say something foolish. His sad face was the last thing she saw as the doors closed, leaving her alone with her depressing thoughts.

Chapter Six

Lana followed Aleksei through the back of the club and into an elevator. Once she entered it, she stood in the back and watched as the doors closed. His scent was intoxicating, and being in the small confines with him only intensified the scent. The elevator rose, and she braced her hands on the silver bar going across the middle of the walls. He stood on the other side watching her, his eye half-lidded and desire reflected in their bright blue depths.

“Where are we going again?”

“I have a room off of my office that I use when I can’t make it home. I feel I should have taken you there, but I will be tied up for some time.”

Moisture pooled between her legs at the thought of what they soon would be doing. She knew the experience would be sinful and erotic as hell, and she just hoped she didn’t make a fool of herself with her inexperience. Before she could respond, his large body pressed against her own. The metal pole behind her dug into the small of her back, but the feeling made her hotter. His mouth came down on hers with such force it took the breath right out of her.

His hands roamed her body, cupping her ass and bringing her pelvis flush with his body. She moaned into his mouth and put her hands on his shoulders. He ground his erection into her belly, and her heart rate picked up. He was so thick and long, she could feel the outline through both of their clothing. His tongue danced inside her mouth, smoothing along hers and causing her to moan. She sensuously rubbed her body along his, loving the feel of his hard muscles against her soft curves. The light ding of the elevator

reaching its destination sounded, and she forced herself to pull away. She looked into his face and saw his eyes closed as he rested his head against her forehead.

“Please let me compose myself.”

He took a deep breath and turned to lead her into a lavish apartment. Before she could really look around, he had her on her back on a cool leather couch. His eyes were half-lidded as he stared down at her. The leather was cold and smooth beneath her back, and it cooled her heated body. Her dress rode up to the top of her thighs, and she closed her eyes and groaned at the feel of his erection gently thrusting against her core. She opened her eyes and licked her lips as he slowly bent down and took her mouth in a searing kiss. Before his lips slanted over her, she thought she saw the tip of a very sharp tooth—the tip of a fang.

It must have been a trick of the light because people just didn’t have fangs. She lost the thought as his tongue speared into her mouth and stroked the inside. One of his hands braced against the back of the couch, and the other he placed by her head. His fingers lightly traced her cheek and moved lower to her collarbone. His mouth never stopped the hot kiss he delivered. His hand hesitated right above the swell of her breasts, but she arched her back and moaned when his palm made contact. Her nipples stabbed through the thin material of the dress, and the sensitivity of them was excruciating. Her breasts were not large in any sense, and the fact that his palm seemed to dwarf her breast embarrassed her. She placed her hands on his shoulders and relished the feel of his hand skimming over her breast and to her hip.

He bunched up the rest of her dress and dragged it over her waist to lay at the tops of her breasts. He broke away from the kiss and looked down at her, then ran his palms across her nipples. He pulled the front of her dress down and released the front clasp of her bra. His eyes roamed over her exposed skin, and she flushed in slight embarrassment. What if he didn’t like what he saw or thought her

breasts were too small? She swallowed and watched him as he continued to stare at her body, his hands not making a move to touch her bare skin. He inhaled deeply, and his gaze snapped to her face.

“Vy ochen' krasivy.”

His deep voice strained, and she licked her lips as arousal swam through her. She didn't understand what he said, but the way he looked at her made a fresh flood of cream coat her pussy lips.

“What does that mean?”

His free hand traced the outer top of her thong, and she fought back the urge to moan. “I said you are very beautiful.”

“Wh-what language is that?” She could hardly form the words as his fingertips skimmed over her heated flesh.

“It's Russian, my sweet.” He slowly brought his mouth down to her collarbone and ran his lips along her skin. He ran his tongue down her skin and over the slight swell of her breast, kissing a pathway toward her distended nipple. He looked into her eyes as he swirled his tongue around her nipple and sucked it into his mouth. He alternated between both breasts and slowly brought his hand down across her ribs, over her stomach, and to the top of her panties.

“Tell me you want it, Lana. Tell me to take these off.”

He didn't wait for her to answer, just went back to torturing her breasts and nipples. She stared down as his erotic words caused her vagina to pulse with a need she had never known. She really should have stopped him, but she was so aroused she would have told him to rip them clean off. Her panties were so soaked that they rubbed uncomfortably against her lips. Every time his tongue swiped over the hard point of her nipple, she wanted to grind her vagina into the hard erection that pressed through his pants. He would alternate between sucking her nipple and dipping down to her hip, delivering a gentle kiss to her exposed skin. He kissed the small birthmark by her belly button on more than one occasion. The birthmark always made her feel self-conscious, and she was glad that he paid so much attention to it.

“Take them off of me.” Her eyes grew wide at the growl that came out of him. He gripped the top of her panties and ripped them clean off of her, tossing the fabric to the ground. She would be lying if she said his aggressiveness didn’t turn her on.

“You smell so fucking delicious. I can’t stand it.”

His voice became deeper, and before she realized what he was doing, he was between her thighs with his hands holding them open. His breath brushed across her exposed folds, and she let her thighs open wider of their own accord. The hot touch of his tongue along her engorged clit caused her to throw her head back and moan. It felt so good, so much better than when she touched herself. He ran his tongue in a circular motion, sucking her clit into the hot depths of his mouth before running over it again. He nibbled and teased her labia, twirling his tongue along the opening of her pussy and running it back up to torment her clit. She had her legs as wide as they would go, but even that didn’t feel wide enough. His tongue continued its exploration of her clit as one of his fingers ran in a slow motion around her pussy hole. She wanted, no, needed him to plunge it inside, to end the exquisite torture he was giving her. It was never ending, the pleasure he brought to her body with just a flick of his tongue and a tease of his finger.

He left no part of her untouched, swiping his tongue over her lips, around her center, and making his way back up to her clit. Moans and groans came from his mouth, vibrating off her clit and causing her orgasm to come closer to the surface. His hands had a tight clasp on her thighs, his big body wedged between them. He lifted one of her legs over the back the couch, opening her up even further to his wicked tongue. He continued to suck at her clit, and the tight coil of her climax moved through her body. Her sex blossomed like a dam opening up and getting ready to spill forth. Her wetness flowed out of her core from the tidal wave of pleasure that coursed through her.

“Oh, yes. I think I’m going to come.” She had climaxed plenty of times by herself but had never felt the feeling that washed through her at this moment.

“Come for me, Lana. Fucking come all over my mouth. I want your cream covering my lips.” He continued to suck and lick at her, and just hearing the provocative words he said set her off. Her orgasm tore through her, causing her to thrust her breasts out and groan loudly. He never let up, just kept sucking and licking until her orgasm tapered off. Although she felt sated and relaxed, the orgasm did nothing to stop the arousal still pulsing through her veins. She opened her eyes to stare at him, his glorious body now naked. She didn’t know when took off his clothes, but his shirt and pants now sat on the floor. Her breath caught in her throat at the sight of his hard, muscled body.

He grabbed his cock as she slid her eyes up and down his body. She stared at his erection, eyes wide and heart beating quickly. He was huge, so big she didn’t even know if he would fit inside of her. His hands slid under her back and flipped her over so she straddled him. He leaned against the couch and gripped her naked hips.

“It will fit perfectly. You will feel exquisite when I slide in and out of you. Fuck, you’re beautiful.”

She breathed heavily, loving the dirty way he spoke to her. His cock rubbed along her slick folds, teasing her clit as he slowly thrust his hips up. The flame in her body grew stronger, her desire burning hotter and hotter. She initiated the next kiss, dipping down to meet his firm lips and slipping her tongue inside. He groaned and slid his hands to her ass before slipping one hand further down to rest by her vagina. He brought his other hand to her breast, tweaking and pulling at her hard nipple. His finger didn’t move any closer to her pussy, just sat close to her hole, making her want to thrust onto it. Their moans filled the room, and before she knew it, he scooped her off the couch and carried her to his bedroom.

His smooth and hairless chest felt wonderful against her flesh, and his raging erection moved against the back of her thigh erotically. Her wetness moved down her inner thigh as she thought about him sliding his cock inside of her. She squirmed a little bit, wanting to get out of his hold so she didn't embarrass herself if her juices got on his arm. He entered through a door off to the side and walked into a large bedroom. A king sized four-poster bed sat in the middle of the room, black and red silk adorning it. Small, intricately carved end tables framed each side of the bed, and a small but lavish chandelier hung from the center of the ceiling. A bookshelf lined one entire wall, displaying hundreds of books. A fireplace was situated across from the bookshelf, unlit.

"What a beautiful room." As he set her on the ground, her body slid sensuously against his, his cock tucking into the folds of her vagina and gathering her moisture. "It's so quite up here." She placed her hands on his chest and looked up at him.

"Soundproof flooring and walls." His head dipped down, and he took possession of her mouth as he walked them backward to his bed. "You smell so good, so fucking good."

Lana broke the kiss, panting with her need. She didn't know what had gotten into her, but she was acting so wantonly. Something inside her was drawn to him, like a moth to a flame, and she couldn't help herself. This felt so right.

"I want you to know I don't ever do this."

He raised a dark brow at her statement.

"I mean, I don't randomly go home with men."

His huge, naked form came forward, his impressive erection standing long and hard. She ran her eyes up and down his body again, getting so hot from the view. She licked her lips, her gaze dropping once again to his massive cock.

"There's a connection between us, can't you feel it? We share the same intense attraction for each other, and it's only logical to share it physically."

His deeply accented voice made her vagina tingle and weep with need.

“Your eyes are darker. I thought they were blue.”

He closed his eyes and breathed out roughly. “It’s just the lighting.”

He didn’t look at her face when he finally opened his eyes. He raked his gaze down her naked body, stopping for several suspended moments on her breasts and mound and causing a shiver to skate down her spine. Maybe she should tell him she was a virgin. She didn’t know but decided to just keep that to herself. It’s not like she was saving herself for her wedding night, the opportunity just never happened. He came closer, mere inches from her face, so that she needed to tilt her head back to look into his face. His hands landed on her bare arms, leading her to the bed. He gently pushed her back on the bed and came over her. Her thighs automatically spread to accommodate his large frame. She was so wet and slick, ready to take all of him. He kissed her sweetly as if savoring her. He pulled away the same time his hand made its way toward her core and started to stroke her. His fingers slid up and down her wet lips as they stared at each other.

“You’re so wet and hot for me. Do I make you feel good?”

“Oh, yes. It feels so good.” She breathed out the words, and a grin spread across his face. His mouth made its way down her cheek toward the part of her neck that met her shoulder. He licked and sucked the spot, his teeth gently rasping over her skin. His fingers continued their slow exploration of her before circling around her center and lightly probing. He continued to suck at her skin, becoming more forceful in his motions. It heated her up even more, having him sucking her skin as his fingers brought her pleasure. He slid his finger in a little farther, her wetness making it an easy move.

“You’re so tight and hot. So small down there. I bet when my cock gets inside of you you’ll burn me up.”

His teeth scraped over her skin as his fingers worked faster, inching a little more inside of her. His erection thrust against her thigh, mimicking the act his fingers were doing. His teeth were sharp at her neck, sliding back and forth as he moaned against her skin. She was so close, her orgasm right on the brink of exploding. Just a few more inches into her and faster rhythm and she would go over the edge. She twisted her head to the side, loving the feel of him at her throat. His free hand grabbed her breast, his fingers pinching at her nipple. His teeth scraped along her flesh, and there was a slight sting of pain. The pleasure-pain washed away into an intense sensation that had her back arching off the bed.

He sucked at her neck, his fingers sliding in and out of her body slowly, and that's when his whole body froze. Her orgasm tore through her, and she was vaguely aware of him lurching himself off of her. Her eyes were closed as the last of the most intense orgasms of her life faded away. A deep and dark growl came from somewhere in the room. She sat up, a sleepy and pleasure-filled haze consuming her. Something wet slid down her skin, and she brought her hand up. The spot was tender, the spot Aleksei had been sucking at. She looked at her fingers and saw bright red blood coat them. Was she seeing right? How hard had he been sucking?

She looked around the room and saw Aleksei's large form in the corner. He breathed heavily, his hands in tight fists at his sides. His gaze was locked on her, a look that had her shivering in fear. His eyes were completely black, no white even noticeable. She scrambled back on the bed, her legs scissoring on the silk covers. He didn't take his eyes off of her, just kept staring and growling that inhuman sound.

She stood there naked, his eyes roaming over her naked form. He breathed out, and she stared in horror at the two fangs that touched his lower lip. They were long and sharp, and she involuntarily brought her fingers to the tender spot on the side of her throat. Blood still slowly dripped down her neck, and her heart pounded wildly in her chest.

“Mine.”

She held up her hands in front of her as his distorted, deep voice said that one word with so much possession she thought she would pass out.

Chapter Seven

Luca held the female's hands above her head and pounded into her willing body. His balls slapped at her ass cheeks, making the sound of wet skin against wet skin bounce off his bedroom walls. His release was so close he could taste it. The female Blood Breed whimpered beneath him as she tilted her neck to the side in offering. He couldn't resist the sight, the temptation driving a nail in his throat. Striking fast, he bit through her skin and pierced her jugular. The sweet warmth of her blood filled his mouth and sated his hunger. The female screamed beneath him, reaching her own climax and triggering his own.

He continued to suck, the pleasure from a Blood Breed's bite making sex much more intense. She bucked beneath him, thrusting her pussy on his dick and driving him wild. Taking one last pull from her neck, he rolled off of her and threw his arm over his face.

"Fuck, that was good."

Irena was a good fuck, always willing and never needy. That was why he always chose her over the other females. When they first started their affair, she sometimes wanted to cuddle afterward, but he put a stop to that. He wanted a fast fuck, a warm vein to tap, and he was ready to move on to the next thing.

He lay there, his arm still thrown over his face as he let her blood give him strength. Maybe if he remained quiet enough, she would just leave. Yeah, he was a bastard, but that's why Irena was a good lay. They fucked, and then she left.

The bed shifted beside him, making his half-erect dick move on his thigh. It was wet from their combined juices, and in about an hour

he would be raring to go another round—with another female. She never spoke to him afterward, always just got up and left. Guilt with him came and went, but right now he felt like a real asshole. He sat up and watched as she bent down to pick up her clothes. Her ass was two smooth, round globes, and his hands itched to grab them. She shimmied into her jeans, making his cock grow hard again.

“Do you need to feed?” He spoke to her in their native tongue, Russian. Surprise flickered in her eyes as she turned around with only her jeans on.

“What?”

“Do you need to feed? I took from you, and you must be hungry.”

“Oh.” She slipped her shirt on, her large breasts swaying with her movements. “I fed earlier. I know how you prefer to keep it physical, without any feeding on my part.”

She was right. He didn’t really like the females going at his vein. Like he said, he could be a real bastard, but his reasons were his own. Irena was different, though. They had been going at it for a while now, and even though she never had taken his blood, that didn’t mean he couldn’t offer it. His cell rang, breaking the awkward silence that had descended.

“I have to take this. I’ll look you up later.” He felt like a huge prick for the way he acted, but he knew she had other guys, human and Blood Breed alike. “Hey, Aleksei, what’s doin’?”

“I need you and Milo at my apartment, *now*. No time to drive—*mist* your asses over here.”

His voice was guttural and distorted. Aleksei was always the calm brother, the level-headed one. He never asked Luca to *mist* anywhere and never with someone else. There had to be a major problem.

“What’s wrong?”

“I. Can’t. Control. Myself. Much. Longer.” The words were broken, and then the line went dead.

He got dressed quickly and threw open his bedroom door, shouting Milo’s name. One second he was pulling a black tee over his

head, and the next Milo was in front of him, no shirt on and the fly undone on his jeans.

“What?”

Luca could smell sex and blood all over his brother. “Aleksei needs us now. He wants me to *mist* us to his apartment. Says he can’t control himself for much longer or some shit like that.”

Milo whistled under his breath and buttoned his fly before grabbing the white T-shirt Luca threw at him.

“Where’s Aniya?” They walked side by side as they made their way down the stairs.

“She’s at the club.”

Good. Luca didn’t want their little sister to be alone, and since she was at the club there would be plenty of Breeds to watch over her. “What about the female?”

“She’s not my female. She’s just some Breed that has been after me for a while now. She’ll be asleep for as long as I want her to be.”

Luca sometimes wished he had his brother’s *gift*—the ability to control any being’s consciousness. He could make someone stay asleep for days—weeks, even. Although, his *gift* of *misting* came in handy. He could teleport anywhere he wanted as long as he had already been there. Needless to say, he made sure to travel all over the world. Unfortunately, he could only *mist* himself and one other person at a time.

At the bottom of the stairs, they walked over to the fireplace. Luca tapped on a brick, and a section of the wall opened up to reveal knives and guns of various sizes. They strapped as many weapons on themselves as they could and closed the hidden compartment. They didn’t go anywhere without being strapped. Luca placed a hand on his brother’s shoulder and closed his eyes, picturing Aleksei’s home. The room around them became fuzzy, the image changing into their brother’s apartment. The living room was empty, but he heard two heartbeats through the wall.

They stood outside Aleksei's closed bedroom door and looked at each other before nodding in unison and opening the door in. Aleksei stood in the corner, naked and fully changed into his primal self. His fists clenched and unclenched as his eyesight was trained on the bathroom door. The fast, erratic human heartbeat came from behind the bathroom door, clearly full of fear. Luca inhaled deeply, catching the scent of aroused female and male lust coating the air. His eyes went back to Aleksei as he took in his brother's form again.

His brother's eyes were completely black, and his body was primed and lethal. He could see the sharp tips of his fangs pressed against his bottom lip. Aleksei's lips curled back in a snarl as he braced himself for an attack. Luca turned his head to where Aleksei's gaze was. Milo made his way toward the bathroom door.

"Aleksei, what's going on? Are you okay?" He held his hands in front of him and walked slowly forward. The only time he'd seen a Blood Breed like this was in a time of bloodlust. Was this what was happening to his brother? He didn't know why Aleksei was acting this way over the female in the bathroom. His brother was letting off some serious possessive scents and saturating the air.

"My brother, are you level? Talk to me. Milo, don't move." Luca held a hand up and sensed his brother stop.

Aleksei closed his eyes and shook his head as if trying to clear his mind. "Get her out of here. Now!" Aleksei shook his head again before sinking to his knees. "Luca, you're going to need to hold me. I won't be able to control myself once the bathroom door is open."

Luca had no idea what the hell was going on. He could smell lust and possessiveness in the air mixed with female fear. Had he hurt the female? He could smell the smallest hint of blood, but nothing that would have alerted him to a harmed human. He waved for Milo to go toward the bathroom door as he slowly walked toward Aleksei. His brother didn't resist when he wrapped his arms around him.

* * * *

Milo didn't know what was going on. Aleksei acted crazy, and he could sense the female in the bathroom was scared out of her mind. He walked toward the bathroom. His instincts were to go to the frightened human and see how he could help. Before he even made it five steps, a very possessive and territorial growl erupted from Aleksei.

The room became saturated in a strong scent, a scent that a male let off when he claimed something as his own. He needed to get to the female and get her out because something was definitely wrong with his brother. It was clear Aleksei was going through bloodlust, but there was also something else happening to him. He watched as Luca wrapped his arms around Aleksei and nodded his head. He eased his way slowly toward the bathroom door, trying the handle. He wasn't surprised to find it locked. Aleksei growled again, like a rabid dog, and that strong possession scent blasted through the air.

"Take her to the house and leave her in my room."

He knocked on the door and waited for the female to answer. She whimpered, and a fresh dose of fear shot through the door.

"Can you open the door so I can get you out of here? I won't hurt you. I'm security for the club." He closed his eyes and searched with his *gift* until he sensed the female's mind. She was strong, maybe one of the strongest he had ever come up against. It was going to be a challenge to make her immobile. He concentrated hard and sent waves of calmness to her. Her mind was strong, but it wasn't strong enough to resist him completely. Growls from his brother still came as well as Luca telling him to hurry up. He sent wave after wave of thought into her brain that would make her unconscious. She finally broke down and obeyed his sleep command, her heart rate slowing down as well as her breathing.

"I'm going to open the door now. Can you handle yourself, Alek?" If his brother reacted to the female this strongly with the bathroom door closed, when he opened it and caught her scent full on,

he would go crazy. “Can you hold him long enough for me to get her out and *mist* us back to the house?” His brother nodded once, still straining heavily to keep their brother down.

He took a deep breath and kicked the door open, wood splintering in all directions. He ignored the grunt and growls that came from behind him and walked inside. Her small body was huddled against the bathtub, a black silk sheet covering her body. Her hair was brushed over her shoulder, and he saw the fresh twin puncture marks that marred her neck. He inhaled. Aleksei’s scent covered her and warned him to back off. His brother marked her, letting all others know she was his. Something very strange was going on here, but he would worry about it later once the female was safe and Aleksei had calmed.

“Milo, shit man, get her the fuck out of here. I’m not going to be able to hold him for much longer.”

Luca’s strained voice was loud, and Milo went into action. He picked the small female up and carried her to the entryway of the bedroom.

“Get your fucking hands off her! She’s mine! I’ll rip your fucking arms off!”

Aleksei’s words were distorted and furious. He had never seen his brother act this way before, not even during battle. His bottomless black stare was fixed on the female, and his lips were peeled back, showing his wicked fangs. The sounds coming from him sounded animalistic, and the scent he let off would let any Blood Breed know she was his. “Alek, what the fuck man?”

“Milo, put her on the bed and come over here to hold him while I *mist* her out of here.”

They switched places quickly, Aleksei going crazy when Milo wrapped his arms around Aleksei’s body.

“Her scent is all over you. I’m going to fucking kill you.”

“Listen to yourself. You’re so fucking gone right now. It’s me, your brother, Milo.” Aleksei’s head snapped toward Luca, menace

pouring off of him. In the next second, Luca and the female were gone, their bodies becoming distorted before disappearing. Aleksei roared in outrage, struggling against his bonds. The last thing Milo heard before his body became nothing was his brother's agonized roar.

Chapter Eight

Aleksei lay on his bedroom floor, naked and shivering. After his brothers took Lana away, he went crazy. His room was destroyed. Everything that had been in his reach was torn and shredded. He wanted to rush over to the mansion and tear their limbs off for daring to take what was his. He willed himself to calm down and quickly got dressed. He took one more look around his room, his sight straying toward the bed where he could still picture Lana lying naked. He shook his head and made his way out of the club and to the garage.

He sat in his Hummer for a moment and took a deep breath, closing his eyes and immediately regretting how he acted. Even though the bloodlust ran strong in his veins, he wasn't worried about turning *Bloodless*—an enemy among all his kind. These rogue males lived off of their bloodlust, killing anything that got in their way. They had once been loved members of the Breed—friends, family, even lovers to members of the Blood Breed. Their lust for blood ruled them, taking what had once been brilliant minds and turning them uncontrollable.

No, Aleksei's bloodlust ran deeper than that. His was for what he just found, or better yet, who he just found. His *Chosen*, his soul mate—the one woman who was born for him alone. The only one who could bring eternal love and happiness to him. When a Blood Breed found their *Chosen*, their life was complete and their soul finally found its match. He kept thinking back to when he tasted her sweet blood and found out the truth that would forever change his life.

* * * *

His cock pressed against her soft thigh, making it burn even hotter. He licked and nibbled at the base of her neck, feeling her strong pulse right below his lips. Just one bite, a little pressure, and her sweet blood would fill his mouth.

His fingers spread her moisture around her pussy, sliding in and out of her tight center. He ran his fingers through her lips, spreading them and wetting them with her cream. Her moans and whimpers fueled his own, making him thrust against her leg. His teeth grazed her neck, and her heart beat faster—her pulse beating erratically under his tongue. He kept a steady rhythm with his fingers in her tight pussy—not going in fully, just teasing her. Her pussy was sopping wet, coating his fingers as her juices made it easy for his fingers to fuck her.

He couldn't hold out any longer, his need to taste her too strong. He opened his mouth, his tongue lapping at the sweetness of her skin. Her muscles clenched around his fingers as his fangs pierced her tender flesh. Her climax ripped through her, gripping him in a stranglehold. He could taste her pleasure and let it wash through his own body. Her blood was the sweetest thing he ever tasted, like a drug he was already addicted to. The sweet liquid slipped down his throat as his fingers plunged in a little farther. His eyes snapped open as his fingers came up against a barrier—her innocence. He swallowed another mouthful of her sweet life-giving nectar, and he wrenched himself off of her. As he swallowed her blood, it triggered something in him so primal the change took over him.

His Chosen. She was his. The one woman that was his...

Mine.

The lone word echoed in his head as he stared at her glorious naked form on his bed. Her back was arched, her flushed breasts pushed up as her climax continued to course through her. Everything inside of him screamed for him to claim her, mate her, and make her irrevocably his for all eternity.

She looked at him, fear taking over the pleasure filled-expression she had. His hands landed on the cool wall, and he could only imagine what he looked like to her. She scrambled off the bed, her beautiful body making him go crazier with lust. He was doing everything in his willpower to control himself, to not take her right here on the floor. His primal side, the one that was pure instinct, fought with his better judgment for supremacy.

She held up her hands in surrender, and his heart clenched in regret. He was the cause of her fear, and it tore him up. He knew he looked like a monster. His eyes were no longer blue but black and bottomless. His body was taller and bigger, and his fangs pressed against his bottom lip. His voice was no longer his but more distorted, animalistic.

Her blue eyes were wide with fear, and her heart beat an erratic rhythm. He told her to go to the bathroom and lock it. He knew he would never harm her, could never harm her, but he couldn't control himself completely right now. She wrapped herself in a sheet and ran toward the bathroom, and when he heard the door lock, relief had his shoulders shagging. A door wouldn't stop him if he really wanted in, but it blocked off some of her mouthwatering scent. It took all his willpower to pick up the phone and call his brother.

* * * *

He pulled up to the front of the home he shared with his siblings and turned the Hummer off. He sat in silence for a minute, getting himself under control and ready for who he was about to face.

Lana.

He didn't doubt she would want to run screaming from him, but he could not allow that—could never allow that to happen. His hands clenched tightly on the steering wheel, and he looked at his home. The house was built into the side of a mountain, hidden by the towering evergreens and pines.

His fangs hadn't descended fully, the idea of claiming his *Chosen* still fresh in his brain. He got out of the car and walked up the stone steps that led to the front door. He closed his eyes and closed his fingers around the doorknob. His body was already pulsing with need. He knew what waited just behind the door, and it wouldn't be controlled much longer. His mind was screaming at him.

Claim her.

Take her.

Make her yours.

He opened the door and walked inside, knowing instantly where Lana was. Her blood ran in his veins now, and because of that, he could find her anywhere. He shut the door and walked toward her, his destiny.

* * * *

Lana floated in and out of unconsciousness, a pleasure-filled sleep with erotic dreams of touching and kissing. She wanted to open her eyes, but she didn't have the strength. Her arms and legs were like weights, and movement seemed impossible. She could hear sounds close by, deep voices arguing with each other in a language she couldn't understand. One of them sounded familiar and sent desire through her. She concentrated on that one voice, trying to place where she heard it before. She became a little more awake and tried to open her eyes, but she still didn't have the strength. He was the one who made her feel such desire, such heated arousal. The noises drifted off, and she idly thought she dreamt them.

As the sounds drifted away, the weight that held her body in place dissipated, and now she had the strength to open her eyes. She lay on her back, the room lightly lit and a crackling sound bouncing off the walls. She sat up, her head still a little foggy as she looked around. A fire was lit in front of her, the flames licking wildly through the wood. She sat atop a massive bed with silk sheets spread across her. She ran

her hand over the smooth material, a spark of recognition about silk sheets stabbing through her mind. An image flashed through in front of her eyes—her lying on silk sheets and intense pleasure washing through her. She flushed at the vivid images, but no matter how hard she tried, she didn't know where those images came from.

"A fire is truly beautiful, is it not? The bright flames dancing along the wood as if it's starving."

She looked toward the shadowed corner where the feminine, accented voice came from. The woman sat in a chair, the fire light dancing over her small body. Curls bounced around her face, framing large, bright blue eyes that struck some kind of remembrance to Lana. A face came to her mind—masculine and with the same blue eyes.

"Do I know you? Where am I?"

"I'm surprised Milo's hold is no longer keeping you asleep." She tapped her finger against her lip and smiled. "Don't worry, your memory will come back shortly. Sooner than any others. Very interesting."

"What are you talking about? Where am I, and who are you?"

"My name is Aniya. You are at our home, my brothers' and mine, that is." She stood and walked toward Lana.

"Why am I here?" Images flashed through her mind, broken pictures and words that didn't make any sense. A large, muscular body, black eyes...fangs. The image of those teeth stood out in her mind, her brain screaming that this one image was vital. She absently touched the side of her neck, the spot tender under her fingers. She looked down and saw herself dressed in clothes that weren't her own.

"I hope you don't mind, but we're about the same size, and I didn't think he wanted you to stay naked." She walked toward the door and grasped the handle as if she were about to leave.

"Wait! Where are you going? Please don't leave me here." Panic swelled inside of her. Even though she didn't know this woman, she somehow felt calmer being around her.

"My brother will be in soon and explain everything to you."

“Please wait! You’re just going to leave me here? Tell me what’s going on.”

She turned around, the smile on her face sad. “Please don’t be so frightened. No one will harm you here.” She turned and left, shutting the door softly behind her.

Lana’s heart pounded hard in her chest, and her body became hot. She scrambled off the bed and ran toward the door. Deep voices sounded outside of the door, but she couldn’t understand what they were saying. She let go of the handle and looked around the room for another way out. There were no windows in the room and only one other door. She ran toward the other door and opened it. Her heart sank as she stared at a bathroom. She didn’t bother switching a light on, just blindly searched for a weapon of some kind. Besides bars of soap and shampoo, there wasn’t anything she could use as a weapon.

She left the bathroom and searched the room, her heart racing as the door swung open. A man stood on the other side, his body massive and his gaze trained on her. She stared at his face, and all of the suppressed memories, all of the broken words and images she had been trying to sort out, became clear. Everything flashed through her mind like a movie on fast forward, and she gasped. Her fear came back ten-fold, and she twisted her fingers together as he watched her.

“Please don’t hurt me.”

Surprise flashed across his features as well as an emotion she thought was pain.

Just shut up, Lana, you’re going to make the situation worse.

She took a step back as he walked into the room and closed the door. He looked at her for a suspended second before his gaze went to the fire. As he stood there, the fire light danced over him and made him look fierce and dangerous.

“What do you want from me?” She involuntarily touched the side of her neck that tingled and throbbed. Images of their naked bodies intertwined made her flush, arousal slowly burning within her.

“Sweet, sweet, Lana. If only I could make you not fear me.” He turned toward her and looked at her with anguish in his eyes. “But this is my fault, is it not? I am the cause of your fear. The reason you think I am here to harm you.” He shook his head and closed his eyes. “I wish to tell you things, things you will not want to believe, but what I say is the truth.”

He walked closer to the fire and turned his back to her. Through the white shirt, his tattoo was evident. It looked like a cross or something similar, but with the lighting being so poor it was hard to tell. The only thing she could tell for sure was that it covered his entire back.

“Are you Aniya’s brother?” She didn’t know why she even cared. From what she could remember, he was a monster. Again, the image of sharp fangs and black eyes flashed through her mind. She remembered his deep, distorted voice and flinched inwardly. As frightened as she was, she had to wonder why he hadn’t hurt her back at the apartment. Why hadn’t he hurt her when she was unconscious? She touched the side of her neck once more, her vagina becoming instantly wet at the memory of his bite.

“Yes, that is my sister.” He turned around, his face now void of any emotion. “I live here with my three siblings. Luca and the twins, Milo and Aniya.” He held up his hands, palms outward in surrender. “I am the eldest of the four. I am Ale...”

“Aleksei.” The name spilled out of her before she could stop herself. Flashes of them naked together, their limbs moving together, filled her head. She called out his name at the pleasure he brought her. She flushed from the memories and turned her head away from him.

“Please look at me.”

She looked back at him, his blue eyes so intense as he watched her. “Why am I here? I didn’t do anything wrong. I just want to go home. I won’t tell anyone about anything I swear it! I have nothing to give you. Please!” The words were spoken on one breath, but her fear started a slow creep through her again.

What if he's the one who's been killing those women?

"I have never harmed a female in my entire existence!" His voice boomed throughout the room.

She stepped back until she felt the wall behind her. "Please, please don't hurt me." She held her hands out, palms forward. How the hell had he heard her? Had she spoken out loud? No, she didn't think so, but she must have because people couldn't read others' minds. Then again, people didn't turn into fanged monsters. He relaxed immediately, and a look of anguish covered his strong features. He held his hand out as if she should just take it and walk toward him. He took a step forward and then stopped.

"I'm telling you not to fear me, and what do I do? I frighten you." He ran a hand through his short hair and breathed out roughly. "I was not upset with you, please know. I could never be upset with you. I'm just on edge with other things, and that is a touchy subject right now." He walked toward the edge of the bed and sat down, motioning for her to do the same. "Please, would you sit down and relax? I swear on my honor I won't harm you. I just want to explain everything to you."

He sounded sincere, but why should she believe him? She couldn't escape with his body between the door and her. She eyed the bed and sat at the very corner, holding her body at an odd angle. A small smile lit up his face, and he took a deep breath.

"Do you need anything? Water, food, different clothes?"

She shook her head, her fingers twisting together.

"How much do you remember...from earlier?"

"Everything." She barely said the word before she gasped. He was right in front of her the next second, his body blocking the light from the fire. In her haste to put distance between them, she ended up slipping off the bed. Before she made contact with the floor, he scooped her up and set her gently back on the bed.

She sat there, mouth hanging open as their eyes locked. He was inches from her face—his blue eyes boring into hers. Memories of earlier assaulted her again, and she blushed. She licked her lips, his

eyes dropping and watching the act. Her body tingled, every cell in her body alive with desire. She shouldn't be aroused by a man who kidnapped her, but she was...really aroused.

She swallowed as she remembered their intimate time together. His large hairless body pressed against her own, his gentle fingers running over her heated flesh. Warm liquid slid out of her swollen pussy, and she hated herself for her lack of control. What was wrong with her?

She moved farther up on the bed to put distance between them. He inhaled and closed his eyes, a deep rumble coming from him.

"It's hard to control myself when you smell so good."

What the hell was he talking about? Smelled good?

"Before you tell me what's going on, I need to make a phone call." She stared at him, his half-lidded eyes making her hotter. He sat down on the bed, his stare intense and knowing.

"Your cell phone is back at my apartment."

"Don't you have a phone here? I have to let someone know I'm okay."

"This is the safest place for you to be."

"I still want to make a call. Am I a prisoner here?"

He ran a hand over his face and looked at the ground. "Will you let me explain everything to you before you make your call? If after I'm done you still wish to leave, I'll take you home myself."

"I have to let my friends know I'm okay. I came with two of them, and they'll be worried."

"I've already informed Adrik, and he will tell your friends."

"Who the hell is Adrik? No, I want to call them myself!"

"Please, just hear me out first."

She looked up at him and breathed out deeply. This was probably going to be the best he offered, and she didn't want to push him. He could be a psycho for all she knew, probably was since he kidnapped her. She would play along, though, for now. She stared at him, anguish and longing filling his face. Why couldn't she hate this man?

She wanted to hate him so badly her chest hurt, but when he stared at her with those emotions flashing across his features, it made it difficult.

“Okay, start talking.”

Chapter Nine

Kayla stepped out of the club, the chilly night breeze stirring the hair around her face. She stood next to Kaleb as they waited for the valet to bring the truck back. Kayla stayed at the club for several more hours searching for Lana. She never found Lana, and that put her in a panicked state. After she asked several people if they saw her, Adrik showed up. His eyes were downcast, as if he couldn't bear to look at her, and that pissed her off even more. He told her Lana was with the owner of the club and she was fine. Kaleb demanded to know what was going on, and she didn't miss how Adrik's face had gone red with rage. She still didn't know where his anger stemmed from, and it tore her in two.

As the valet pulled Kaleb's truck to the front of the club, she looked back at the club. She didn't feel right about leaving Lana, but Kaleb and Adrik both said she was fine, and she trusted both of them deeply, even if Adrik abandoned her. She hadn't been able to get a hold of her on her phone. What was the point of having a cell if she didn't answer it? Kayla still fumed as she got into the truck and they left the club.

* * * *

"Pl-please don't hurt me."

The human female stared up at him with big gray eyes as tears ran down her cheeks.

"Shh, it's okay. No one's going to hurt you." Lord D looked down at her as she cowered on the floor by his feet. Several of his minions

had been searching for the *prophesied female* and brought back this woman. He knew the *prophesied female* was in Stone Brooke, could feel the underlying power coming off of her. They needed to find her fast, though, before others caught on to what they were doing. He knew the Blood Breed had to have figured out by now what they were doing. Their damn king wasn't an idiot and would catch on sooner or later, especially if they read the local paper.

He stared down at her, crouching down and running his hand over her dark hair. She whimpered and flinched away. "Love, stand up."

"Wh-what?"

"Stand. Up." He emphasized the words, already feeling his nerves running thin. She stood and took a few steps back. He didn't think she would be stupid enough to try and run again, not when his minions stopped her the last time and she saw their fangs and black eyes. "Take everything off."

She whimpered again, looking around as if someone would actually help her.

"You have nothing to fear. No one will harm you. Haven't I already told you that?" His anger started to rise steadily at having to continuously repeat himself. "If you don't remove your clothing, I'll do it myself."

Her eyes grew wide, and fear poured off of her. She was afraid he would rape her. He might be ruthless, a prick and an asshole, but he wasn't a rapist. "Now, *please*, remove your clothing."

When he found out those females had been killed, he was furious. He killed the minions who committed the crimes, not one to condone unjustified killing, especially when they were defenseless humans. He just wanted to find the prized female and be done with it.

The female tentatively removed her clothing, looking around at the males who were leaning against the walls. She cried the whole time, finally getting down to her bra and panties. Her breathing was fast, and her heart pumped erratically. He walked toward her, and she curled into herself. He didn't bother reminding her she wouldn't be

harm, but then again, she had been ripped from her home and thrown in the snake pit, so to speak. He knew they looked like monsters to her. Hell, they were monsters.

He walked around, looking at every piece of her exposed flesh and searching for the key to all of this. He stopped in front of her, grabbed her arms, and pulled them out to the sides. She looked like she was on the verge of passing out but managed to stay upright.

“You don’t have what I’m looking for.” He dropped her hands and called for his minions to come near. She started crying again and wrapped her arms around her stomach. His minions eyed her like she was the prized hen. “You will not touch her! She will be returned to her home the same way she came here. Am I clear?”

His minions stared at him, confusion and a ting of anger resonating off them. Their minds were working, wondering why their horde leader wasn’t letting them feast on the small, weak human. He never condoned the killing of humans, let alone human females who were so much weaker and smaller. As always, they cursed and grumbled but did as he ordered. They knew if they crossed him, the consequences would not be pleasant.

He ushered them out of the room, wanting to be alone with the female. She continued to cry and sank to the floor, her knees pulled to her chest and her head low. He crouched in front of her, and she cried harder. “All will be well, little one.” He stroked her dark hair as she cringed away from him. “What’s your name, beauty?”

She didn’t answer, and he lifted her chin with his finger. “Your name?”

Her eyes were closed, the wetness of her tears making streaks down her skin. She slowly opened her eyes, the blue of them so striking and bright. He continued to stroke her hair as he stared at her. Soon she wouldn’t remember any of this.

She took a deep breath. “Sighla. My name is Sighla.”

“Ahh, Sighla, such a beautiful name.” He placed his hand on her forehead, her skin warm and smooth. He projected pleasing and

calming emotions into her mind, and her body visibly relaxed. Her eyes started to close, and she swayed to the side slightly. He closed his and searched her memories for her time spent here and anyone relating to his kind. He plucked them out of her memory, one by one, until nothing of this encounter would remain.

He gently laid her on the floor and brushed her hair away from her eyes. She was a striking female, beautiful and innocent. It really was too bad he couldn't have enjoyed her a little bit, but he never mixed with the humans in that sense. He liked females that could handle his rougher...appetites.

He stood, walked over to one of the couches, and grabbed a blanket off of it. He wrapped her small body in the throw and called for his minions to return. He reminded them once again she was not to be touched or harmed and ordered them to take her back to where she lived. They were smart enough not to speak or complain about his command because if they had, he would have taken his anger and frustration out on each and every one of them.

* * * *

Lana sat on the bed and waited anxiously for Aleksei to tell her what the hell was going on. She bit her bottom lip and wrung her hands together.

"Well?"

He sat there just staring at her, not moving or speaking. "What do you know about folklore?"

What a strange question to ask. "What does this have to...?"

He held up his hand and cut her off before she could finish.

"Please, just humor me. What do you know specifically about vampires?"

She would have laughed at him if not for the fact that she saw and felt those wicked-looking fangs in his mouth. "I don't know, I guess

as much as anyone else does. I don't sit and read up on it or anything."

If he said he was a vampire, she was making a run for the door. Maybe he was in a cult of blood drinking people who wanted to be vampires. That would explain the teeth, but what about the rest of him? His eyes had been so black, but then again contacts could have achieved that. His body grew bigger and more muscular, but maybe that had just been a trick of her eyes—her body going into shock from fear.

He shook his head and closed his eyes before opening them and staring at her again. "Okay, I'm going to tell you some things that are going to sound unbelievable, but just remember what you saw tonight."

She nodded. The images of his massive body huddled in the corner came rushing through her mind. "Don't even tell me you're a vampire. There are a lot of things that could cause the things I saw tonight." She inched a little closer toward the door. The bed was huge, and her movements didn't seem to do anything except alert him to the fact.

"No, not a vampire...so to speak."

"What do you mean? People aren't vampires."

"You're right, *people* aren't vampires, but Blood Breeds are."

"Blood Breeds? Is that some kind of cult?" Panic swelled inside of her, and she looked toward the closed door. He held his hands up in a gesture of surrender as he inched his body closer to hers.

"Be calm. Let me explain before you jump to those absurd conclusions."

His thickly accented voice did something to her that made her want to do whatever he said. She didn't want to make him angry, so she willed herself to act calm as she thought out an escape route. Just one big lunge and she could make it to the door and run as fast as she could. What would she do once she opened the door, though? Where would she go? She didn't even know where she was.

“Go ahead then.” Her voice was raised, but she made herself appear calm.

“Everything I’m about to tell you will seem like a fairy tale, but it is all the truth, whether you accept it or not.” He ran his hand through his hair and looked down for a minute before bringing his eyes back to hers. “My name is Aleksei Draukowski. I am a Blood Breed of the royal blood line—the King of my kind. My kind originally came from Russia, but as times progressed, families branched out to different countries. We are not too different from your species, although our differences are quite grand.”

“What kind of differences?” She was surprised she was able to sound calm. This was an absurd conversation she was having, and she should be running and screaming in the other direction.

“Well, for instance, we have *gifts* unique to each Blood Breed. Mine, for instance, is that I am able to read minds—able to see a person’s whole existence in a matter of seconds.”

“Can you read my mind?” She didn’t know why, out of everything he told her, that was the one question she wanted to be answered. Of course she didn’t believe him and his absurd story, but curiosity caught the better of her.

“Just snippets here and there, but I really have to be focusing to hear your thoughts, and even then I can’t always pick them up.”

“Huh, what else?” She sounded sarcastic. It was clear in her voice even if she hadn’t meant for him to hear. He looked at her, his face showing that same stoic expression he always held.

“Well, our life spans are immeasurable. We are faster, stronger, and our...diet is different. We require different nutrients to survive. We are not able to tolerate sunlight, either.”

“Your diet is different? What do you mean you can’t tolerate sunlight?” Her hand flew to her neck as she waited for him to say what she already suspected.

“We drink blood. It gives us the required nutrients we need for our species to survive. As for the sun, it will kill us on contact.”

“Blood?” She stared at him with shock, and even though she didn’t want to believe what he told her, the small wound on her neck told her otherwise. Forget the whole sunlight thing. He actually talked about drinking blood. People weren’t vampires, and they didn’t drink blood, not sane people, anyway. She was in a room with a crazy man, and she needed to get out right away. He continued talking as if this was all so normal, as if he had these conversations all the time.

“Our appearance alters when our emotions are at their strongest, although an older Blood Breed can control those changes. You saw that earlier.”

He stopped, as if he waited for her to respond. She waved her hand for him to continue, not trusting herself to speak calmly anymore.

“We also have what is called the *Allure*, it’s a *gift* all Blood Breed’s possess. It makes us irresistible to the opposite sex. Once in a lifetime, a female or male is created for a Blood Breed. We call them our *Chosen*. Fate chooses that person to complete us—to combine our lives and hearts together for all eternity.”

Why was he telling her these things? Why would she want to even know? Why was she even allowing him to continue talking about it?

“Lana, you are my *Chosen*. You are the one fate made for me. I have waited my whole life for you to be created.” He shook his head and ran a hand through his hair. “The pull I had toward you didn’t make any sense. I thought it was just my blood lust, but when I had your soft, warm body under mine, and when I sank my fangs into your smooth skin, I knew I had finally found you. You’re mine, Lana, and I can’t let you leave.”

Chapter Ten

Lana didn't wait any longer. His last words confirmed her suspicion that he had no intention of letting her leave. Bolting off the bed, she ran the short distance to the door and wrenched it open. She didn't look back to see if he followed her, just pumped her legs faster.

The stone floor was cold beneath her bare feet, but that just meant freedom. The walls were a blur beside her as she raced away. She didn't know where she was going, but it didn't matter. Lana followed the long hallway as it twisted and started to ascend. She took a chance and looked back, expecting to see him behind her. A wave of relief washed through her at the empty space, and she ran faster. A door came into view, and she breathed a sigh of relief. Jerking the door open, she ran up the stone steps on the other side.

Her heart raced, and a light sheen of sweat coated her body. A large wooden door stood at the top of the stairs and she smiled. Why was he letting her go so easily? Why wasn't he following her? There was no time to contemplate the *whys*. She just needed to escape.

Stopping at the top of the stairs, she tried to make her breathing less erratic and pressed her ear to the door. She strained to hear any kind of sound, but either she was in the clear or the door was too thick for her to hear anything. Taking a deep breath, she gripped the handle and slowly pushed it open a crack.

Peering through the small opening, she saw an ornately decorated sitting room with leather furniture, a big screen television, and a bar off to the side. Not hearing anything, she pushed the door open farther and stepped through it. Shutting the door quietly behind her, she crept over the thick rug. She looked around the room in search of a phone

but couldn't find one. Stepping into a small hallway off of the room, she peered around the corner.

The room was lavish and expensive in taste, with antiques littering every available space. The hallway branched into a foyer with closed doors lining the walls. The faint sound of music caught her attention, and she crept toward the sound. As the music got louder, she stopped at the door it seemed to come from. The door was slightly ajar, and when she looked inside, she was assaulted with the color black. Everything from the walls and floor to the fixtures and furniture was black.

Her eyes widened as a woman stood naked in the center of the room, her arms tied above her head and a blindfold covering her eyes. A heavily muscled man walked in front of her, nothing covering him except a pair of loose, faded jeans. His hair was as dark as the room and fell to his shoulders. His chest was bare and smooth, a dark line of hair going from his belly button and disappearing below his jeans. He looked similar to Aleksei in so many ways there was no doubt in her mind they were related.

She would have thought the woman was a victim, kidnapped just like her, if not for the fact that she moaned and thrust her large breasts out at his touch. He spoke to her in a strange language, which made the woman moan and thrust her chest out. He caressed her breasts so gently that his next move had Lana gasping. He walked behind the woman, his hands palming her breasts as he ran his fangs over her exposed neck. Twin rivulets of blood spilled out from his mouth and ran down her neck and over her breasts. The woman moaned loudly, the music not able to mask her sound of ecstasy. Her head was thrown back, her fangs prominent in her mouth.

Lana covered her mouth to stifle the scream welling in her throat and stepped away from the door. She turned around and ran into a very hard chest. Her hand still covered her mouth as she looked up into a masculine face. The man in front of her looked down at her with dark eyes, a smile covering his lips. Twin fangs protruded from

his mouth, huge and deadly in their appearance. His hands wrapped around her upper arms, steadying her, but not stopping the tremors wracking her body.

"I see you've found your way out." His gaze ran up and down her body as tears stung her eyes. "Why Aleksei would let you leave, I haven't the faintest. I, myself, would have had you so exhausted you wouldn't have been able to move." He licked his lips and inhaled deeply. "You smell so sweet, too."

She felt sick and on the verge of passing out. She reared her leg back, on the verge of kicking this man where it counted. Before she could actually do it, a deep and very familiar voice spoke.

Aleksei stood several feet away with a look of pure menace on his face. He spoke his words quickly and roughly in the same language she heard several times tonight. His voice sent reassurance through her, and she didn't want to think too deeply into that. She felt calmer knowing he was there, and that scared her. She looked at him as he continued to speak fast, angry words to the man holding her. As she watched Aleksei, his eyes turned from a beautiful bright blue to piercing black. The black spread like an ink stain, covering even the white of his eye. The man still held on to her arms, a sharp intake of breath coming from him as he stared at her. He immediately let go of her arms and stepped back.

"I'm sorry, my brother's *Chosen*." He bowed his head and walked briskly out of the room, leaving her alone with the man she ran from.

A noise sounded behind her, and she turned around. The man with the black shoulder-length hair stood by his open door, his chest bare and the front button of his jeans undone. He smiled a knowing smile, bowed his head also, and shut the door.

The feelings washing through her confused her and made her dizzy. She had no idea what happened—had no idea what was even going on. The room started to spin, the walls twisting and turning as she fell back. Before she hit the ground, strong arms caught her and swept her off her feet.

She stared, dazed and confused, into Aleksei's face. She should have been frightened, but it was hard to feel those emotions when so many other ones rushed through her. As hard as she tried to hate him, to run from him and avoid him, it all seemed so fruitless when she was this close to him.

His scent enveloped her, went through each of her senses until she was intoxicated. She didn't know what he said to that man, but whatever it was saved her from the fate she had been about to receive. She couldn't deny the relief she felt when she saw him. At that moment, something inside of her turned on, a recognition she could rationalize or understand.

It was a strange realization, but at that moment, she knew the man holding her would never hurt her, could never hurt her. She allowed herself to close her eyes and rest her head on his shoulder, letting a blanket of security wash over her. Something was definitely wrong with her, but how could she fight it when it felt so right? Could she really believe everything he told her? Was this man, the one who cradled her so gently and protectively, really a vampire of myth and lore? She couldn't deny everything she saw thus far was very, very real.

* * * *

She sat naked in the dark, the room pleasantly warm. She looked around, a dim light brightening the darkness and illuminating everything. She sat alone, but she was frightened. She looked down and stared at her birthmark, the mark she always hated. She traced the outer edge, her eyes growing wide as her belly swelled right under her hand. It slowly bulged out, not stopping until she could no longer see her feet. She stood up, her heart racing as she ran her hands over the mound.

Strong jabs thrust through her stomach and against her palms. She couldn't ever remember having a dream about being pregnant, but this

was defiantly one of those. In the next second she was fully clothed, and her stomach was flat again. A force threw her against the wall, and her breath gushed out of her. Fear consumed her as a door appeared in front of her and opened. A large figure stood on the other side, the shadows covering him completely. He didn't speak as he pressed their hand over her birthmark. It became warm and then hot under their hand, not easing up, just becoming hotter and hotter. She screamed, fire racing through her body until all she could feel was the heat.

She sat up, breathing heavily and clutching her stomach. She pulled her shirt up and ran her hands over her birthmark. The heat felt so real, like her flesh was actually peeling from her body.

"What's wrong?"

She heard the voice, but her mind didn't comprehend who spoke. A light sweat coated her body as she continued to run her hand over her stomach. A finger lifted her chin up, and she looked into worried blue eyes. She stared at his face, the same face that saved her, the same face that was with her now. She breathed a sigh of relief and wrapped her arms around his neck, burying her head against his chest. His body was tense, but he soon relaxed and rubbed her back in soothing circles.

"It was so horrible." She whispered the words, her tears covering his shirt and making it wet.

She didn't feel embarrassed, although maybe she should have. She didn't know why she was turning to Aleksei for comfort when just earlier she ran from him, but here she was doing just that. Whether he told her the truth or not, he hadn't hurt her. In fact, he saved her. As he held her, warmth blossomed within her, branching out to reach every cell in her body.

She could still feel the dream like it was a living, breathing entity. Her screams echoed in her head, and the terror she felt still encompassed her. She stared up at him, her tears wet against her cheek as he wiped them away. His eyes dropped down to her lips, his

breathing picking up as they stayed intimately close. His head slowly lowered, and she knew what was about to come. She should have stopped him, but there was something about this man that made all logic and reason go out the window.

“Ty nuzshna mne bolshe vsevo na svete.”

He was so close to her that his warmth surrounded her. She closed her eyes and took a deep, steady breath. “What does that mean?” The words were whispered, their breathing mingling together.

“You’ll think I’m crazy.” He rested his forehead against hers and closed his eyes. His hand cradled her cheek, his thumb gently rubbing back and forth.

“Please, tell me. It sounded so beautiful.”

His hand moved down to her neck, his thumb now running over her pulse. Her skin tingled with awareness, anticipation dancing through her veins at the feel of his hand there. The night’s events changed so rapidly it made her dizzy. At that exact moment, she wanted nothing more than to be with Aleksei in every sense of the word.

“It means I need you more than anything else in this world.” His lips took possession of hers, his tongue sliding over the seam of her lips and tempting them open.

The kiss started out strong and fierce, but he slowed the pace to a more sensual caress. His lips pressed against hers as his tongue swept across the seam of her lips. Their tongues slid together, hot and moist, making her vagina pulse with need. His hand moved down to her hip, his palm gently squeezing as his other hand caressed the side of her neck. Their heads tilted to the side as their mouths worked feverishly together. Their combined moans saturated the room, the sounds making her pussy weep and clench. He pulled away and buried his face against the crook of her neck. His breathing was ragged, but then again so was hers.

“We should stop.”

She weaved her fingers through his short strands, tilting her head as he dragged his lips across her skin. His teeth nibbled and teased, his tongue brushing away the pleasure-pain before he started it all over again. The image of his sharp fangs flashed in her mind, but instead of fear, it had moisture pooling between her legs.

“Ahh, what you must be thinking about to get so aroused. I can smell your sweet cream, and it’s driving me mad.”

His hand moved lower, grasping the edge of her shirt but not pulling it up. Everything he did felt so right, so incredibly right. His mouth left scorching kisses down her collarbone and across her chest. She lifted her arms up as he tore the shirt from her body and tossed it on the floor. She didn’t wear a bra, and her breasts bounced free to his waiting hand. One hand cupped her breast while his thumb flicked across the distended nipple. He slowly made its way down to her other breast, his mouth sucking in the other nipple and gently biting it. She arched her back and moaned as his tongue alternated between her nipples, his teeth lightly tugging on each of them. One of his hands moved across her ribs and down to the waist of her pants. His big body pushed her back on the bed, his hands immediately pulling her pants and panties off. His hand rested above her mound, so teasingly close that she groaned aloud.

“Please, touch me.” She lay there naked and needy under him, his erection evident as it pressed against her thigh.

His lips moved to hers, and they kissed feverishly. Her hands blindly went to his shirt and started unbuttoning it. He ripped his mouth from hers, braced himself on his knees, and tore the shirt off. Buttons flew in every direction as he threw the material across the room. He unbuttoned his jeans and, in a move that seemed unreal, removed them without getting off of her. He wore only a pair of boxers as he covered her body with his again and took possession of her mouth. Her hands skimmed the smooth skin on his shoulders, his muscles bunching and flexing under her palms.

She spread her legs wider as his big body wedged itself flush against hers. His fabric-covered erection rubbed against the wet folds of her sex, making her clit pulse with excitement. His lips moved over hers, his hips thrusting back and forth against her pussy in an erotic motion. She could feel the thick length of him against her core, the defined head mere inches from her opening. His hand worked between their bodies as his thumb found her clit and flicked it back and forth.

“Don’t stop.”

“Trust me, I have no intentions of stopping.”

His hands went the waist of his boxers just as he a knock sounded on the door. He cursed loudly and looked at the door. “Do not open that door!”

He pulled the blanket over her naked body and walked to the door. He quickly slipped his pants on, not bothering to button them all the way. On the other side of the door stood the man she recognized from earlier, the one with the dark, shoulder-length hair. He looked over Aleksei’s shoulder and stared at her. She brought the sheet to her chin and blushed, fully aware she was naked. Aleksei stepped into his view and growled deep in his throat.

“What?”

“You’re needed at the club. Some young males were fighting inside. They are being held, and I think it best if you speak with them since they risked exposure.”

She heard what he said, disappointment filling her at the thought of him leaving. Aleksei cursed, ran his hand through his hair, and turned around to stare at her. She saw disappointment flash in the depths of his blue eyes before he turned back around.

“I’ll meet you there.”

He shut the door and walked back to the bed, sitting on the edge and taking her hand. His thumb ran over her skin, and a tingle of awareness shot through her. He leaned in, cupping her cheek and

bringing his lips down to hers. The kiss was sweet and gentle, nothing rushed but filled with passion.

"I'm sorry, I have to go." He rested his forehead against hers. "I wish I could spend all night with you."

"Me, too."

He laughed, but it was humorless, and she knew he was just as disappointed as she was. He kissed her on the forehead before getting up and grabbing a shirt out of his closet. His muscles bunched and flexed as he pulled the shirt over his head—the sight making her shift uncomfortably with desire. "Who was that man?"

"Milo, my brother. I'll be back as soon as I can. Anything you need is at your disposal. I'll leave you my cell phone so you can call whomever you need. The club's number is programmed into the phone, so you can call me if you need anything." He looked at her for a suspended moment, smiled, and walked over to the door. Milo stood on the other side leaning against the wall, a look of impatience covering his features. The door shut, leaving her alone with only the sound of the fire crackling to break the silence.

She rested against the plush pillows and watched the fire. She could have tried her escape again, but she really had no desire to, not with the conflicting emotions bombarding her senses. Her feelings for Aleksei confused her, and the intensity of them scared her. They didn't make sense, with no rhythm or reason as to why she felt so connected to him, why she felt this was where she belonged.

She thought about everything he said about being his *Chosen* and if it could really be true. Could it? She grew up thinking fairy tales were just that, fairy tales. Now there was this man, this *vampire*, who told her things that sounded insane and unbelievable, but could they all be true? She continued to watch the fire, her eyes growing heavy and her body relaxing. She closed her eyes, letting the weight of sleep consume her.

Chapter Eleven

Lana woke to the delicious feel of a mouth licking up and down her body. Fingers plucked at her nipples, a tongue replacing them with hot wetness. She was either dreaming, or she was getting an incredible wake-up call. She raised her hands above her head and opened her eyes. Aleksei's dark head was bent, his mouth working feverishly against her breasts.

"Mmm, I like your wake-up method."

His deep chuckle spread through her pussy, and she opened her legs in invitation. He made his way up her body and brought his mouth down on hers. He grabbed her wrists, holding them above her head as his other one massaged her breasts. Their kiss became frantic, his hand moving from her breasts down to her already wet pussy. His fingers slid through her slick folds, parting them before moving up to tease her clit. She moaned as he gently pinched and tweaked at her engorged clit. His thumb worked quickly against her flesh, her orgasm moving swiftly through her body. She broke the kiss and tilted her head back, her eyes closed as her climax peaked.

"Oh, yes."

He kissed her neck as white hot pleasure tore through her, leaving her shaken and weak.

He moved down her body until he was between her spread thighs. His mouth immediately sucked on her clit before letting it pop out of his mouth and spearing his tongue into her still clenching hole. His hot breath fanned across her bare flesh as he thrust his tongue in and out of her. He lifted her legs until they rested on his shoulders and moved back up to her clit. He sucked her pulsating clit as he teased

her opening.

She arched her hips, needing more for what he gave her. She was close to another orgasm, and as it was about to explode within her, he stopped and moved up her body. He took possession of her mouth, the taste of her sex thick in her mouth as their tongues dueled. They removed their clothing, never breaking the kiss until their bare skin rubbed together. Her hands gripped his hair as she thrust her hips into his. The hard length of his cock rubbed along her saturated folds as she moved her hips below his. She broke the kiss, both of their breathing ragged.

“Wait.”

He looked down at her, his eyes closed and his jaw tense. “We don’t have to go any further, my sweet. Let me just control myself.”

He rolled off of her, and she immediately felt the cold air from the loss of his big body. She looked over at him, his eyes closed, his breathing still fast. She smiled, not about to explain she didn’t want to stop what they were doing. She just wanted to taste him, to feel his thick cock inside of her mouth. She sat up and stared at his body, the muscles of his abdomen rolling his under his skin. His erection strained against his stomach, the tip going past his belly button and making her swallow. He was huge, longer and thicker than she actually thought was possible. The head of his cock was an angry red, pre-cum seeping out the slit and dripping down the length.

She licked her lips, her eyes going to his face as she moved closer. His eyes were still closed as she moved her mouth inches from the head of his erection. She tentatively ran her tongue over the seeping slit, and a pleasure-filled gasp escaping him. She watched his reaction, his eyes snapping open and watching her as she ran her tongue around the tip. She had never done this before and hoped she was doing it right. His muscles bunched tight, his whole body tense as she licked down the length of him, the veins under the skin raised and pulsing.

“Fuck, baby, you don’t have to do this.”

“I want to. You taste good.” She whispered the words against his flesh, a moan sounding above her as she ran her hand across his heavy sack. She grabbed his balls, the weight substantial in her palm. He was huge everywhere, every part of his massive body straining as she rolled the twin weights in her hand.

“Fuck, that feels good.”

She pulled back and looked at the flushed head of his cock, swallowing thickly as she kissed the tip. He was salty and masculine, the translucent liquid coating her lips and tasting oh, so good. His flavor dripped down her throat, inflaming her arousal as she sucked just the tip of him into her mouth. His hips pushed up gently, and she opened her mouth wider, taking in the full, wide head.

He groaned and praised her, his hips thrusting up slightly. She could only get half of his massive length in her mouth and gripped the rest with her hand. She moved her lips up as her hand worked down. Soon her actions were in sync as he groaned and growled above her. His hands gripped her hair, his fingers spearing through and pulling slightly. The sting felt good, really good, and she moaned against his flesh.

“Stop, baby, oh fuck.”

He tried to pull her away, but the taste of him was too good, and she worked her mouth and hand faster. He growled loudly, the sound deep and rough. At the last moment, he pulled away from her, his semen coming out of him in white ribbons. He stared down at her, his mouth slightly open as he breathed heavily. His fangs were evident as they pressed against his bottom lip. It turned her on—made her clit pulse and her vagina clench in need of his big cock thrusting inside of her. He was so fast that in the next second he had her on her back with her legs spread wide. He reached over and opened the bedside table drawer, pulling out a condom and slipping it on so quickly it was a blur. He had the head of his erection pressed at the entrance of her pussy, and she gasped.

“Do you want me here?”

He moved his hips forward until the tip lodged inside. It was hot and big, filling her with a sting of pain that made her body light up with desire. She didn't answer—just pushed down so another inch of him slid inside. He closed his eyes, the muscles of his biceps tightening on either side of her head.

“You're so fucking hot and tight. You feel unbelievable.”

His hot breath tickled her neck, his teeth scraping against the skin and making her shiver in awareness. He stretched and filled her, the slight pain feeling wonderful as he worked his cock inside of her inch by agonizingly slow inch. They were both sweating and panting, their bodies sliding together sensuously. He stopped above her and pulled back to look at her.

“Are you ready?”

Her heart beat rapidly as they stared at each other. “I'm scared.” She whispered the words, his brows bunching together slightly.

“Why are you scared, baby? I'd never hurt you intentionally.”

“I know that. It's just, well, I have never done this.” His finger stroked down her cheek, and he bent his head to kiss her softly. He pulled away, but only marginally, their faces mere inches from each other.

“If I could take the pain away, I would. I'll be gentle. I'll make you feel so good, Lana.”

She smiled and brought her head up so their lips met. As they kissed, his hips pulled back, and she knew it was time. She forced herself to relax as he pushed the rest of his length into her. It stung and was slightly uncomfortable, but once he was fully sheathed inside of her he didn't move. He broke the kiss and rested his forehead against hers with his eyes closed. She gripped his biceps tightly, her nails digging into his flesh as the pain slowly went away.

His hips started to move back and forth, slow and gentle, just like he promised. The pain came back slightly, but was immediately replaced with a feeling of incredible pleasure. She gasped as he pushed in and then pulled out. She could feel the flared head of his

erection rubbing along her channel, causing a delicious burn to travel within her.

“Does it hurt? I can stop, baby.”

Concern filled his voice as he stopped his hips and stared down at her. She opened her legs wider and lifted her hips. She twisted her hips, and she gasped at the pleasure the small action caused. His jaw tensed, and his hand landed on her hip, stilling any further movement.

“If it hurts, I want you to tell me.”

“Does it look like it hurts?” She arched her hips again, moaning when his balls moved against her flesh. A growl erupted from his throat as his hips reared back and he slid into her again. His rhythm became quicker, her juices making his cock slide in and out of her easily. Soon, his hips were pistoning into her, the sound of wet sex echoing throughout the room.

“You’re so fucking beautiful.”

His mouth dropped down to her neck, his tongue swiping over the base as his moans vibrated against her skin. She wrapped her legs around his waist and tilted her head to the side, offering what he wanted...what she wanted.

“I could sink my teeth so far into you we would be as one.”

His words added fuel to the fire inside of her, and she moaned. She must be crazy because at that moment, she wanted his bite, wanted to feel his teeth sink into her flesh. Her skin tingled at the image, and she moved her hands to grip his ass. His teeth nibbled at her neck, his tongue licking away the sting. Her nipples beaded up and rubbed against his sweat-covered chest. She was so close, just a second away from going over that she could feel it building within her.

“Oh. My. God.”

* * * *

Aleksei couldn't hold off any longer. Her channel rippled along his cock, her climax so close he could taste it on her skin. His fangs descended, the anticipation of tasting her blood too much to handle. He scraped his fangs down the side of her throat as a moan came out of her on a soft breath.

He pierced her flesh, her blood pouring into his mouth as his hips pumped faster into her willing body. Her pussy gripped his cock, her hot, wet depths driving him mad. Her climax tore through her body, and her back arched off the bed, a moan spilling from her mouth.

He drank deeply from her vein, the endorphins from her orgasm evident in her blood. It drove him mad and had his seed shooting out of him in hard jets.

Her inner muscles clamped around him, and she bit his shoulder, her blunt teeth causing minimal pain, but driving his lust to a fever pitch. Her blood raged inside of him, his instincts roaring out as pleasure consumed him at the idea of finally claiming her. He licked at the wound he made on her neck, licking off every drop of her sweet, sweet, blood.

"Mine." His saliva would help the wound heal, but because she was his *Chosen*, it would never fully disappear. It would let all males of his species know who her mate was and what the consequences would be if they touched her...death.

He pulled out of her slowly, and she whimpered. He kissed her neck, her cheek, and then her full lips. He rolled off of her and pulled her to his side, wrapping the sheet around them in the process.

"Oh, my. That was...incredible."

He smiled against her hair, her breathing already slowing down as sleep overtook her. Incredible wasn't the word he would have used for the emotions bursting through him, for the sharing they just experienced. She was finally his, and whether she fully accepted it or not, he wasn't going to let her go.

Chapter Twelve

Kayla slammed her front door, shut just barely missing Kaleb in the process. It would serve him right for all the shit he had done.

“What’s wrong now?”

“You really don’t want me to answer that.” She turned around, stabbing her finger at him. “On second thought, let’s just get this over with now.”

He raised an eyebrow and crossed his arms. “So talk, then.”

“First of all, how could you think it was all right for Lana to be left with that guy? You made it sound like she was in safe hands when you don’t even know him.”

“As much as I dislike Adrik, I know if he says Lana’s okay, then she is.”

“Since you want to open that can of worms, I want to know what the hell is with you and Adrik.”

He grabbed a beer out of the fridge, ignoring his question as he opened the top and took a long drink. “We aren’t going to go there.” He walked passed her and into his bedroom. He said goodnight before shutting the door.

“Fine, you don’t have to tell me shit, but I bet I can get it out of Adrik.”

That was a lie, and she knew her brother knew it. Adrik was just as stubborn as her brother. Maybe it had to do with a woman they had been fighting over? Kayla pushed that idea right out of her mind as jealousy filled her. She had no right being jealous over a man who wasn’t even hers. She could lie to everyone else, but she couldn’t lie

to herself. She was still in love with him, even if the feelings were only on her side.

She opened the fridge and pulled out the supplies to make a sandwich. She really didn't want to fight with Kaleb, especially since he was only here for a short time. She made two big sandwiches, grabbed a bag of chips, and headed back to Kaleb's room.

She knocked on the door, his music coming through the wood in loud, angry verses. He opened the door, a fierce scowl on his face. He dropped his eyes to the food she carried and breathed out roughly before he smiled. She knew her brother better than anyone, and if there was one way to bring a smile to his face—it was a plate full of food.

* * * *

Lana slowly woke up, her body pleasantly sore in intimate places. She smiled and stretched her arms above her head, the act pulling her muscles and making her wince. It hurt, but it was the best kind of pain she could imagine. She turned her head and saw Aleksei on his stomach, his breathing deep and even. She turned to her side and rested her head on her hand as she took in his glorious form.

His arms were above his head and resting on his pillow. The sheet pooling right below his back left nothing to the imagination. His back was a golden color in the firelight, all muscles and sinew.

Covering his entire back from shoulder to shoulder and to the tip of his spine was an intricately tattooed sword. Swirls and lines made up the sword, with strange letters woven into the blade. Blacks and reds made the tattoo come to life, as if she could reach across his back and take it by the handle.

She traced her fingers along the sword's blade, his skin smooth and flawless. It looked beautiful yet powerful, just like Aleksei. She gasped, now on her back with Aleksei pinning her hands above her head. His pelvis was cradled between her thighs, his already stiff

erection pressing against her clit. His tongue traced the outer shell of her ear, and she breathed out in pleasure. She moved her hips up, rubbing her still sensitized flesh along his. He growled deeply, a sound she was growing to love.

“Show me.”

He looked at her, a little confused, and then understood. His face became a stoic mask, and he rolled off of her. He stared at the ceiling, running his hand through his hair and shaking his head.

“Why won’t you show me? You’ve told me and even...bitten me, but when I voluntarily ask you to show me, you refuse?” Her frustration rose to the surface, but she didn’t care. He started this, and she was going to see it through.

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes as he ran a hand over his face. His muscle bulged and flexed as he pulled himself up and rested against the headboard. “You don’t want to see that. Not really.”

“Don’t tell me what I want to see. I asked you to show me, and if you won’t, then just take me home.” Maybe she sounded childish, but she wouldn’t apologize.

“You don’t really want to see me like that.” His hand traced her cheek, a sad smile covering his lips.

“I do want to see...please.” She threw the last word in there for good measure and hoped he would take the bait.

He sat there for a while and closed his eyes, and she thought he was really going to show her. He opened them a second later, but they were still vivid blue, not the black she prepared herself for.

Right in front of her, his eyes darkened, just like they had in the hallway. Her heart pounded in awe at what he showed her. His breathing grew faster as his mouth opened and his canines grew sharp and long. He still sat against the headboard, and she moved back slightly as the muscles on his body grew bigger and more pronounced. He was huge before, but his muscles now bulged beneath his skin. His breathing hadn’t slowed down, and when he spoke, his voice was deep and distorted.

“Do you fear me now?” He didn’t move, just sat there and watched her with eyes so dark they looked like bottomless pits.

She shook her head and moved closer to him. His body tensed, but she could tell it was from fear of her touching him.

“You don’t frighten me, not anymore, that is. I know you wouldn’t hurt me.” She sat there and stared at him, knowing deep within what he said was the truth—that she just slept with a vampire.

That knowledge alone should have had her screaming and running, but instead she sat in front of him, her hands reaching for him. She ran her hands across his chest, his body still tense and shock still covering his face. Since she met him, he had shown her nothing but kindness and affection. She brought her hand up and slid her fingers down his cheeks. He closed his eyes as she stroked every line of his face, every sharp angle that made up who he was.

They made love after that, not a rushed frenzied mating like before, but a slow exploration of each other’s bodies.

* * * *

Lana woke slowly, the spot next to her empty. She didn’t know how long she slept, but she felt refreshed. She ran her hand across the empty sheet, the fabric cold and unwelcoming. She sat up and brushed the hair out of her face, the fire still going strong. Tingling warmth blossomed on her side, and she looked down. She ran her fingers over her birthmark. The sensation originated from that spot. Confusion filtered through her as she stared at the mark that bothered her so much. The shade was off, a deep cream color that had her knitting her brows.

She went into the bathroom and wet a washcloth under the faucet. She rubbed her birthmark, the color not growing lighter, but her skin becoming red. She threw the rag in the sink and walked back into the room. She noticed an outfit draped across the back of a chair, a note

lying on the cushion. She opened the letter, a smile covering her lips at the masculine scrawl on the thick paper.

My dearest Lana,

I apologize ahead of time for leaving so abruptly, but some important business came up. I hope the clothing is to your satisfaction and that it fits correctly. I have no doubt that you will be beautiful, no matter what you wear. Please wait for me, and I shall be back shortly. If you need anything, I left my phone on the dresser, and my number at the club is programmed into it.

*With all my love,
Aleksei*

She folded the paper, grabbed the clothes, and walked back into the bathroom to take a shower. After her shower, she sat on the edge of the bed and watched the fire. There was no way she was just going to sit in here and wait for him to return. She picked up the phone, staring at the smooth surface, and touched the screen. It was similar to her own touch-screen phone, so she had no problems with figuring out how to work it. She dialed Kayla's number, knowing her friend had to be worried to death about her. Her heart pounded as the phone rang, and she couldn't believe she was actually nervous.

"Hello?"

Kayla's voice was groggy, and Lana wondered what time it even was. "Kayla? It's me." Silence greeted her for a moment, and then Kayla let out a long breath.

"Oh, my God, I have been so worried about you. Where are you? Why are you calling me so late? Is everything okay?"

The words were spoken fast and in one breath, and Lana smiled. "I'm fine. I'm sorry that I woke you up. What time is it?" Shuffling

sounded on the other end as well as a couple of unfeminine grunts from Kayla.

“Sorry, I couldn’t find the light switch. It’s one in the morning. Why didn’t you call me sooner? I was so worried last night and today.”

Had it only been a day since she came here? It seemed unreal, like days passed. “I’m sorry I worried you. I couldn’t get to a phone until now. I just wanted to let you know I was okay.”

“Where are you? Do you need me to pick you up?”

“I’m fine, really. I, uh, I went home with a guy.”

“Yeah, I know. Adrik told us you were with the owner of the club.”

She didn’t ask how Adrik knew that. It wasn’t important, anyway. She didn’t think it was wise to tell Kayla how she originally got here because the situation changed drastically. She wanted to be here now, and that was what mattered, but how was she going to explain to Kayla all the unbelievable things she learned? Should she even tell her? Would she even believe her?

“I just wanted to let you know I was okay and that I’ll call you when I get home.” Silence greeted her, and she wondered if Kayla had hung up. “Hello?”

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

Lana could hear the worry laced in Kayla’s voice and felt bad that she was the cause of it.

“I promise, Kay. Go back to bed, and I’ll call you later, okay? There is a lot to tell you.”

She slipped the phone in her pocket and breathed out. She looked around the room and decided to see the rest of the house. She gripped the handle and pulled the bedroom door, the heavy wood swinging open with ease.

She headed off the same way she had the night before and ended up facing the staircase. She climbed the stairs and opened the door

that led to the lavishly decorated sitting room. Everything was quiet as she made her way out of the sitting room and into the hallway.

The hallway opened up to a large foyer with a crystal chandelier that hung from the cathedral ceiling. Marble and granite covered the floor and walls, and she turned in a big circle as she took in the beauty of it all. Going down one of the three openings branching off of the foyer, she ended up walking into a kitchen. Stainless steel appliances filled the kitchen, and black granite covered the counters and floor. Her stomach chose that moment to growl, and she grabbed a banana from a bowl of fruit on the counter. She sat at one of the barstools and ate the banana in silence, jumping when loud music blasted through the walls. She walked down the hallway and stood in front of a set of huge wooden doors.

She cracked the door open and peeked inside. A studio stood on the other side with mirrors covering the walls and polished pine covering the floor. Classical music played from a large stereo in the corner. She pushed the door open a little wider, afraid of what she might see. A woman danced beautifully, her movements matching the rhythm of the music to perfection. She couldn't remember her name. Anna maybe? No, Anna didn't sound right. Aniya, maybe? Yes, that was it, Aniya.

She wore a light pink leotard and a gauzy black skirt. Her body was slim and graceful as she twirled around to the music. Lana wasn't familiar with ballet, but Aniya did it perfectly. As the music slowly faded away, Aniya finished her dance with a split jump in the air and a soft landing. Her hair was dark, and her eyes were the same bright blue as Aleksei's. As if she read Lana's mind, she looked up and smiled.

"Did you like the dance?"

She nodded, not knowing what to say to the woman in front of her—the *vampire* in front of her. "Very much so. Where did you learn to do that?"

“So long ago it isn’t worth mentioning. Aleksei introduced me to pointe, and ever since then, I’ve done it.” She walked over to a small table and grabbed a bottle of water. “Ballet is very popular in Russia.” She turned off the stereo just as another classical song filled the room.

“Do you dance professionally?”

“No, it’s more of a pastime, really. I used to dance in performances, but that was quite awhile ago.”

She didn’t look older than twenty, but she spoke eloquently and intelligently, as if she were much older.

“Would you like something to drink?”

“No, thank you. Aleksei left, do you happen to know when he’ll be back?”

“Sorry, my dear, I don’t. It’s very hard to tell when he will make an appearance. He comes and goes so frequently.”

She watched Aniya gather her things and walk toward her. Her life changed so dramatically in the last twenty-four hours that it was surreal. She had gone from graduating college to becoming the *Chosen* to a vampire. Well, she did think given the circumstances she was handling everything well. She certainly was handling Aleksei very well. The images that came to mind had her face heating and her brain conjuring up illicit thoughts of the hours prior with him. She hoped Aniya didn’t notice her flushed face. Aniya cleared her throat, and Lana knew the woman noticed.

“Well, enough with that. Shall I show you the house?”

Aniya held her hand out and without a single thought, Lana grabbed it and let the woman lead the way.

Chapter Thirteen

Aleksei sat behind his desk as several of his warriors gathered around. Things needed to be set up on a wider spectrum if they were going to catch the monster who killed the women. As he motioned for the men to come closer, he laid out a map of the whole city. Dimitri and Garrik flanked him on each side, and Nikolai, Adrik, and Damien stood in front of him.

“Okay, here is the outer perimeter of the city.” He ran his finger along the edge of Stone Brooke and continued. “Nikolai and Damien, I want you two to take three other Breeds with you and check it out. Dimitri, Adrik, and Garrik, I want the three of you to take another five Breeds and do a run through of the inner city. I will speak with Aedan and see if he has seen any strange activity in his territory.”

He sat down and opened his desk drawer. He pulled out four Glockes and set them on the table.

“I want to find out what the fuck is going on, and I want to know tonight.” Each male picked up a gun and placed it at the small of their backs. “Go do your thing, boys, and keep me posted.” He would have loved to join them in the little hunt, but right now he had more important things on his mind...Lana

* * * *

“Shit, when did it get so cold?” Dimitri brought the lapels of his coat up around his neck and crossed his arms.

“Quit being a pansy.” Garrik elbowed him in the side, a grunt coming out of Dimitri.

“Both of you shut the fuck up and keep your eyes open.” Adrik walked between the two of them, constantly scanning his surroundings. So far they found a whole lot of nothing. He pulled his cell out and punched in Nikolai’s number. He answered on the first ring.

“Yo.”

“Any news?”

“Nah, I’m juiced for some shit to go down, though.”

“Keep me posted.” Adrik shut his phone and stuffed it back into his pocket. The three of them stuck together as he sent the other five Breeds in different directions. All five checked in to report they hadn’t seen any unusual activity. He looked around, his pulse kicking into overdrive up as he realized where he was.

“The two of you head around to the left and see if you sense anything. I’m going to go over here and see if I can pick anything up.” As the two of them left, he scanned his surroundings quickly and crossed the street.

He was in a small residential area of Stone Brooke—the houses all the same design. He walked briskly down the sidewalk and headed to the back of the house. He slipped behind a thick tree, his body blending into the shadows. He stared at the second story window, the room dark and no movement coming from the other side. He was being a voyeur, yes, but he told himself he was making sure she was safe. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and slowed his respirations and heart rate.

His *gift* was astral projection, and even though this was a really bad idea, he couldn’t stop himself. His body separated into two different beings, his physical form staying by the tree—his other self moving through her window. He stood in Kayla’s room and watched as she slept silently in bed. Her blond hair lay loose around her pillow, the locks framing her beautiful face and making her look ethereal. The sheets bunched around her waist, her legs poking out and causing his lust to spike.

Her legs were long and smooth, and his hands itched to run up the length of them. He could watch her all night. In fact, he did watch her a lot in this form, and he should have felt shameful for the fact. Because Kaleb was gone a lot of the time, Adrik needed to know she was safe. He gave one last, longing look toward her and willed himself back into his body.

* * * *

Lana followed Aniya around the massive house and was surprised to know it was built into the mountainside. Aniya pointed out all of the historical and priceless artifacts that littered the house, some being so old it was unbelievable.

“Do you want to go to the club?”

“Really?”

“Sure, why not? It’s not fun hanging around the house all night.”

They stepped through an open door and into a very feminine bedroom. A large canopy bed sat in the center of the room—white lace trimming the bed. Aniya walked over to a set of double doors and opened them. Behind the doors was a walk-in closet, the shelves and racks filled with clothes and shoes.

“Let me just change, and then we can head out. I’ll have my brothers follow us out there.”

An armoire sat in the corner, the color a deep cherry with delicate engravings in the wood. Beautifully carved shelving was built into one of the walls and filled with Faberge eggs. Track lighting illuminated the eggs, making the jewels encrusted in them shine and cast rainbows. Lana walked over to the eggs and reached out to touch one.

“Beautiful, aren’t they?”

She jumped at the sound of Aniya’s voice behind her. Aniya smiled at her, her jeans and cardigan set casual yet elegant on her

petite body. Her hair was piled high on her head, and small pearl earrings dotted her ear lobes.

“They were my mother’s. Aleksei says she used to shine them with a silk cloth every day. He says she would have wanted me to have them.” Sadness crossed her features as she ran her finger across one of the eggs.

“Did your mother pass?” What a stupid question. Of course her mother had died or she wouldn’t have been talking about her in the past tense. “I’m sorry that was a rude and stupid question.”

“No, it’s okay. My mother and father died when I was an infant, and Aleksei raised us.”

“I’m so sorry.” A smile playing across her lips that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“Enough talk about that, that was so long ago. Shall we go?” She gestured toward the door. “How about we take one of Milo’s cars? They’re pretty fast.”

She admitted she didn’t have the urge to run away again, but that didn’t mean she didn’t want to go back home. Her time with Aleksei had been incredible, but she had a life and a best friend she worried. The club wasn’t too far from her house, and if Aleksei wanted to talk with her then he could go there to speak with her.

They reached the garage, Aniya opening the door and gesturing for her to go inside. Two men leaned against the opposite wall, both of the familiar from earlier. They stopped talking and stared at them, an air of power surrounding both of them.

“Wow, he marked you up good didn’t he?”

“Shut up, Milo, you’re so rude.” Disgust dripped from Aniya’s words as she looked back at Lana with sympathy.

Milo leaned against the wall, popping a piece of gum. The taller one stood next to him, his sight trained on Lana. Both men looked so much like Aleksei she could definitely tell they were brothers. Milo seemed happier of the two men, making her feel more at ease as he smiled.

“What? I’m just stating the obvious. I mean that’s the point, right?”

She looked down at herself, slightly confused. “What are you talking about?”

“Nothing.”

“No, tell me.” They were lucky she wasn’t running at them with a stake in her hand for the shit they pulled earlier. Well, maybe not Milo, but definitely the other one. Did stakes work on them? She didn’t know but would have to remember to ask Aleksei.

“Well,” Milo looked at his brother and sister before he turned back and stared at her, “he marked you.”

“Marked me?” Again, Lana looked down at herself trying to see what they meant.

“On your neck. He marked you on your neck.”

Her hand went up to her neck, her skin instantly tingling under her touch. It was slightly sore in one spot, but the skin felt smooth and unmarred.

“He marked you to let all males know that you’re his, and if they even think about approaching you they are as good as dead.”

“What?” Her voice raised, shock resonating within her. “He marked me like some dog pissing on a tree?”

“I don’t know if I would have used an analogy like that. It’s his way of protecting you.”

She wasn’t some piece of property he could just mark up. Who the hell did he think he was? Everyone was silent for several minutes, and her anger boiled more.

“Where are you guys going?”

“We’re going to the club. We still have a few hours before dawn.” Aniya walked toward a small shelf on the wall and opened it. She plucked off a set of car keys, one of the many that hung from gold hooks. “Aleksei will be there, so it’s not really a big deal.”

“Does Alek know you’re taking her out of the house?”

“Like I said, it’s not a big deal, Luca. Everything will be fine. The two of you can even follow us there if you want.”

Luca, the one who frightened her in the hall earlier, turned his head and looked at her. She squared her shoulders, not about to let a stare rattle her. She made sure to stare at him dead in the eye as she spoke.

“I’m a grown woman and standing right here. If I want to leave this place, then I will, and not even you will stop me.” Aniya and Milo burst out laughing, which embarrassed her. Even Luca had a small smile tugging at his lips.

“Wow. Alek has his hands full with you. I’m going to love watching him try to handle you.”

Milo pushed away from the wall and walked over to the key rack and took a set of keys off. The garage was bare save for a wraparound work area and a few shelves bolted into the walls. Milo pushed a button on the wall, and she heard a ticking noise and then a loud whirling noise. One of the walls opened up in the same fashion a garage door would. On the other side sat several shiny, expensive looking cars.

“Milo, we’ll be taking the Aston.” Aniya walked over to her brothers and kissed them each on the cheek.

Luca watched her the whole time, setting her nerves on edge. There was just something about him that made all of her instincts go on high alert. She stood by the door and watched as Aniya disappeared into the room full of cars. Lights flashed on, and the purr of an engine started. Seconds later, a sleek black car rolled out, Aniya sitting behind the wheel. The vehicle was like nothing she had ever seen before.

“Hop in?” She looked at Lana and then at her brothers. “Well, are you boys following or not?” Both men walked to where the cars were and disappeared into the inky blackness. Once she saw lights flare to life, she hustled over to the passenger side door and slipped in. Cool

leather and smooth suede greeted her back as she rested against the seat. It was only a two-seater but had a lot of room.

“Nice, right?” Aniya pushed a small button attached to the visor and waited until the main garage door opened.

“I’d say so. I’ve never seen a car like this before.”

“Better buckle up.” Aniya pulled out of the garage, the wide driveway coming into view. “This is an Aston Martin Vanquish S V12. It’s Milo’s baby, although he does love his Gumpert.”

“His what?”

“His Gumpert Apollo, the car he’s driving behind us.”

Lana turned in her seat and stared behind her. The car looked like it should be on a race track instead of the streets of Stone Brooke. “It looks like a space craft.”

Aniya laughed, the noise soft and petite. “Yeah, well, don’t go saying that around him. Milo is always ranting and raving about his babies. I, on the other hand, will stick with my little Benz. I don’t know why he’s driving the Gumpert, though. He must be fishing tonight.”

“Fishing? He goes fishing in a car like that?”

Aniya burst out laughing and wiped a stray tear from under her eye. She patted Lana’s hand, and Lana felt her cheeks flush with embarrassment.

“Don’t feel embarrassed. I’m sorry I laughed, really. What I meant was he must be fishing for women.”

“Oh.”

“Milo only brings out the big boys, meaning his cars, when he thinks he’s going to get laid. Although, I thought he already brought someone home tonight.” She brought a perfectly manicured fingernail to her mouth and tapped her lips. “Makes no difference, really. My brother’s appetite for women is insatiable.”

The picture of Aleksei with a harem of women flashed into Lana’s mind. “Does Aleksei fall into that instable appetite category?”

She felt her face become red even before the question was out of her mouth. She quickly turned her head toward the passenger window and watched the trees pass by. In the distance, she could see the lights of Stone Brooke twinkle below. She turned around. The car that had been behind them now gone.

“They took another way.”

She stared at Aniya, the moon’s light illuminating her profile. She also noticed Aniya hadn’t answered her question. She wasn’t going to push it, though. “Aleksei told me that...your kind has special *gifts*. Can you read minds also?”

“All Blood Breeds have their own special *gift*. Aleksei, for instance, can read minds. He can also see a person’s whole life, their memories, their fears, and their desires. I have the ability to read objects, Milo’s ability is pyrokinesis, and Luca is able to *mist*.”

“What’s pyrokinesis and *misting*?”

“Pyrokinesis is the ability to start fires with your mind. That is Milo’s *gift*, which I must say got him in a lot of trouble as a child. Luca can *mist*, which is the ability to...teleport I guess is the right word.”

The car began to accelerate, the trees passing by in a blur. Lana’s heart sped up as she gripped the arm rest.

Lana closed her eyes as Nine Inch Nails suddenly came through the speakers. “How fast are we going?” She opened her eyes and looked at Aniya, a smile covering the woman’s lips.

“Fast.”

Chapter Fourteen

Adrik walked the dark streets, blending into the shadows. Everyone checked in again, but so far no one had gotten into any activity. He walked more toward the city's outer limits, the forest becoming thicker the farther he went. He inhaled, stopping in his tracks as the stench of *Bloodless* filled his senses. They were near, or at least had been in the area very recently. He inhaled deeply again, the scent of a Lyken also in the mix. That didn't make any sense, though, since the Lykens tended to stay within the heavily guarded forest. He grabbed his cell and punched in Aleksei's number.

"Yeah?"

"My lord, I was doing a sweep close to the city limits and scented rogues."

"Do you need back up?"

"No, but that isn't the only thing I sensed. I can also smell a Lyken, a female Lyken to be exact."

"Where are you?"

Adrik gave him his coordinates and hung up, closing his eyes and opening up his senses to his surroundings. He walked slowly and quietly toward the scent of his mortal enemy. He stopped and pressed his body against the cold brick of a building. The *Bloodless* and Lyken scents were especially strong off to the left, which happened to be a darkened alley. He pulled out his gun and stayed with his back against the wall as he rounded the corner and walked slowly forward.

All too soon, he heard low male laughter and a small feminine whimper. He kept to the shadows, hoping his enemy was too occupied to sense him. The closer he got, the stronger the smell of blood

became. The alley was a dead end, and in the center stood three large rogues males. A small female lay in the center of the alley, the males circled around her as they laughed and taunted her. He couldn't believe there was actually a female Lyken without protection from her clan. It was unheard of for them to let their females walk around alone. Her shirt was torn in several places and cuts marred her body.

"Pretty little thing, aren't you?"

"Some would say you're nothing but a dog, but I have to say I rather like the way you look and smell."

"I like when you put up a fight. It'll make you that much sweeter."

They taunted her as they circled her, their elongated nails occasionally slicing through her skin. Stepping out of the shadows, he made his presence known by cocking his gun. "Hey there, boys, lovely night isn't it?"

The female whimpered, the fear pouring off of her.

"It's okay, sweetheart." They moved away from her, their fangs protruding as they hissed. The female slowly moved away but didn't get very far when one of them grabbed a chunk of her long blond hair and lifted her up.

"Just leave now, and we'll spare you, Breed."

"If you kill her, the Lykens will extract vengeance on her and hunt you down. On the other hand, if you leave her, I can make your deaths more merciful than what the Lykens will do."

The three of them laughed, and the one who held her pressed his sharp nail against her throat. Her big green eyes stared at him, pleading him to help her as tears streamed down her cheeks. His vision turned to red, the female in front of him no longer a Lyken, but his precious Kayla. It was Kayla who was being held, and Kayla who cried for his help. Adrik smiled and put his gun at the small of his back. He was going to kill these bastards with his bare hands. His teeth lengthened, and he felt his eyes change as his body primed itself for a fight.

The rogue dug his nail into her flesh and broke her skin, blood making a slow trail down her pale skin. Blood welled up and slid down her throat, disappearing below her shirt. The rogue let out a roar as Adrik charged the one holding her and pried his hands back from her neck. Bones crunched as he bent the rogue's hands at an unnatural angle, causing the bone to tear through the skin. He pushed the female toward the wall and barked the order for her to stay down. In a swift move, he twisted the rogue's neck and snapped the bone in half. A broken neck wouldn't kill a *Bloodless*, but it would render him immobile for a while.

He turned toward the others and saw they took fighters' stances. Charging toward them, Adrik ducked as they both came at him. Sweeping his leg under their feet, he sent them both down to the ground. He bounced back up and slammed his fist into the closest rogue he could touch. Ribs cracked under his blow, and a howl of pain brought a triumphant smile to his face. The other one jumped up and charged him, slamming his fist into Adrik's face. Blood poured into his mouth, and he relished the flavor. Fire burned through his body as he grabbed his enemy by his neck and lifted him.

Smiling at his captive, he made sure to display his elongated fangs. He knew he should keep one alive for questioning, but this one he held wasn't the lucky one. The male struggled in Adrik's grasp. With a flick of his wrist, Adrik broke the rogue's neck and tossed him to the ground. The *Bloodless* would heal before dawn if they weren't disposed of soon. He would have to have one of the boys come out and clean up his mess. Tossing the body to the ground, he was pleased at the lifeless thump it made as it hit the cement.

"Thank you."

The small female voice helped aid him in calming down. The adrenaline still pumped through his veins, Kayla's face still in his mind. He turned and saw her body huddled up against the wall. Her knees were to her chest, and she slowly rocked back and forth. Pulling out his cell, he punched in Garrik's number.

“Where are you?”

He gave his location and hung up before punching in Aleksei’s number.

“Where the fuck are you?”

“Three *Bloodless*, one Lyken female, all still living.” He shut his phone and looked back at the female. The Lykens were going to go ape shit over this, and he hoped he wasn’t around when they were told. A Blood Breed wasn’t afraid of anything, but a fully grown, pissed off Lyken male was one scary motherfucker.

* * * *

Aleksei stood with feet braced apart and arms hanging loosely at his sides. Three *Bloodless* males lay on the dirty, stained ground, none of them moving.

“Adrik, which one hurt the female?” Aleksei was barley containing his anger at the fact that the female still huddled in the corner was scared and injured. Adrik walked over to a badly mangled body on the ground and kicked it.

“Take him to the club and have one of the boys finish off the other two. I want the female taken to my office—I’ll contact her clan.” He walked over to the female and crouched. “What’s your name, little one?”

She brought her red-rimmed eyes up and met his. “Joslyn.” Her small voice was barely a whisper.

“How old are you?” She couldn’t be more than twenty, if that. She was just too tiny and childlike in her features.

“I’m seventeen. Please don’t call my family. They’ll be so angry with me for sneaking off. Look at all of the trouble I’ve gotten into.” She rested her head on her knees and softly started to weep. Her family’s anger was the least of her worries.

“You could have been killed tonight. Do you know what those creatures were?”

She sniffled as she brought her tear-filled eyes up and met his gaze head on. “I know what they are...were. I am forever grateful that you saved me. I will forever be in your debt.”

“Joslyn, this is Adrik. He will take you to my office where you can wait comfortably for your family to arrive. Will that be okay?”

She nodded as she slowly rose and brushed off her pants. Cuts covered her small body, and he gritted his teeth in anger. She slid into the waiting car, turning around and giving him a tortured look before she slipped inside.

“Shit.” He ran a hand over his face and over his hair.

Garrik stepped in front of him and pulled out a sword from behind his back. He nodded once, giving him the all clear to finish up the mess. He dreaded what he was about to do...calling her family...the Lykens.

* * * *

Lana walked behind Milo and Luca as they made their way through the club. The club was bouncing again tonight, bodies grinding against each other to the latest hits.

“Are you hungry?”

It was hard to hear Aniya as she practically yelled over the music. She nodded, the banana she ate earlier doing nothing for her now. They walked over to a set of red carpeted stairs, the huge bouncers in front bowing their heads and stepping to the side. She looked them up and down as she made her way up the stairs—their gazes trained straight ahead, their bodies like statues.

At the top of the stairs, they pushed open two double tinted glass doors. As the doors shut behind her, the music from the club below disappeared. She looked around the posh interior, the scene completely different than the previous floor. Shining stainless steel and black leather were the main décor of the place, along with

elegantly dressed patrons. A willowy blonde slinked over toward Milo, practically rubbing herself all over him.

“Oh, my dear Nadia, how are you this fine evening?” Milo groped the woman, his hands leaving no part of her body untouched. “*Ya skhazshu po tebe s uma.*”

Whatever was happening between the two of them made Lana feel fully out of place and slightly uncomfortable.

“We’ll be back shortly. Go relax and order whatever you like.” Aniya said the words as she and Luca walked off.

She stood there next to Milo but soon excused herself when he started to make out with the woman. She found an empty table and sat down, a waiter coming over immediately. She was hungry, but her stomach had started to grow a little upset. She decided on a light soup and salad, hoping she just needed something substantial in her belly.

As she waited for her food, she thought about her home. She was going to need to go back sooner or later, and she wasn’t about to wait until Aleksei thought it was the right time. Her frustration was starting to mount at the thought of not being able to do what she wanted. As she sat there and thought, her anger and frustration mounted. She ate in silence, her emotions making the food taste bland when she was sure it was fabulous.

“Will you need anything else, miss?”

The waiter didn’t look at her but at her neck. Her face flushed, and she cleared her throat, knowing exactly what he was staring at. She made a point of flipping her hair over her shoulder. His gaze snapped to her face, and a polite smile played on his lips. What was she supposed to do now? She didn’t want to just leave. Well she did, but not without telling anyone, and no one was to be seen. Milo walked off with that woman, and Aniya and Luca hadn’t returned. She signaled the waiter over, deciding she would have a drink while she waited. If everything was “on the house” then she was going to take advantage of it.

“Can you please bring me a drink? A strong drink.”

“Do you have a preference, miss?”

“I don’t really care as long as it’s strong.” She leaned back in her chair and watched the people mill around. They spoke in hushed tones as soft music played overhead. The waiter placed a drink in front of her, but before he could leave she caught his arm. “Keep them coming.”

He stared at her for a second and then nodded.

* * * *

Aleksei paced one of the lower chambers in the club as he waited for the Lykens to show. He kept everyone out patrolling and only brought in Adrik, Dimitri, and Luca. The three Breeds stood against the wall, watching him as they all waited for the Lykens.

The little Lyken female sat in an overstuffed leather chair that seemed to engulf her. He had a Breed female bring her a change of clothes since hers had been torn and covered in blood. She flipped through a fashion magazine, looking up at the door every so often.

He could hear her heart beat quickly, and he could see the beads of sweat that dotted her forehead—yup, she was just as nervous as they all were. She admitted to sneaking off even though she knew the dangers of leaving her clan’s protection. She confessed she just wanted to see the bright lights of the city up close, the ones she always saw from a distance. The Lyken clan was very protective and territorial of their females and rarely did they allow them to travel into the city alone. Aleksei could understand their reasoning, but then again, he had always thought that kind of reasoning seemed a little outdated.

He thought about Lana and how he felt now. He was very territorial and possessive of her, and he knew now that he found his *Chosen* he shared the Lykens’ beliefs about their females. He would do anything to protect her, even if that meant laying down his own

life. He continued to pace back and forth until everyone in the room stopped and stared at the door.

The Lyken female stood, placed the magazine gently on the chair, and gave Aleksei a sympathetic look. She knew her family would be furious she left their protection. When Aleksei told Aedan about what happened, the Lyken leader had been very calm about the whole thing. That alone told Aleksei just how angry he was. If Aleksei had been in this situation with Lana, he didn't know how he would have reacted, but calm would not have been one of his emotions.

The air in the room grew cold and thick as the three Breeds standing against the wall took their fighting stances. Even though the Lykens and the Blood Breeds had a truce, the Lykens might consider what happened to their female the Breed's fault. Rogues attacked *their* female, and since *Bloodless* had once been Blood Breeds, in the eyes of the Lykens, they were one and the same.

The handle turned, and the door opened—five huge, pissed off Lykens walking through. He knew each one of them, and none of them looked pleased, least of all the small Lyken female's brother, Liyam. Aedan stood in front with Liyam and Callum flanking his sides, Deacon and Roan standing behind him. All five Lykens stood nearly seven feet tall, their muscle mass rivaling the Breeds'.

"Where is *it*?" Aedan spoke low, his voice laced with menace and thick with anger.

"He's in a holding cell a level below us."

"Have you been hurt, lass?" Aedan spoke to Joslyn, his Scottish accent thick and heavy.

She shook her head, keeping her gaze to the ground and her arms behind her back. Liyam walked toward her and lifted her chin with one of his large fingers. "You donna' have to worry anymore. Ye're safe."

"I kno' I am. I'm sorry I left the safety of the clan."

"Donna fret, lass."

“The boys and I are gonna want see *it*.” Aedan walked up and stood next to Liyam, both males’ eyes scanning her body for any injuries.

Aleksei nodded without any hesitation, knowing the Lykens would get any information out of the male as easily as they could. He looked back over at Liyam and saw his hands clenching and unclenching. His jaw was locked tight, and a tick worked under the skin. He had to be going through hell with the knowledge that his younger sister had almost been killed.

Adrik and Dimitri left to show the Lykens where he was being held. This whole ordeal made Aleksei want to see Lana that much more—to make sure she was safe. He received a message from his sister saying they were taking her to the club. As much as he wanted her safe at his home, he knew his family would protect her.

He left Luca and Joslyn, needing to see Lana now. He took the stairs two at a time, every thought in his mind about his *Chosen*. He needed to be with her more than he needed to feed, and that necessity was coming up fast. He fed from her lightly when they made love and when he finally claimed her, but he feared hurting her, so he hadn’t taken enough to quench his hunger. He would never get enough of her, and if he had to use his last breath to accomplish it, he would make sure she felt the same way about him.

* * * *

Adrik leaned against the wall, his arms crossed over his chest as he watched the five Lykens circle the male. The rouge was beaten and bloody by the Lykens’ fists, but now he just sat unmoving, laughing as the Lykens questioned him.

“Who sent you to harm our female?” Aedan asked the question as he crouched and stared at him.

Humans called them werewolves, but in truth, a Lyken never turned into a wolf or anything that resembled one. When they changed, it was into a form that was a frightening sight.

Adrik only saw it once when he had been a fledgling, but it was something he would never forget. He went out into the woods with a few other fledglings, practicing hunting and tracking, when they stumbled across two Lykens fighting. A female leaned against a tree, her body completely naked as she watched with a smile. The two males stood facing each other, their bodies priming for a fight.

He always heard about the Lyken males fighting each other in order to claim a female they wanted, but he never expected it to be like this. The two males started to breathe heavily and their already huge bodies got even bigger. Their muscles grew and swelled to monstrous proportions, and their eyes took on an unnatural pale blue color. Fangs erupted from the top and bottom of their mouths, and claws sprang from their hands.

There, only a short distance away, stood two beings at least eight feet tall, packing on some serious weight and growling at each other. The female obviously liked what she saw because she was panting and started to touch herself. Females Lykens didn't change like their male counterparts did, and she stood several feet back, her body minuscule compared to theirs. Their females were as weak as human females and because of that the males treated them like bone china. The males fought until they were bloody and torn—fought until only one stood. He fucked that female hard, and Adrik and the other fledglings watched the whole thing in awe.

Dirt and pebbles were embedded in the rogue's skin, and he had a crazed look in his eyes. He breathed heavily, his fangs sharp and stained yellow from his continuous bloodlust. When a Blood Breed let their basic instinct to feed rule them, over time their complete make-up changed.

Bloodlust consumed their every waking hour, and soon they became the creature Adrik stared at. They couldn't control the

change, their eyes always staying black, and their bodies perpetually huge. They were slaves to blood. There were some younger Breeds who thought with the right type of treatment the *Bloodless* could be rehabilitated. That was the wishful thinking of mourning members of the Blood Breed who wanted their family and friends back.

The Lykens continued to circle him as they threw one question after the next at him. Their forms changed right before him, and it truly was a frightful sight.

“What do they call you?” Aedan’s voice boomed through the small cell.

He shook his head, his hair moving around his face, the strands matted with dried blood and dirt.

“Fuckin’ tell me!”

“You know if I tell you my leader will kill me.”

“If you donna tell me, I’ll make sure you die a verra slow death. Tell me want I want to kno’ and I will make it quick and painless.”

He stared up at Aedan, one of his eyes swollen shut and his lip split on the side. He sighed and hung his head before speaking. “Do you swear to make it quick?”

He cracked sooner than Adrik anticipated. Aedan looked around at his clan before smiling and nodding.

“I am called Zechariah. I was sent out with the others to search for a woman who bears the mark.”

“What do you mean bears the mark?”

“I’m new in my horde and do not get all the classified details others receive. All I was told was that we were to hunt and bring back a female who matches his description.”

“And what of this description?”

He brought his bloodied face up and stared at Adrik. “I was told to bring back a female with dark hair and light eyes and who bears the mark.”

Adrik inhaled sharply, never taking his eyes off their prisoner. “Mark?”

“Yes, the mark of a crescent moon within a circle on her skin. *The Prophesied Female*, to be exact.”

Adrik needed more information, and he was going to damn sure get it out of this asshole. “Tell me everything.” He pulled up a chair and planted it right in front of the male, ignoring the looks and snarls from the Lykens. They would get their chance, but right now. If what he was hearing was true, then everyone’s world was about to change.

“I was told by my comrades that the female being sought was truly a rare prize.”

A rare prize, indeed. Adrik couldn’t agree more. *The Prophesied Female* was said to bear a mark letting all know she would carry their future leader. It was said through ancient scrolls and through a prophecy written by none other than Aleksei’s father, their former king, that the child born from this female would rule over all beings of the *Otherworld*. He thought back to the scroll they read regarding this exact revelation.

Hair of dark, eye of light, the seed she will carry, the child of the night. The crescent sun is where he shall be born, good and evil, two sides shall be torn. To be the great, much power he will hold, a king to rule all others is what shall be foretold.

He had to get to Aleksei and let him know what they suspected had just been confirmed. Everything was verified now, and all hell was going to break loose if their enemies captured *The Prophesied Female* and used her for their own gain. The Lykens stared at him in confusion as he pushed his chair back and made his way toward the door.

“Where are you goin’?” Aedan stood at stared at him, a sadistic gleam in his eyes. Adrik knew the Lyken leader was more than happy to see him go so he could really start their questioning. He knew the Lykens were not going to give him a quick death, not after he attacked one of their own. He needed to reach Aleksei fast and let him know what he found out. The Lykens knew nothing of their history or

any prophecies that had been foretold. He wasn't about to clue them in on what was going on until he spoke with his king.

"Later." Adrik closed the door behind him and bounded up the stairs two at a time, reaching in his pocket for his cell. Just as he was about to dial Aleksei's number, he heard the scream of the *Bloodless* as the Lykens finally gave him his "quick" death.

Chapter Fifteen

Aleksei tried to wait patiently in the elevator as it made its way up to the VIP suite. His body was on fire at just the thought of Lana. His cock pressed insistently against his pants, and he brought his hand down to adjust himself. He stared at the numbers as they continued to climb. He wanted to see her, smell her, and touch her. Is this how all Breeds felt when they found their *Chosen*? It was hell, like his body wasn't completely together, like a part of his soul was missing. She was still human, and because of that so very fragile compared to his kind. He wouldn't rush her to make the change over to his side, but it became harder and harder to suppress his instinct to do the opposite.

The soft *ping* from the elevator let him know he reached his destination, and the doors separated for him. He stepped out of the elevator, music playing overhead in a soft cadence. He looked around the spacious area and spotted Milo in a corner booth with one of the servers wrapped around him. Their mouths were fused together and their bodies ground as one. Where the hell was Lana? His brothers were supposed to be watching her, and instead one of them was dry humping a female. Anger speared through him at the thought of Milo being so careless with what Aleksei held so dear.

He looked around and finally spotted her at a small table in a shadowed corner. She sat with one elbow propped on the table and the other hand stirring the drink with her straw. Two large empty glasses sat to the side of her, and she looked a little worse for wear. Her hair was a bit on the mussed side, and her eyes had the unmistakable glassy look to them that let everyone know exactly how much she had

to drink. He walked over and pulled up a seat next to her. She looked up with big blue eyes, a smile shaping her pink lips.

“I know you think this is funny, don’t you?”

Her slurred speech sounded cute, and also let him she didn’t need to finish the glass in front of her. He signaled for the server to remove all three glasses and waved him on when Lana started to protest.

“Hey! I wasn’t finished with that.” She tried to look angry, but the fact that her eyes couldn’t focus all the way did little to make her look ferocious. “You and I have a lot to talk about, mister.” She pointed a finger at him and squinted. “First of all, what the hell do you think you were doing ‘marking’ me up like that?” She raised her hands and made quotation marks in the air.

Damn his brothers for opening their fucking mouths. He didn’t want her to find out like this, but it was a little too late for that. He should have told her right away, but he didn’t want to frighten her or anger her any further than he had.

“Lana, love, can we talk about this somewhere more private? Like possibly my place?”

He placed his hand over hers and rubbed it back and forth. He couldn’t help smiling at the angry look that crossed her face. She seemed to sober up slightly, and her gaze traveled down to his lips. His smile faltered, lust starting a slow burn in his body at the look she gave him. She was drunk, and he should feel horrible for his desire, but her scent coated the air around them, thick with her desire and want.

“I can smell your desire, and it smells so fucking good.” He leaned in to whisper in her ear as her eyes closed. “I bet you’re soaking wet right now, aren’t you, baby? I bet you want me to lick those sweet pussy lips of yours, don’t you? I’ll make you feel so good.”

Her body shivered as he spoke erotically to her, his own words making images of her naked flesh form in his mind. He pulled back until their lips were inches apart. She breathed heavily, and her pupils

were dilated. All it would take was for him to move in and their lips would meet.

He looked down at her pink lips, and he moved his finger over the softness of them before leaning again to speak in her ear. "Let us leave."

"I want to go back to my place." She looked at him with determination in her eyes.

He didn't want to deny her anything but couldn't guarantee her home was safe.

"Please, Aleksei, I want to be in my own bed and in my own house."

He leaned back and watched her. He couldn't deny her anything, and as he nodded and her face lit up, he knew she would be his weakness.

* * * *

He paced back and forth and waited for Osip to return from his nightly rounds. They still hadn't found the *Prophesied Female*, and every hour he didn't have her made his anger spike another degree. His claws dug into his palms, and his warm blood trickled down his hands. A loud knock sounded on his chamber doors, and he stopped pacing.

"Enter." He knew it was Osip even before the huge *Seeker* stepped through.

"My Lord." Osip knelt and bent his head in submission. Even on one knee, he was a big fucker, easily coming to Lord D's shoulders.

"Get up and speak." He didn't have patience right now for formalities and just wanted to know the report.

"I am sorry, my lord, but we have not found her yet."

D's vision went red as his anger reached its snapping point. He slammed his fist into the wall closest to him, making the stone crumble easily beneath his hand. "Do not come back until you have

her. She is somewhere in this city, and I want her here before the next night. Am I understood?" He kept his back toward Osip as he spoke.

"Yes, my lord."

Seconds later the door shut with a light click, and he breathed in heavily. He was running out of time. They needed the female or his plan wouldn't work. He knew he needed to have patience, but then again, that wasn't one of his virtues.

* * * *

Lana and Aleksei's mouths fused together as they stumbled up her front porch steps. He pulled away, his breathing heavy against her face as he rested his head on her forehead.

"Wait. I need to make sure everything is safe."

She nodded and pressed her lips on his again, a moan spilling from her at the small contact. Their lips worked as one, and his tongue tangled with hers. Hands touched and petted over clothing, and she felt his erection pressing against her stomach. He gently pushed her away again and softly laughed. She rested her head on his chest and could feel the deep vibrations of his laughter all the way to her core.

"Wait here, baby."

He turned from her and inhaled deeply before slipping the key into the lock and opening the door. He pushed it wide, stepping inside and disappearing into the shadows. Seconds later he returned, his hand outstretched for her to take it. "It's all clear."

She took his offered hand and gasped as he scooped her into his arms. She pointed up the stairs to where her bedroom was as their mouths started their exploration again. Once in the bedroom, he set her on her feet and broke the kiss to remove her clothing and then his.

* * * *

Osip cloaked his appearance so he could walk the streets of the city unaware. Being a *Seeker*, he was able to become invisible, able to blend in with the very air so he went undetected. Even the Blood Breeds wouldn't be able to sense him if he were breathing right down their necks.

He was a banished *Seeker*—a bounty hunter of the *Otherworld*—a world that housed any creature not mortal. If anyone ever found out he was working with the *Bloodless*, especially the *Divinity of the Eye*, he would be hunted down and gutted. Then again, what did he care if the *Eye* found out about him? He had taken out plenty of them thousands of years ago, and they knew what he was capable of. The *Divinity of the Eye* was nothing more than creatures who thought they were above everything—beings that passed judgment and decided on the very fate of immortals.

He shook his head in disgust at the very thought of the *Eye*. As he walked the streets, he scanned his surroundings. He was frustrated with himself for not finding the female yet. He should have had her the first night. He steamed in his own anger at the thought of doing this grunt work for that worthless *leech*. His knuckles turned white every time he referred to him as “My lord.” His time was coming, and when it did it would be a sweet victory.

His eyes and senses continually scanned his surroundings, taking in every shadow and every house. He could hear the loud and soft noises of the humans. Beds squeaked, and human grunts and moans echoed throughout his mind as bodies joined together in sexual fulfillment. He envied humans in a way. He couldn't remember the last time he ever felt something for another being. He was born solely for one purpose—to track and hunt down his assigned prey. He stuck his hands in his coat pockets and kept a steady pace down the darkened streets. He stopped and smelled the air, immediately catching the scent of a vampire.

The scent was covered, like the vampire was not out in the open but inside one of the houses. He thought about that and couldn't think

of why a vampire would need to be inside a human's dwelling. He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply, tracking the scent to a small, two-story house hidden among the trees. The house was dark, but he could easily see two shapes in one of the upper story windows.

He easily picked out the vampire's shape, and not because of the scent that was coming off of him. The guy was big, really big, and dwarfed the human his body wrapped around. He could see them easily as if it were broad daylight and they stood right in front of him. Arousal and lust shot out of the two like hot bullets from a gun. He was about to turn and leave and continue his quest when he saw the vampire step away from the female. Osip's heart sped up as he saw the naked female.

She was a beautiful creature with her long dark hair and her stunning blue eyes. That, of course, wasn't what had his heart beating a frantic rhythm. Next to her small belly button was the mark he had been searching for—a crescent moon within a circle. Either the vampire didn't know what the mark meant or he did and Osip would have one hell of a fight trying to get to her.

The sun would be coming up soon, and unlike the vampire, he was able to tolerate the bright rays. He would just wait them out, and when the vampire left to find cover from the sun, he would make his move. He didn't know what Lord D planned to do with the female, and frankly he didn't care.

He walked over to a large tree across the street and jumped to the highest, thickest branch. He crouched on the branch and waited, hoping the sun would rise soon so he could end this.

* * * *

Aleksei stepped back and looked at Lana's naked form. She was beautiful and petite and all his. Her breasts were round and tight, the perfect size for his palms. His eyes traveled over her breasts and down to her flat stomach. Her small birthmark seemed to pick up the

moonlight, giving it a silvery glow. He stepped closer and ran his hand over it, feeling smooth and flawless skin. He let the backs of his fingers trail over her flesh, not letting any of it go untouched. Her eyes were closed, and her breathing increased. Small goose bumps rose along her body, and he ached to kiss them away. His cock pulsed with need, and he had to control himself not to throw her on the ground and fuck her right here. He let his hands drop from her body as he continued to look at her skin. He wanted, no, needed to memorize it. He wanted to know every curve and every hollow that made up her body.

“Please don’t stop.”

Her whispered words were his undoing, and he scooped her up and carried her over to the bed. He didn’t want to speak, didn’t want to prolong being buried deep within her welcoming heat, but he knew he had to go slow.

“Touch me, Alek. Touch me right here.”

Her eyes were closed, and she took his hand and brought it down between her legs to her soaked pussy. He couldn’t stop the growl that erupted out of him at the feel of her hot, wet heat. He ran two fingers through her folds, gathering her moisture and bringing it to circle around her hard little clit. He swept his finger down to her entrance and dipped it inside, loving the way her back arched and she made a silent cry.

“Look at me.” She opened her eyes and stared at him as he brought his soaking finger to his mouth. Her lips parted slightly as he brought his digit inside his mouth, licking all of her cream off it. “Ahhh, fuck you taste so good, baby.” His felt his eyes start to change, and felt his fangs elongate and pricking his bottom lip. He tried to hold off the change from fully taking over, but looking at Lana beneath him had him gritting his teeth. “You like that, Lana? Like me sucking your honey from my fingers?”

She brought her hands up and ran them over his shoulders, her small fingers causing him to shudder with desire. He dropped his head

and kissed her with all the passion he felt for her. She ran her tongue along his and over his fangs. They ached to be buried in her, the same feeling his cock had.

Her tongue stroked the tips, and he couldn't stop his moan. Her blood spread into his mouth as the sharp points nicked her flesh. He sucked her tongue farther into his mouth and brought his big body flush with hers. He pushed her legs open with his knee and settled between, feeling her wetness slide on his shaft. He rubbed his erection along her seam, her lips parting and her clit moving along his shaft. He reached between them and aligned himself at her core, her warmth already enveloping him. In one swift move, he buried himself deep within her, his balls slapping against her skin and making the most erotic sound.

"Need to go slow." His words were short and clipped as he stayed still within her, not daring to move a muscle. She shook her head and brought his mouth back to hers.

"No, fuck me, Alek."

That was all he needed to hear. He growled and reared back, slamming into her willing body and causing her to move up a notch in the bed. He pulled almost all the way out before sliding into her deep and hard. She gripped his shoulders and threw her head back as he picked up a fast rhythm. He brought his mouth to her neck, licking and nipping at her smooth skin. "I want you with me forever."

She tilted her head and moaned at his words, and he slowed his rhythm.

"Will you let me, Lana? Let me keep you forever?"

"I'm yours."

He groaned against her skin and picked up his pace, his body slapping erotically against hers. Her hard nipples rubbed along his chest. Their skin became slick with their combined sweat and made a delicious friction. Her inner muscles tightened around him, and he knew her orgasm was close. His was, too.

Right before her body went exploded and tightened around his shaft, he sunk his teeth into her tender flesh, her blood instantly spilling into his mouth. They mouth moaned loudly, her orgasm setting off his own. He poured his pleasure through the bond they now shared and tasted hers through her blood.

His cum continued to shoot out of him and coat the inside of her—marking her as his. He moved off of her, loving the little whimper that left her mouth. He rolled onto his back and pulled her over him, her nipples stiff like tiny diamonds against his chest. She lifted her head and looked down at him, her eyes mere slits of blue in the darkness, and her hair mused. His eyes were half-lidded as he brought his hand up and stroked her cheek gently.

“Ti takaya krasivaya.” He smiled and kissed her on the forehead.

She yawned and laid her head against his chest.

“What does that mean? It sounds nice.”

“It means you are so beautiful. Although I do not feel that phrase does you any justice. You are far more than just beautiful.”

“Such things you say.”

They were both silent for several heartbeats, and he sensed Lana drifting off to sleep.

“I meant it when I said I want you to be with me forever.” He whispered the words, not able to hold in his feelings.

“I know you did, and I feel the same way. Even though we just met, I feel a strong connection to you. Does that sound silly?” She looked up at him again and smiled.

“No, it sounds wonderful to hear you say that. I feel the same way about you.”

She rolled off of him even though he protested. He turned to his side and played with a loose strand of her silky hair. “We should have that talk now. What do you think?”

She turned toward him and rested her head on her hand. “Now is as good a time as any, I guess. I get to start with some questions first,

okay?” She took a deep breath and began. “Your family told me you ‘marked’ me. I want you to explain what that means.”

“You are my *Chosen*, Lana. Remember that first night when I told you and you ran away?” At her nod, he continued. “Well, you are mine. Forever, that is, if you will have me. Fate, destiny, whatever you want to call it has said that you are mine, and only mine. You were made for me and I for you. We are two pieces of the same whole, two copies of the same blueprint. Once I tasted your blood, I knew what you were, and my body instinctively took control. I had to have you at all cost, and damn the consequences.” He broke their stare and looked at the ceiling. “For me there is only you. I will never want or need another being now that I have found you.” He stared back down at her shocked expression and ran his finger over her eyebrow and down her cheek. “I want to be with you forever, and when I say that, I really do mean *forever*.”

“How is this even possible? How can I be your *Chosen*? What even is a *Chosen*?”

“Members of my kind search for their *Chosen*, that one person that will truly bring peace to our lives. We can live happy lives without our *Chosen*, but it will never really be fulfilled. We can never have children without the other half of our souls.” He ran a hand over his hair and breathed out. “Once we find our mate, our world completely changes. Our life completely blends in with that person until we are one. Once we find our soul mate, we can’t live without them, literally.” He stared into her bright blue eyes, confusion and shock spilling out of her. “I couldn’t live without you, wouldn’t even want to. That’s how important you are to me.”

“So you’re saying that out of every female in the entire world, I was picked to be your *Chosen*? Why me?”

“Why does anything happen the way it does? Why is anything ever created? Maybe it’s all a result of a higher power, or maybe it isn’t.” He took her hand and brought it to his lips. “We can be together forever, Lana, if that is what you choose.”

“Wait a second. What are you trying to say?” She sat up fully and stared at him as his hand dropped to the bed.

“I can make you immortal like me. I can make it so we can be together forever. If you choose not to, then I will gladly grow old with you and leave when you do.” She stared at him as if he was crazy, but maybe he was.

“You can make me a vampire? Y-you would grow old with me if I didn’t want to be like you?”

“Well, I can’t grow physically old, but if you decided you didn’t want to become like me, immortal that is, then I will gladly stand by your side and leave this earth when you do.”

She breathed out heavily and lay back on the bed, her small hands running over her face. She turned back toward him and stared at him. “How exactly do you become immortal?”

His heart beat fast. The very idea that she would contemplate becoming an immortal was too good to be true. “I can only change my *Chosen* into an immortal. You would not become like me, a Blood Breed, that is. You wouldn’t be too different than you are right now. The only thing changing would be your life span, although I guess that is quite a hefty change.”

She got off the bed and paced the length of the room—the moonlight glowing off her glorious body.

“You’re serious, aren’t you?”

“I am.”

“How? How would you do it, I mean?”

“It would require an exchange of blood.” He slid off the bed and walked over to where his pants lay. He pulled them on before walking back to the bed and sitting on the edge. “I should have never asked you such a thing. I’m sorry. What was I thinking asking you to give up everything you know for me? It’s just the feelings—such a mild term for them, really—the feelings I have for you go beyond everything I know, any kind of reason that has gotten me through my life. I have been waiting for you my entire life, and when I finally find

you, I scare you with a question that probably makes me look insane.” He stared at the floor, not wanting to see what emotions her face held. The bed dipped beside him, and he looked over at her.

“Aleksai, when I’m with you all *my* reason goes out the window. Since meeting you, I feel like I’m in a dream. Weird, yes, but a wonderful dream nonetheless. You tell me vampires really do exist and that you want me to become immortal, and I feel like I’m outside looking in.

“You need to give me time to come to grips with everything, to let my mind settle over what you have told me. It’s still hard to believe that creatures from the myths and fairy tales do exist.” She took a deep breath and intertwined her hand with his. “I know with certainty that I want to be with you, for however long that may be. Eternity is a long time for me to comprehend.” He leaned in and brought her lips to his. “Just give me time to adjust to everything you’ve told me. I want to go slow and enjoy what we have.”

He pulled her onto his lap and buried his face in her vanilla-scented hair. “You have all the time in the world, and for however long you want, I will be right by your side.” He kissed her head and stood. “Will you go out to dinner with me tomorrow night?”

“Of course.”

She gasped as he scooped her up and carried her into the bathroom where they let the water run off their bodies as they made love.

Chapter Sixteen

Lana woke the next morning to the sun's rays shining through her window. She smiled and stretched as the night before replayed in her mind.

Aleksei took her in the shower and then again on her bed, leaving her deliciously sore and aching. He hadn't wanted to leave her by herself, but she assured him she did just fine before she met him. Finally he left, but only after he made her promise him she would call him as soon as she woke up. She grabbed the phone and picked up the piece of paper on which he wrote his number. He gave her every number he could think of so she could reach him at any time. She punched in his number and laid back against the pillows.

"Hello, my sweet."

Aleksei's deep voice came through the receiver after the first ring and had her smiling. "Well, hello yourself." She looked at the clock and realized how early it was. "I'm surprised I didn't sleep longer since you wore me out."

His deep-throated laugh came through and had her arousal starting all over again. For the next twenty minutes, they talked and made plans for later in the night. Aleksei wanted to take her to a Japanese restaurant that had just opened up outside of town. She hung up and dialed Kayla's number.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's me. I'm home and thought you might want to have breakfast." She slipped on her robe and headed to the kitchen for some much needed coffee.

"You're home! Okay, stay right there and I'll be right over."

The line went dead before Lana could say goodbye. She got ready for the day and read the paper in the kitchen as she waited for Kayla to arrive. A loud knock sounded on her door, and she was surprised Kayla had made it over so soon. Opening the front door, she craned her neck up to see the hulking man standing on her doorstep. He filled her entire door, blocking out the sun with his immense presence. She swallowed in nervousness.

“C-Can I help you, sir?”

His black hair hung to his ears and was mused like he didn’t care what it looked like. He wore faded blue jeans and a black shirt under a black distressed leather jacket. Sunglasses covered his eyes, and he had an air of menace that surrounded him. He took a step toward her, and her heart sped up. Just as he opened his mouth to say something, a car horn honked continuously until it sounded right in her driveway. She breathed out a sigh of relief knowing Kayla arrived.

“I’m sorry, miss, but I’ve lost my dog. Have you seen him?” He slid his sunglasses down so they rested on the bridge of his nose and stared at her with eyes the color of melted silver. “Have you seen him, miss?”

“N-no, I’m sorry.”

He gave a half smirk before thanking her and walking down the street. Kayla got out of her car and stared at him with her mouth hanging open.

“Who, or should I say *what*, in the hell was that?” Kayla walked up to her, her eyes still on the man as she pushed her way inside and closed the door.

“He lost his dog.” Lana stared at the closed door, still feeling uneasy.

“Dog, huh? I have to say that was one hell of a man.” Kayla went into the kitchen and threw her purse on the counter. “Uh, I am in dire need of some caffeine.” She poured herself a big cup of coffee and sat at the kitchen table, looking at Lana above the rim. “Spill it.”

She walked over and sat across from Kayla, her fingers twisting together as she suddenly became very nervous. Kayla set her cup down, her eyebrows knitting together as she stared at Lana.

“What’s wrong?”

“Okay, the story I am about to tell you is going to sound like a fairytale.” She looked at Kayla, one of her eyebrows arched as Kayla brought the cup to her mouth and took a long sip.

“Okay.”

* * * *

Lana watched Kayla as she finished telling her everything, the vampires, the blood drinking, absolutely every detail she could remember. Kayla sat back in the chair, her finger lazily running over the edge of her coffee cup, not speaking a word.

“Let me get this straight. You are dating this guy who happens to be a vampire, I mean a Blood Breed, and who has claimed you because you’re his *Chosen*? Oh, and last night you had unprotected sex with him, which, by the way, means you gave your virginity to him? Does that about sum it up?”

There was sarcasm and disbelief in her voice, but Lana couldn’t blame her. “Yeah, that about sums it up.”

“You have got to be kidding me. Aside from everything you just told me, which is so unbelievable I don’t know what to say about it, you had unprotected sex with a man. What about STDs? Pregnancy?”

Lana covered rubbed her face and stared at Kayla. “So after everything I just told you, the thing that sticks out in your mind is the whole virginity and no condom story?”

“Well, those are pretty big things. Honestly, Lana, so you actually expect me to believe you? The story is crazy.”

Lana shook her head and moved her hair off her neck, showing her the mark on the side of her throat. Kayla’s mouth dropped open as

she leaned in close and lifted her arm to run her fingers across the tender spot.

“He bit you? I didn’t even know you were in to that kind of thing.”

Lana snorted as she let her hair fall back over her neck. “I’m not in to that kind of stuff. I’m showing you he is a vampire.”

“That doesn’t prove anything. Some people are into biting and stuff.”

“Look at me, Kay. Do I look like I’m into letting guys bite me? I’m telling you the absolute truth. It was hard for me to believe at first, too, but when I saw everything, it was kind of hard not to believe.” Kayla leaned back in her seat again and didn’t speak. They stayed like that for several minutes, just watching at each other.

“You’re really not lying, are you? How can all of that even be possible?”

Lana nodded, feeling a weight lift off her shoulders at the knowledge that Kayla believed her. “I don’t know how it’s possible, but it is. Trust me, I’ve seen him change right before my eyes.”

“Wow. Do you think he’d do it in front of me?”

Shocked, Lana stared at her, surprised that Kayla actually wanted to see the change. “Are you serious? Why aren’t you more freaked out?”

She shrugged and got up to set her empty cup in the sink. “I guess I always thought that there was more out there than just *us*, you know. I always believed in aliens, so why not open up my mind to the idea of vampires or mermaids or any other creature?”

“I guess, I mean, I just can’t believe how well you’re taking all of this.”

“Yeah, well, until I see the proof I am still a little skeptical.”

Lana breathed out and looked out the window.

“Listen, let’s just hang out, like old times. I can call Kaleb, and he can meet us for lunch. He is leaving tomorrow, you know.” Kayla reached across the table and placed her hand on top of Lana’s.

“So soon?”

“Yeah, he got called back earlier than he expected. It can just be the three of us again, like the good old times.”

Lana couldn't help the smile that covered her lips at the memories that came to mind—the three of them eating popcorn as they watched B-rated scary movies.

“Yeah, that sounds like fun.” And it did, something “normal” to get her mind off of everything that seemed anything but.

* * * *

Aleksei stood with his feet braced apart on the cushioned blue mat. Dimitri stood much the same way with his sword hanging loosely in his grip. They started to circle each other, hoping to best one another. Aleksei needed to work off some steam, and working with a punching bag didn't have the same effect.

“Are you sure you're up for this, old man?” Dimitri brought his sword up to shoulder level as he stared at him.

“Oh, so the youngling wants to throw out the old man jokes, huh?” In one swift move, he swung his sword around in a move that would have sent the blade right through Dimitri's shoulder. He stepped out of the way at the last minute and brought his blade down, cutting Aleksei's bare chest before he had time to side step away.

The warmth of his blood trickled down his skin a second before the cut knitted itself back together. “Very well done, although I have to say I gave you that one.”

Dimitri gave a loud and deep laugh before he held his weapon high in the air and went for Aleksei's thigh. Using his speed as an advantage, Aleksei moved behind Dimitri before the Breed knew what happened and placed the blade to his neck. He pressed the tip to Dimitri's skin so it started to cut his flesh. A small line of blood formed just as he pulled away.

“See, that just pisses me off.” Dimitri spun around with a grin on his face and bent, sweeping his feet out and brought Aleksei to his back. Dimitri swung his blade down, aiming at Aleksei’s pectoral. The blade slammed into the blue mat as Aleksei swung his sword in the air and ran it against Dimitri’s jean clad thigh. He hissed an oath and spun around with his sword held high. Adrenaline pumped through Aleksei’s veins, and he relished the sensation. He gave a purely predatory smile as they both lunged for each other at the same time.

* * * *

Osip left the female’s house pissed off and fuming. He should have just taken her, but then her little friend had shown up, and things would have just gotten messy. He had never been in a situation like this, and it infuriated him. He should have already had her, but no, he was playing these cat and mouse games, and they were getting old.

The female was so tiny all he would have had to do was grab her. He ran a hand through his hair as he made his way back to his place. He watched her house, waiting for the right opportunity, but it never came. The two females stayed inside the house before they both left in one car. He followed them to a small restaurant before following them from one shop to the next. He gave up and headed home.

He had a feeling her vampire would be back for her tonight, and as much as he wanted a confrontation, he didn’t have the time for it. He would just have to wait until the following evening.

* * * *

“Well?”

Lord D’s voice boomed throughout the walls as Osip knelt in front of him. He clenched his fists at the sound of his voice and willed himself to not lose his temper. Once he finished this job, he would

collect his fee and be gone from this place before he killed the little fucker.

“I have found her and will be collecting her the following evening. The opportunity wasn’t right. I didn’t want to draw any unwanted attention.”

“No, we don’t need that. I am most pleased with you, Osip, most pleased, indeed.”

Osip looked up, the female still between D’s thighs, his cock in her mouth. He held her wrist to his mouth, licking the blood that trailed down her cream-colored skin. He pushed her off and dismissed her while he pulled up his pants and walked down toward Osip.

“Well, speak. What does she look like? I’m sure very beautiful if she is the *Prophesied Female*.”

“She is most beautiful, very petite and ample in all the right places.” Osip suppressed the snarl that threatened to escape as he watched D close his eyes and lick his lips. He knew exactly what the leech was thinking about and what he planned for the little female. Why was he even going along with this? He always hunted down the worst of the worst, not innocent and small human *females*.

Lord D snapped his eyes open and clapped his hands together. “Yes, you will bring her to me right away, and then you will be rewarded.”

Osip bowed once more before stalking off toward the door. This was the last time he would help the vampires. Honestly, he couldn’t stand any being, but the leeches were the worst—always so selfish and conceited with all their wealth and power.

He briskly walked through the stone corridors and made his way outside to the home where he resided. Maybe after this was all said and done he would travel to Europe. Yes, he always liked Europe and hadn’t been there in ages. Feeling resolved in his decision, he zipped up his jacket and walked faster as he naturally *cloaked* himself.

* * * *

Lana looked at herself in the mirror and ran her fingers through her hair. She spoke to Aleksei at least three different times today, the last one being only an hour ago.

The sun just started to set, and she could feel butterflies in her stomach at the thought of Aleksei coming. She was excited about going to the new restaurant but more so about just seeing him. She thought about him constantly today, and every time her thoughts strayed toward him her heart beat faster and her stomach did a little flip.

Looking at the clock on her dresser, she grabbed her purse and headed down stairs. Before she even reached the bottom step, her doorbell rang, and her stomach did another familiar flip at the thought of Aleksei. Grabbing a shawl and wrapping it around her shoulders, she opened the door.

He stood on the other side, over six and a half feet of male perfection. He wore a tailored black suit, the fabric molding to his muscular body not hiding the raw power he held. His short hair was impeccably styled and when he smiled, his perfect, straight white teeth showed.

“Oh, I feel somewhat underdressed.” She blushed as his eyes gaze hooded and traveled up and down her body. She wore a simple black strapless dress and a matching shawl, her only jewelry being pearl earrings.

“Hmm, maybe we should stay in tonight.” He leaned in and kissed her sweetly on the cheek. “I love that your cheeks turn the sweetest shade of pink when I compliment you. Your sweet blood rises to the surface and makes you glow.”

He held his hand out, and she took it, shutting the door behind her as she followed him to the driveway. When she spotted his car sitting in the driveway, her eyes widened. It was indeed another one of those fancy, extreme cars.

“Wow, what a car.” She looked up at him and smiled.

“I wanted you to travel in luxury like the queen you are.”

He stopped and brought her body flush against his, his mouth sweeping down and kissing her feverishly. Breaking the kiss, he led her to the passenger side and helped her into the car. He got in the driver’s side, looked at her, and smiled before he started the car and pulled out of her driveway.

* * * *

Lana watched as the Hibachi chef twirled his cooking utensils in the air and caught them gracefully. She had never been to a Japanese restaurant, let alone one that had a chef that cooked right in front of her. Aleksei reserved the whole restaurant for their night out and sat back in his seat just watching her. She smiled as the chef piled on onions, making a volcano in the process. He poured clear liquid in the center and set it afire, smoke coming out in tendrils from the tip of the onion volcano.

Laughing, she clapped her hands as flames shot out of it like it had erupted. Looking over at Aleksei, her smile faltered as he watched her with hooded eyes. She could see the desire reflected in their depths and knew it matched hers. Shifting in her seat, her vagina pulsed with a need that should have been quenched by the numerous times he took her earlier.

The chef filled their plates and left them with a bow. Lana cleared her throat, starting in on her food and pushing her lust-filled thoughts to the side. “So, you can eat regular food?” She twirled noodles around on her fork and watched him do the same with a set of chopsticks.

“We can eat anything we want. We just also require a different...supplement.”

“So, um...how old are you? I mean you said your kind is immortal, right? You must be pretty old.”

He smiled at her before placing his chopsticks down and wiping his mouth. "What age would shock you?"

Thinking about it, she shrugged, not really knowing how to answer. He watched at her, his mouth in a half smile. "I'm over six hundred years old."

She stared at him but kept her expression blank. Really, if she thought about it, this was probably one of the more "normal" things he had told her. "Wow, you bring a whole new meaning to robbing the cradle."

His lips quirked up and they both finished their meal.

* * * *

They sat at the restaurant for hours, just talking and holding each other's hands. He told her all about his life and about his family. She felt so sorry for him when she learned about his mother, father, and brother dying. She grew fascinated when he told her about living in Russia hundreds of years ago. He told her in vivid detail about the battles he fought in and how life was all those years ago.

She listened to him, but she found her concentration slip as she stared at him. Her chest ached when she looked at him, a feeling she was not familiar with. Could she have fallen for him so soon?

If the emotions she was having were anything to go by, then she would have to say yes. Could it be love? She was a stranger to the concept, but who made the rules about how long it took to fall in love?

As they left the restaurant, she noticed a newspaper lying on a bench. She let go of Aleksei's hand and picked it up, the headline catching her attention.

"Two more women missing in the small town of Stone Brooke."

She scanned the paper and looked up at Aleksei with wide eyes. "Can you believe what is happening? Those poor women."

He stared at her with a hard set in his eyes and took her hand to continue walking.

“What’s going on?”

His actions were weird, and she had a feeling he knew what was going on. He helped her into the car and slipped into the driver’s side, his focus on the window in front of him.

“Lana, I don’t want to really get into it right now.”

“Please tell me what’s going on.”

He scrubbed a hand through his hair and faced her. For several heartbeats, they sat there staring at each other before he spoke again.

“I am a Blood Breed as well as the ruler of my race. When a Blood Breed can’t control their hunger, they go into bloodlust. Usually, the bloodlust can be controlled if we feed quickly. If we feed when the bloodlust is at its highest, it gives us a high, and so it becomes addictive. Your senses are heightened, more so than normal, and you’re juiced up for anything, but you’re also very aggressive and unstable.

“If a Breed doesn’t get the bloodlust under control, then there’s no going back. Those who choose that path will become something else, monsters in their own way. We call them the *Bloodless*. They are vile creatures that I don’t even want to associate with my species. They kill indiscriminately and live off the high that the blood gives them.” He ran a hand over his mouth and stared out his window. “I’m not telling you this to frighten you, but so that you know what is walking the night out there. They’re dangerous beyond measure, and I know they’re the ones killing those females.”

She stared at his profile and gasped, her hand going up to her mouth. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “Why haven’t I heard about them killing women before? I mean this town is so quiet, and nothing like this has happened before.”

“They don’t stay in one place for very long. Something has brought them to Stone Brooke, something that could change the lives of every creature on the planet.”

“What could they possibly want here?”

His phone choose that moment to ring, taking his focus so her question went unanswered. “Yeah?”

She listened as Aleksei spoke short, clipped words, his whole demeanor changing right in front of her. Whoever he was speaking with was pissing him off, and it was clear by the way he spoke and how his body tensed up.

“Okay, give me an hour. I’ll meet you back at my office.”

“You have to go, right?” Disappointment filled her voice at the thought of not being able to spend the evening with him.

“I do have to leave. Something’s come up, and as much as I want to stay with you, this seems to be extremely important and not able to wait.” He lifted his hand and ran his fingers along her cheek. “Don’t worry, love. I promise I’ll try and come back to see you tonight and explain what I can.”

She nodded, knowing whatever he had to do was probably important. He held her hand as he left the restaurant and headed back to her place. Once at her house, they just sat there in silence, the slow hum of the car the only noise to break the silence. She turned to open her door and gasped as it swung open before she could touch the handle. Aleksei stood on the other side with his hand outstretched and a smile covering his lips. He led her to her front door where he pulled her into the warmth of his body and stared down at her.

“I’m going to bid you goodnight and then kiss you gently on the lips.”

She didn’t want him to bid her goodnight and certainly didn’t want a gentle kiss on the lips. His warm breath filtered across her skin as he kissed her cheek and then moved slowly toward her mouth. Their lips touched lightly, and she inhaled at the contact. Their mouths moved together in a slow and sensual exploration that left her breathless.

His hands moved up to her face and framed it as their heads tilted, and the kiss deepened. He broke away, and she rested her head

against his chest as she felt him start to stroke her hair. Her emotions were so strong at that moment that she wanted to tell him how she felt—tell him that she had fallen in love with him. The words lodged in her throat as she listened to the rhythmic beat of his chest.

“I wish this would never end.”

Chapter Seventeen

Osip sat in a tree, watching the place where the female he would be taking shortly resided in. As always, he cloaked himself so no one would be able to sense him. He leaned against the thick trunk of the tree, his legs out in front of him, his arms crossed over his chest as he waited.

A sleek, dark car crept down the quiet street and pulled into his target's driveway. Eyes not missing anything, he watched as his target and the vampire got out and walked to her door. They shared a lover's embrace, and after several long moments, he expected the male to join her inside, but instead he went back to his car and pulled out of the driveway. The car drove a few feet down the street and then stopped. Osip thought for sure the male would go back to her, could practically smell his arousal and determination to do so, but his car slowly moved forward and was soon out of sight.

He smiled, the adrenaline pumping through his body and priming him for his mission. Several minutes later, her bedroom light went on, and she walked past the window. He didn't know if the male would come back, but he wasn't about to wait and find out. He jumped out of the tree and walked toward the small house.

* * * *

Aleksei didn't want to leave Lana, but Adrik insisted on speaking with him right away. Something in the back of his mind told him—urging him to go back, but he resisted the urge and drove off.

He rolled his head around on his neck and tightened his hands on the steering wheel. It was getting harder to suppress his basic instincts, but he knew he needed to give her whatever time—knew he needed to give her however long it took for her to decide. He was determined to make this meeting quick and to get back to her and finish what they started on the doorstep.

He pulled into the underground garage of the club and parked his car. Once inside, he made his way up to his office and waited for Adrik to show. A deep knock sounded on his door and Adrik walked in, his expression grim. “Let’s get this over with, if you don’t mind. I would like to get back to where I came from.”

Adrik paced the floor in front of him as he ran a hand over his face. “I wanted to tell you this sooner but couldn’t reach you.” He stopped his pacing and sat down in one of the chairs. “I’m sure you know the Lykens took care of that rogue, right? Well, before I left them, he spoke about what they searched for.”

Aleksei leaned forward in his chair. “And?”

“He said his horde leader had them out searching for a female who bears the mark of the crescent moon within a circle on her skin. He said they were searching for the *Prophesied Female*.”

Aleksei leaned back in his chair, stunned at the revelation. He knew the *Bloodless* were out killing women and searching for something, but what that something was he hadn’t known for sure. He suspected as much from reading the scrolls, but hearing the confirmation actually shocked him, which wasn’t an easy feat. He ran a hand over his mouth, not sure what to do with the new information.

“You’re sure that’s what he said?” He knew what he heard was correct, but needed to have it verified again. At Adrik’s grave nod, Aleksei cursed and stood to pace the floor. “Gather all available Breeds and meet in the training center. I will meet everyone down there shortly.” He grabbed his cell and dialed Lana’s number.

“Hello?”

Lana's confused answer came through, and Aleksei let out the breath he hadn't known he was holding in. "Lana, love, it's me."

"Oh, hi. Is everything okay?"

"Everything is fine, baby, but unfortunately I won't be able to see you again tonight. Something's come up that I can't ignore. "

"Oh, okay. Is there anything I can do to help?"

Yes, let me make you mine for eternity so that I will know you are forever safe and don't ever have to worry about your safety.

What he wanted to say made its way into the front of his mind, but he quickly pushed it away.

"No, love, there really isn't anything you can do except stay inside tonight. I will call you as soon as I can."

They got off the phone, and he contemplated what his course of action would be. He opened his desk drawer, pulled out his Glock, and shoved it at the small of his back. There really was no easy way to go about it—he would just have to round up the troops and do an all out search until they found a *Bloodless* that could lead them to the horde leader. He headed out the door and made his way to the lower training level to meet up with the other Breed males.

* * * *

After hanging up with Aleksei, Lana couldn't help the disappointment that filled her. She really hoped to see him again tonight. She finished getting ready for bed, feeling lonely. She was just about to slip into bed when she heard pounding on her front door. Her heart raced, and she couldn't stop the smile that covered her lips or the excitement that coursed through her body. Aleksei must have found a way to get away from work.

She practically ran to the door, tripping over her own feet in the process. Once she reached the front door, she took a steadying breath and clamed herself. She unlocked the door and pulled it open.

She stood staring at her empty porch with her eyebrows knitted together. A cold draft of air pushed by her and caused tendrils of her hair to shift around her face. She lightly shivered and shut the door quickly.

Maybe the wind pushed something against the door and made it sound like a knock?

She locked the door and turned around...running right into a very large, very muscular chest. She slowly inched her gaze up until she looked into a set of familiar silver-colored eyes. She took a step back and felt the cool wood of her front door.

"W-What do you want?" Her words came out more like a whisper as her heart pounded loudly against her ribs.

"You."

That one word was spoken so low it caused shivers to skate down her spine.

There was nowhere to go. She had the door to her back and his massive body blocking her way.

"Find your dog?" She swallowed when a smile covered his face, but it was anything but friendly. She kept her eyes locked with his as she slowly inched her way sideways. If she could just slip past him, she could make it out the back door.

"You can't out run me, and if you did manage to slip by me, I would catch you before you even took two steps."

She needed to stay calm, but when faced with abduction it was almost a fruitless attempt. She made herself relax and smile which she knew didn't reach her eyes. "Okay, I'll go with you."

He arched a brow at her comment but then narrowed his eyes as if he didn't believe her. He held out his hand for her to take, which she did. His other hand reached for the handle of the front door, and that was when she leaned her body into his and brought her knee up to where it counted.

He let go of her hand to cup himself, and she dashed around him and ran toward the back door. She heard his inhuman roar and didn't

dare look back as she heard his heavy footsteps behind her. She turned the lock on the back door and ripped it open—running across the grass toward the door on the fence.

She looked behind her and saw him standing in the open doorway, a blank expression on his face. One second he was by the back door and the next he loomed over her with an intense angry stare.

Mouth open in a soundless cry, she turned around so fast she lost her footing and fell sideways toward the ground. She heard a loud cracking sound as she went down and vaguely realized that the sound came from her.

A deep thrumming went through her head, and stars appeared before her eyes. Reaching behind, she felt the large, cool rock she fell on and the wet stickiness of her blood across her fingers. Her focus started to waiver, and right before she passed out, she saw the man loom over her and smiling menacingly.

* * * *

Lana came awake to the sound of soft music playing in the distance. Slowly opening her eyes, she winced as the pain on the side of her head instantly made itself known. She blinked several times, trying to get her eyes to focus on her surroundings. Pushing herself up, she fought the wave of dizziness that washed through her. She clutched her head, trying to stop the pain from bursting through her skull. Rubbing her temples, she closed her eyes as nausea assaulted her.

What happened?

Everything came crashing back, like a tsunami of memories. She looked around the room—nothing seeming familiar at all. A window was placed on one wall, thick drapes covering it and blocking out any light. Getting up, she stumbled into the bathroom on the other side of the bed. She felt around the wall for the light switch and turned it on

once she located it. The bright florescent lights were not the most soothing and increased the pain in her head.

Looking at herself in the mirror, she noticed the dark circles under her eyes and her pale skin. Her hair was piled high on her head—the chignon intricately woven together with pearl clips slipped into the strands. She leaned in close, all of this like some bad *Twilight Zone* episode and she was the main character.

Looking down at herself, she noticed she wore a gauzy dress, not the pajamas she had about to go to bed in. The dress was sleeveless with a lace bodice that flared out from her breasts and pooled at her feet. Her head still felt disconnected as she walked over to the window. Pushing the heavy curtains aside, she blinked several times at what was revealed. There was no window behind the drapes, just a mural of the sun rising over the mountains.

She looked around the room, her brain working at full capacity now, thinking of a way to escape. Running over to a thick steel door, she tried the handle—of course it was locked. Pounding on the hard cold metal, she yelled at the top of her lungs.

“Can anyone hear me? Hey! Please, someone help me!”

Her palms ached and her head hurt as she dropped her hands and noticed the tray by her feet. Fruits, meats, cheeses, and breads littered the tray along with a glass of wine. She squatted and ran her hands along a rectangular drawer at the bottom of the door. There was no latch to open it, but she knew that was where the tray had slipped through.

Eyeing the food with disgust, she pushed it aside, not about to eat anything that was fed to her. The smells of the cheeses and meats wafted up to her nose, causing a wave of nausea to overtake her. Running into the bathroom, she barely missed the toilet as she heaved into it. She could still hear the distant music playing in the background, and all she wanted to yell was for them to shut the damn thing off. Rinsing her mouth, she went back into the bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the closed door.

Lana lifted her eyes open and realized she fell asleep. Sitting up in the bed, she rubbed her eyes, thankful her head didn't hurt as bad as it had earlier. Ripping the pins out that held her hair together, she threw them across the room, pleased when they bounced off the door. She tried the door once more, defeated when it came up locked again.

"Who the hell are you?" Tears started to well up in her eyes but she forced them back. No way was she going to give these monsters the satisfaction of knowing she was breaking down. Looking down, she noticed a new tray of food at her feet.

She bent and lifted the shiny silver lid, her mouth watering at the sight and smell of the food. Closing the lid, she reminded herself that the food was probably poisoned.

How long have I been here?

She knew it couldn't have been that long since she wasn't terribly hungry, but it had to have been long enough for them to give her two meals, right? Maybe not. Maybe they would just keep giving her food hoping she'd eat it and whatever poison they tainted it with. There was no way she could just sit here and wait for someone to rescue her. No one even knew where she was. Hell, she didn't even know where she was. She wanted to break every damned thing in the room but thought better of it since she didn't want to draw even more attention to herself. Lana walked into the bathroom to get some water out of the facet. After drinking a couple of handfuls of water, she dried her mouth and went back into the bedroom.

Her heart stopped at what lay on top of the bed. She looked at the closed door, fear strangling her that someone had come in without her knowing. She hadn't heard anything, and the fact that they had been right behind her had her breath catching. A gown of dark blue silk was spread out across the duvet, a pair of slippers and some jewelry next to it.

Clenching her fist, she ran over to the door and started to pound on it.

"Let me the hell out of here!"

She kicked and pounded on the door until her feet and hands ached with pain. Walking back over to the bed, she grabbed the dress and threw it against the door. She did the same with the shoes and jewelry, screaming in the process.

“You can take your dress and shove it up your ass!”

Feeling deflated and hopeless, she went back to the bed and sat down, dropping her head in her hands. She thought of Aleksei’s brilliant blue eyes, his strong, masculine voice, and his body primed and ready for her. She lay down, buried her head in the pillow, and let her thoughts of him carry her away into sleep.

* * * *

Aleksei stood in the middle of the large room. Breed males gathered around him, fully armed and looking ready to kick some ass. Weight benches, punching bags, as well as many other pieces of workout equipment were scattered around the room.

Every male had enough firepower strapped to his body to blow apart a small town. Aleksei decided to do a thorough sweep of the entire city as well as the outer city limits. Aleksei called the Lykens in to monitor the surrounding forests and the outer ring of their territory. He hadn’t thought the Lykens would be up for helping him, but when Aedan agreed right away, he knew the whole Lyken clan was upset over one of their females almost being killed.

He paired the warriors up in twos and sent them on the hunt. They were to bring back any *Bloodless* and kill them if they had no information on the ringleader of this whole operation. The warriors filed out of the room, many of them juiced up about the hunt and slapping each other on the backs. Others had a hard look in their eyes and clear determination in their step.

As the last pair left, Aleksei gripped his chest and started to rub in a circular motion. Something didn’t feel right. His instincts flared up, and his senses became more focused. He didn’t know what brought

on these sudden changes. Rubbing the spot over his heart, he knitted his brows in confusion.

“You okay?” Milo stepped beside him, worry on his face.

“Yeah, yeah. Just pumped about this whole thing, ya know?” He tried to push the strange feelings aside as he motioned for his brothers to follow him out into the night.

* * * *

Aleksei fell into his bed and just wanted to let his exhaustion take him away. He, along with all the warriors, canvassed the entire area of the city as well as the outer perimeter. The Lykens reported back that they hadn’t seen or heard anything suspicious in their area. He looked up at the clock—sunrise mere minutes away. He wanted to reach for his phone and call Lana, but knew it was too early and she would still be asleep. He had been itching all night to hear her voice and to know she was okay, but that wouldn’t be right of him to keep her up just to ease himself. He closed his eyes and willed his body to rest, an easier thing to think of than actually accomplish.

Aleksei opened his eyes to the sound of his phone ringing. He leaned over, fumbling on his nightstand for the damn thing. He looked at the clock, pissed he slept over half the day away. He only meant to rest for a short time, but he must have been exhausted. He picked up the phone, his thoughts immediately going to Lana.

“Hello?” His voice was hoarse from sleeping, and he cleared it as he sat up.

“Yo, Alek, are you coming up and eating with us?” Milo’s voice bounced through the receiver, and he could hear Luca and Aniya in the background. “Aniya made the works, bro.”

As Milo listed everything their sister made, he scrubbed a hand over his face. “Yeah, let me shower, and I’ll be up.”

He got up and stretched, checking his phone for any missed calls. He stared at the screen in confusion—not one call from Lana. He

punched in her number, letting it ring until her machine picked up. He called three more times—all ending in the same result.

He set his phone on the nightstand and rubbed his chest again—hating the fact that something just seemed off. Maybe she'd just gone out for a while and forgot to take her phone. Yeah, but to not even call him, something didn't seem right. He didn't want to overreact, but his basic instincts were firing wildly at how wrong all of this seemed. It was still daylight, and as much as he hated it, he had to sit and wait to go to her.

* * * *

Lana slowly woke to the sound of shuffling feet near her. She tried to keep her breathing even so she didn't alert whoever was in her room that she was awake. Cracking open her eyes, she was thankful for the hair that fell over her face and obscured the fact that she was awake. A small figure moved briskly through the room, her movement quick and silent. Maybe this woman was a captive like she was.

"Hey." She said the word on a breath, hoping the woman could hear her. The woman stopped and turned slowly around to face Lana. She held a rag in her hand and a bottle with a blue solution that sloshed around in it.

She's cleaning the room?

Lana pushed herself slowly up and motioned for the woman to be quiet. It was clear that if the woman was cleaning the room she most likely was not a captive, but she still had hope that maybe the woman would have a little compassion and help her out. She smiled at the woman, or maybe she was a girl. She looked so young.

"What's your name?"

The girl looked at the closed door and then back at Lana. It was clear she was scared of whatever repercussions might come about with speaking with her.

“It’s okay. We can be really quiet and just talk.”

The girl fiddled with a piece of her dress before looking Lana in the eyes. She had the clearest and brightest green eyes Lana had ever seen. Her strawberry blond waves poured down her back with a small clip holding one side up. Her eyes were huge as she continued to look between Lana and the closed door, fear obvious in her face.

“Kasia.”

“Kasia. What a pretty name.”

“Thank you.”

“What do you do here, Kasia?” Lana edged closer to the girl and offered a small smile.

“I cook and clean and do...other things.”

Other things?

She didn’t even want to think of what they made this poor girl do. “How old are you?”

Kasia played with the fabric of her dress in nervousness. It struck Lana as odd that they would have a maid wear something so elegant.

“Eighteen...I think.” Kasia looked embarrassed at the fact that she didn’t know exactly how old she was.

“Where are we?”

Kasia turned back around, her head shaking as she went back to cleaning the dresser.

“Kasia, please.”

“I’m not supposed to talk to anyone, especially not you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am not allowed to speak unless I am spoken to, and I was given orders not to speak with you.” She looked around the room and then turned toward Lana again. “If they find out I spoke with you, I will be punished severely.”

Lana’s heart broke for this small girl who was just as much a prisoner as she was.

“I can’t even tell you where you’re at because I don’t know.”

“Who took me? Do you know?”

“They’re monsters, all of them. Their eyes are soulless and black as the night.” Kasia walked toward Lana and placed her hands in hers. “I don’t know what they are. All I know is that they,” her eyes grew wide as her voice dropped to a small whisper, “drink blood. I don’t even want to know what they are going to do to you.” She dropped Lana’s hands and stared at the floor.

The only thing her frazzled brain could come up with was that they were the *things*—the monsters Aleksei told her were killing those women. What did he call them? She thought hard, finally remembering what Aleksei called them.

“*Bloodless?*” Lana looked at Kasia with dread growing inside of her. If those killers were the ones that kept her prisoner, then there was no telling what they would do.

“How did you know that? I have heard them talking and saying that name before. All I know is that they are real life monsters that have no compassion or heart. They’re evil.” Kasia suddenly grew quiet and still, her hand going up for Lana to be quiet. “Hurry, pretend you are sleeping. They’re coming back.”

Lana didn’t hesitate as she lay back on the bed. The door opened, and she willed her breathing to slow.

“Done?” The deep male voice boomed through the room and made Lana want to curl into herself with fear.

“Yes.” Kasia’s small voice seemed distant as Lana opened her eye and watched as an impossibly huge man walked up to her.

Lana kept her eyes from going wide as she took in his appearance. He was so tall and so heavily muscled that she didn’t know how he fit through the door. His hair was black as night and cut close to his scalp. His eyes were the same color, as dark as Aleksei’s when he changed in front of her.

Lana’s hand involuntarily clenched as she saw his enormous fangs. He truly was the monster Kasia described. He walked up to Kasia and ran a finger over her cheek. She had her eyes cast down,

but Lana didn't miss the way the girl winced as if she had been burned.

The man seemed captivated by her as he stared at her bent head and continued to run his hand along her cheek and then her hair. She wanted to protect the young girl, but she might end up doing more damage. Lana vowed that when she escaped—and she would—she would take Kasia with her.

As more loud footsteps sounded from outside the door, the man straightened and pulled away from Kasia quickly. Two men walked through the room, one having the same onyx, bottomless eyes and huge frame, and the other...the other being the man who took her.

"Stefan, what are you still doing in here?" The one with the obsidian eyes spoke in a distorted voice as he bared his fangs.

Stefan, the one who had been stroking Kasia's cheek, turned around and bared his own massive fangs. "Just wrapping up, and you would do best to watch your fucking mouth around me."

Kasia backed up as if she knew there was going to be a fight. Lana could see the man who took her sniff the air and move his gaze on her. She squeezed her eyes shut and prayed he didn't know she was awake.

"Both of you shut the fuck up. It looks as if we have an audience."

She heard footsteps come close to her as a light sweat broke out across her forehead and her heart beat wildly against her ribcage. Her eyes were shut so she couldn't see anything, but she could feel someone right beside her.

"Rise and shine, princess." The deep, distorted voice right by her ear had her bolting off the bed and throwing herself against the wall. The one named Stefan smiled at her, showing off his very white, very long fangs.

"You're scaring the shit out of her. Knock it off."

Stefan turned and bared his fangs at the one who spoke. "Fuck off, Osip." He inhaled and smiled again. "I love the smell of fear, don't you?"

Lana looked around the room in a panic and saw a small gap between the two men. She looked at Kasia, who also planted herself up against a wall and kept her head low. There was no way she could get to Kasia and make it out of the room before one of them caught her.

“It’s pointless to try and run. I can see the idea all over your head. You wouldn’t get far and would just end up pissing a bunch of vampire’s off.” The man who took her, Osip, spoke as he stood against the wall with his arms crossed.

“Kasia, come on.” Stefan called out and looked at Kasia, who started to walk toward the door, head still bent and hands clasped together.

How was Lana supposed to get them both out of here? She would find a way even if it killed her, which most likely it would. Lana watched as the three left the room, leaving only her and Osip. He closed the door and leaned against it, his silver gaze trained on her.

“Bet you’re wondering what you’re doing here.”

She didn’t bother with replying, just gave her answer through her stare.

“Yeah, I bet you are. I took no pleasure in capturing you. I mean, don’t get me wrong, that’s what I do, capture and deliver, but I took no pleasure from taking a weak human female.”

Why in the hell was he explaining himself to her? She couldn’t care less the way of it all—the only thing she cared about was that he had done it and that she wanted to leave.

“He’ll come for me.”

“I know he will, but he won’t find you.” He walked away from the door, and Lana pressed herself more firmly against the wall. “Don’t worry, I won’t hurt you.” He laughed, stopping and looking at the wall. “You see, he’ll try to find you, probably using his last dying breath to do so. The thing is, he’ll never find this place, ever.” He leaned against the bedpost, his attention going back to her. “You

know, you really should eat. You're not hurting anyone but yourself with your stubbornness."

She pressed her lips in a small line and narrowed her eyes. She really hoped she hurt him bad when she kicked him. "Why are you keeping me here?"

He actually had the audacity to look offended at her question. "*I'm* not keeping you anywhere. Actually, I think it's rather heartless to hunt down and capture a female, a human to boot." He shrugged his broad shoulders and pushed off the bedpost as he made his way toward the door. "Like I said, you should really eat. Nothing has tainted your food, so rest assured." At that, he walked out the door and locked it from the other side.

She sagged against the wall and let gravity take her to the floor. She was so confused and scared that she was having a hard time processing everything. She wondered what he meant when he said Aleksei wouldn't be able to find where she was. Dread filled her at the thought of never being found, but she knew she needed to stay strong and have faith in Aleksei. It was then that she rested her head in her hands and finally let all of her pent-up tears flow out.

Chapter Eighteen

Aleksei paced back and forth across the hard tiled floor, his heart a constant ache in his chest. A week passed since Lana had gone missing, and he felt it down to his very bones. He couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, and he snapped at anyone who spoke to him.

He knew she wasn't dead—could feel her life force pulse through his body. He had been going out at sunset and staying out until the sun was just starting peak over the horizon. There were many times when he had come home with burn marks across his face, but he didn't care. He couldn't even feel the pain. The only thing he felt was the agony that centered in his heart, in his very soul, at the thought that *they* had her.

Lana hadn't called him, and he tried hundreds of times to reach her. When the sun finally set all those days ago, he was a crazed mess as he had Luca *mist* him to Lana's house. Everything on the outside looked the same, nothing disturbed, but as soon as he opened the front door, which had been unlocked, he caught an unfamiliar smell. It was something he never smelled before, and mixed with that dark male scent lay something he was familiar with—the stench of the *Bloodless*.

It was faint, barely even noticeable, but there nonetheless. It was after he walked through the whole house that he noticed the back door open. His heart stopped as he caught the beautiful aroma of Lana's sweet blood outside. He charged through the house, finally falling to his knees in the backyard, the bloodied rock lying in front of him. His emotions ran raw as he threw the rock across the yard and watched it embed itself in the thick trunk of a tree.

So now, a week later, he still had no idea where she was. He came to a realization as he thought about why the rogues would want her. She matched the physical description of the female the *Bloodless* were after—the *Prophesied Female*. He paced the floor as he checked his watch again...*almost sunset...almost sunset*. He chanted the words in his head over and over again as the seconds ticked by.

The Lykens offered their help, and since they could go out during the day, Aleksei used every last one of them. He had every available Breed male searching for her, all of them knowing by now the female they searched for was their King's *Chosen*.

He was tempted to use other resources available to him, but the thought of what the *Seekers* would ask for payment was a price he wasn't willing to pay. They would have found Lana for him, but they would have wanted her eternal soul...as payment. They were cruel and selfish bastards.

He scrubbed a hand along his face, feeling the stubble that grew in from the week. He knew his family, and everyone else for that matter, worried about him. He planted himself in the leather love seat by the window and dropped his head in his hands. His breath caught, and the tears he held in this whole week finally spilled forth. It felt as if his heart had been torn out of his chest, like the light Lana gave him no longer shined.

He knew she was still alive, could feel her life force run through his veins, but the very idea that those *beasts* had her, such a fragile and innocent being, made his blood run cold and his fangs shoot out of his mouth. He walked a thin line that was long overdue to snap, and he couldn't wait until he found her because the ones who took her from him would pay with their lives.

* * * *

Lana lay on the bed she had become so familiar with, her home away from home. She snorted at the idle thought, sickened by its very

presence. Time had no meaning anymore, the days running together until there were no minutes, no seconds and no hours. She ran her hand over the smooth silk of the comforter and let her mind drift off.

She started to lose hope that she would ever be found. She refused the food they brought her, partly because she didn't know if it was tainted, and the other part because she just really had no appetite. She was grateful for Kasia, though, and the breads, meats, and cheeses the young girl brought her. She refused it at first, thinking Kasia was unaware if it had been poisoned, but relieved when Kasia assured her it was from her own supply. It wasn't much, but Lana ate the food, putting her trust into her that the food was safe.

Her stomach was always on a rollercoaster, and she was constantly throwing up. She started to notice the dresses that were brought for her to wear were becoming looser, the fabric hanging off her body like a sack. Little presents also started coming with the meal trays, but she pushed them away as she did everything else.

Kasia came by every day, but Lana couldn't tell if it was once a day or a longer gap between the visits. She had no sense of time anymore, and it drove her mad. The two of them became friends, and Lana anticipated these small visits. True, Kasia was there to clean, but the two of them found strength in one another.

She stared at the door, suddenly hearing footsteps pound down the hallway. This was how it was every time they dropped Kasia off. The door opened moments later, and Kasia walked in. Her head was lowered, and her hands were folded together in front of her. Usually she smiled at Lana and talked freely with her as soon as the door shut, but Kasia didn't say a word, just started cleaning the room.

"Hey, is everything okay?"

She kept her head down and started to straighten things up even though Lana started taking the liberty of cleaning up after herself.

"They will come for you tonight."

She stared at Kasia's back, confusion running through her mind. "What do you mean?" She stood and walked over to Kasia, who

wiped off an already clean dresser top. The wood shined beneath Kasia's rag, but still she continued to wipe from left to right as if in a trance.

"He has waited as long as he will, and now he will come for you tonight." Kasia turned around with a dazed look on her face, tears shinning in her emerald green eyes.

"What are you talking about? Who's coming for me?"

Kasia dropped her gaze to the floor, her tears finally spilling over.

"Kasia? You're scaring me."

She raised her eyes, a sad smile covering her lips.

"Are they going to kill me?" She whispered the words, fear squeezing her chest.

She shook her head, and Lana let out a somewhat relieved breath. "So, who's coming for me and what do they have planned?"

"The master of this place, the leader of all of these monsters." Kasia wiped a tear off her cheek and sniffled. "I overheard the monsters talking about how he was getting anxious to meet you and wouldn't put it off any longer."

"What will he do with me?"

"I don't know, but he feeds off women, so maybe that's what he wants you for, although this whole kidnapping is not like him. He usually finds willing women, gets what he wants and then gets rid of them. I fear for you and don't know how to help you."

Lana stumbled back toward the bed and planted herself on it. Would he drain her? Kill her in the process? Aleksei's face went through her thoughts, and she felt like weeping with how unfair things had become. They were playing with her, like a cat toying with a mouse. She rubbed her eyes and looked up at Kasia, who watched her with sympathy.

"Help me escape." Desperation coursed through her like a freight train that wouldn't be silenced.

Kasia just shook her head and sat next to her on the bed. "I can't escape any more than you can. I don't know how to."

“Have you ever tried?”

Kasia’s gaze became unfocused as if she were replaying a memory in her mind. “I’ve been here for as long as I can remember. I’ve tried so many times to leave this place I lost count. They always find me, though...always. This place is one giant maze, a catacomb of tunnels. It confuses you—makes your mind not know what’s up from down.” She looked at Lana and smiled a sad, hopeless smile. “I wish I could help you leave. I would leave with you. I’m a prisoner the same as you are.”

Lana got up and put her arm around the young girl’s slim shoulders. The two of them stood in silence until Kasia pushed Lana toward the bed and went back to wiping off the dresser. *They* were coming, their loud footsteps pounding down the hallway and stopping on the other side of her door.

The door opened, and she dropped her gaze and stared at the floor. One of them came close to her, his large boots coming into her view. She didn’t look up as something dropped on the bed. She heard the soft click of the door closing and heard the lock turn. She looked up. A tray of food sat next to her as well as a long rectangular box next to that. She picked up the box and tore the satin red ribbon off. Lifting the lid, she pulled aside the tissue paper and saw *his* newest gift.

Lying between the smooth tissues was a deep red silk gown with black crystals inlaid in the soft material. A note lay next to the dress, and she hesitantly took it out and opened it.

Only the best for my future queen. I look forward to finally meeting you, my dear.

D.

She set the note aside and looked back at the dress and then the tray of food. The smell of the herb roasted chicken and potatoes made her stomach growl in anticipation. Her mouth watered, but she hesitated eating it. How long could she live off the small pieces of bread Kasia brought her?

She took the fork and moved the food around on the plate, the delectable scents wafting into her nose. She once again thought of Aleksei and the short time they had together. She should have told him how much she had grown to care for him, how much she wanted to spend her life with him.

Since being in this prison, a lot of things had come clear for her, the main one being that she loved him. She knew she loved him before, but after being torn away from him everything became clear. She thought of how it could have been with them, how she would have loved sharing her life with him.

The tears spilled down her cheeks, and she speared a piece of chicken with her fork. If she could go back in time, she would have told him she loved him and wanted to be with him forever. His life was far from what she ever believed in, far from what she ever envisioned for herself, but as she sat alone, she could only think about what they *could* have had. He was caring and thoughtful, diligent and strong, and she knew that despite the fact his was a vampire—an idea she was still trying to accept—she knew that without him, she wouldn't be happy.

It was too late, though, and he would never know how she truly felt. She thought about Kayla and how much she missed her dearest friend. All the times they shared growing up, all the laughs and tears. She would have liked to tell Kayla how much their friendship meant to her.

She sniffed and put the piece of chicken in her mouth, the food bland as she numbly ate. She closed her eyes and smiled as the images played across her mind like a movie—her own sad and depressing pictures of what she would never experience again.

Chapter Nineteen

Osip walked through the halls as he waited for Lord D to give him his reward for finding the *Prophesied Female*. He waited long enough to claim what was rightfully his, and his patience was growing dangerously thin.

He could almost feel the *Dagger of Life and Death* in his hands—feel the power that coursed through the jewel-encrusted handle. He could feel the coolness of the sharp blade pressing into the skin of the one he wanted dead most. He had a score to settle that was long overdue.

He cloaked his appearance by instinct and made his way toward D's chamber. He was about to open the door when it sprang open and a few males walked out. He slipped inside, making sure not to touch them as they walked past. Lord D and Stefan sat at a table picking off pieces of meat and drinking thick red liquid that was not wine out of crystal goblets.

"I want her." Stefan popped another piece of meat into his mouth as he stared at his master.

"I know, but you must have patience. She is still young and has yet to complete the change. You will end up killing her if you act too quickly." D took a long sip out of his glass and made a disgusted face. "It gets cold so fast."

"I know, my lord, but the change is close, and it is becoming harder and harder for me to resist."

Osip didn't know what they were talking about but had an idea of whom they spoke. He knew it wasn't about Lana because D wanted her for himself. The only other option would have to be Kasia. He had

seen the way Stefan eyed her, and it made Osip's blood run cold. Lust raged in Stefan's bottomless black eyes every time the girl was near. The girl was human and wouldn't survive whatever Stefan had in store for her—that Osip knew for sure.

"Enough talk about the girl. Have you arranged for my chambers to be set up properly?"

"Yes. Everything is set up to your specifications, and the girl will be prepared for you as was discussed." Stefan took a big drink of the thick red. "How do you think he will react when he doesn't get what he seeks?"

Osip's ears perked up at the change of topic.

"I assume he will be quite angry with me, but he will be disposed of, so it makes no difference."

"I would like to dispose of the banished *Seeker* if it would please my lord." Stefan smiled, pure hate and eagerness reflected on his face.

He didn't want anything more than to reveal himself and tear the two of them apart, although he continued to listen.

"I don't even have that fucking knife." D laughed and looked back at Stefan who started to laugh as well.

Osip's blood ran hot and his nails bit into his palms.

That little fucker!

"The girl should be ready for you by sunset."

"Good. That's very good. You are a good minion, Stefan, and shall be rewarded for your loyalty. You may have sole rights to extinguish the *Seeker*."

Stefan smiled and went down on one knee. "I thank you, my lord. I serve only thee."

Osip walked toward the door, barley reigning in his temper. There was a knock at the door, and Osip slipped through as two *Bloodless* walked in.

So he plans on killing me or at least attempting to kill me?

Osip steamed as he made his way through the tunnels and out into the open forest. The maze of tunnels that ran underground and housed

D's fortress was covered by a haze of confusion. Anyone brought into the fortress would never be able to get out, and anyone trying to find the place would be searching forever. So when he told the human female her Breed lover would never find her, he meant it.

He walked briskly, having one destination in mind. He should have killed those bastards when he had the chance, but he knew someone who would take more pleasure out of it, and frankly, he would have just ended up making a big mess.

* * * *

Lana finished up her meal and slipped on the dress, looking at herself in the dresser mirror and feeling sick, both physically and mentally. She should have torn the dress up, but maybe if she behaved, or at least acted like she was okay with the situation, he would take mercy on her. It was probably wishful thinking, but right now that's all she had.

The room started to shift, and she held her head, stumbling to a nearby chair and sitting down. The walls twisted and turned, and she held a hand over her mouth to hold back the nausea that threatened to overtake her. As the room slowly righted itself, she got up and made her way toward the bed—bad idea on her part. The room immediately went back to being a rollercoaster ride and moved weaved toward the bed like a drunk.

She eyed the empty tray of food. Her food had been tampered with, but really, was she all that surprised? Why had she eaten it? They would have drugged her one way or another, or so she told herself. Reaching for the bed, she just fell short, her knees hitting the hard floor and making her wince. She fell onto her hands and stayed in that position as she caught her breath. Hearing the all too familiar lock turn, she looked up to see the door to her prison open. Her mouth was so very dry, like she had been eating cotton or sand.

Two large men walked into the room, the same two she remembered seeing all the other times. They looked at her and then each other before cracking wide smiles and elbowing each other in the ribs. She could see their mouths moving, knew they were speaking, but no sound came to her. She tried to speak, tried to tell them to get away from her, but like the sound not reaching her ears, no words came from her mouth. She reached her hand out to them—to reach for help or to push them away, she didn't know. They smiled at her, their long white fangs the last thing she remembered as her world went black.

* * * *

Osip slammed on the accelerator of his BMW and loved the feel of all that power beneath him. He took the sharp turns of the mountain road swiftly and tightly. Trees rushed by him at blurring speeds and made him press on the gas even more. His destination was minutes away, and as he anticipated the outcome of his arrival, he turned up the radio and let System of a Down's *Lost in Hollywood* blast through his speakers.

No doubt he would not be welcome, but he could handle himself, and the outcome of this little detour would be well worth any repercussions. He arrived at his destination in no time, pulled into the wide driveway, and made his way toward the front door. The sun was bright in the sky, but he knew everyone in the building was awake—could sense them.

He smelled the male's scent all over the female he captured, and it had been an easy hunt. Even through the thick brick and plaster of the building, he envisioned the male inside, could feel his anger and anguish pour out and through him. He didn't bother cloaking himself since they already knew he was here. He got out of the car and walked up the stone steps to the huge double doors. A security monitor was mounted in the far corner, and he turned and stared at it.

“What business do you have here?” A deep voice came through the little speaker beside the monitor.

“I know where she is.” That was all he said, knowing the male on the other side would know exactly of whom he spoke. There was a loud click, and then the doors opened. He walked into the darkness, knowing he was about to get his ass kicked.

* * * *

Aleksei paced back and forth as he glared at the intruder. He was fully changed and so pissed off he could have ripped the fucker’s head off with his teeth. He refrained from lashing out at him since he claimed to know where Lana was. The fact that this being had the nerve to take what was his and then show up at his doorstep flaunting it made him roar inside.

He called himself Osip, and from history, Aleksei knew he was the banished *Seeker*, the damned one.

“You dare come to my house after you took what was mine?”

He sat in a chair, his hands neatly folded in his lap, and he looked at them nonchalantly. Ten warriors stood around him, all fully changed and eyeing him like they were thirsty.

“I can understand why you must be angry.”

Aleksei charged at him, his fist making contact with the *Seeker*’s nose. He felt satisfaction course through him as bone crunched beneath his fist. Blood poured out of Osip’s mouth, but he didn’t flinch, didn’t even bother wiping the blood from his nose.

“I know where she is, and if you kill me, you’ll never find out.”

“What did you say?”

“I know where she is, and I’ll lead you to her if you swear on your honor you will to go once you have her.”

Aleksei thought about what he said, furious over the fact that this male wanted to negotiate with him over his *Chosen*. He reached out

with his mind and tried to penetrate the *Seeker's* mind. A steel wall blocked his probing, and he cursed out loud.

“How do I know you will take me to her? How do I know this isn't a trap?”

“I can feel you probing my mind, but don't bother. You can't read a *Seeker*.” He spit out a mouthful of blood and finally wiped his mouth. You can smell her life force on me and know that I speak the truth. What choice do you have? You want her back, don't you?”

Aleksei cursed again loudly, so pissed he wanted to crush the fucker in front of him. He was fully changed, his body so primed and pumped he could have snapped the *Seeker's* neck like a twig. “How do I know you truly know where she is?”

“Do you really have any other choice but to trust me? I know this for sure, though, without me, you will never know where she is.”

He paced in front of Osip, his warriors cracking their knuckles and growling in hopes of killing something. He was slowly dying inside without Lana, and as much as he searched for her, he seemed always an arm's length away. His rage spiraled out of control, and he shook from the force of it.

Not able to help himself, he bared his fangs at Osip and backhanded him again, relishing the fact that pain flickered on the banished *Seeker's* face. Blood continued to pour out of his nose, and he shook his head. Right in front of him, Osip's body started to heal itself, kitting the broken bone and open cuts together.

“I can give you the one who contracted me. We don't have much time because come night fall she will be given to him.”

Aleksei's breath stopped, his anger dimming as fear took its place. “Fine. It's settled. You take me to her and you can go free.”

* * * *

Aleksei paced his office, surprised there wasn't a track in his floor. The hours ticked by at a snail's pace, and he was getting itchy waiting for that blasted fire ball to sink.

He double-checked his ammo and weapons, adding a knife or a gun every time. Strapped to his back was his ancestral sword—the same one that was tattooed on his back—along with knives of various sizes and guns. He was probably over doing it, but with Lana, he wasn't going to take any chances. He continued to watch the clock as he paced the room. He could hear his warriors getting juiced up for the hunt, their voices loud and their excitement high. A knock sounded on the door, and he already knew it was Adrik.

"Come in."

"The Breeds are ready for your orders."

Aleksei nodded and did a double check of all of his weapons. Yup, strapped and loaded. Only a few more minutes before the sun finally set and it would be safe to venture outside.

"Everyone move to the garage so we can leave as soon as the sun sets."

Tonight there would be blood, a lot of blood, but it wouldn't be the Breed's.

Chapter Twenty

The first thing that penetrated her disoriented brain was the sound of classical music. Her head hurt so bad, and the room spun even though her eyes were closed. She groaned and slowly opened her eyes, thankful the lights were dim. She rolled over and groaned with nausea.

The canopy of the bed she lay on was bright red with gold inlaid thread and gave her a head ache. Whatever they slipped into her food left a bad taste in her mouth and made her head pound furiously. She sat up and clutched her head as it started to pound something fierce.

She definitely wasn't in her room—or better yet, her prison. This room was exceptionally exquisite in its decor and furniture. Silk adorned the walls and furniture in deep, masculine colors. Candles were sporadically placed, giving the room the soft glow of ambiance.

The biggest fireplace she had ever seen sat in the center of the room and blazed fiercely. Two red leather chairs sat in front of the fireplace, a dark wooded table between them and two wine glasses and a bottle of wine in its center. A large, intricately carved wooden door stood off to the side, and she slid off the bed. She felt woozy and lightheaded and kept stumbling and bumping into the wall. She gripped the door handle, groaning to find it locked. A husky and thickly accented voice came from behind her.

"I really don't wish to lock you in here, but understand I must take precautions with my future."

She turned around, the quick movement causing her already disoriented brain to scream in frustration. She pressed her back

toward the door, her eyes squinting in the dim light to find where the voice came from.

“No need to be frightened. I would never harm you.”

She finally registered the voice coming from a shadowed corner. She tried to penetrate the darkness, but it was no use. Even though she couldn't see who owned the voice, she knew the man speaking was dangerous. She expected to see another one of those creatures, the ones with the monstrosly huge bodies, black, endless eyes, and impossibly big fangs, but instead, she was surprised to see the man who walked out of the shadows.

* * * *

Aleksei stood in a small clearing staring at a huge protruding rock coming off the mountainside. Five Breeds stood behind him, two of those males being Luca and Milo. Two others stood in front of Aleksei, holding Osip's massive arms. The *Seeker* took them just barely out of Stone Brooke and high into the mountains that lined the town.

“We've already searched this area. What's the meaning of this?” Aleksei didn't bother keeping the venom out of his voice as he stared at the banished *Seeker*.

“No need to change into your freakish form.” Osip held out his palms as best he could and nodded toward the boulder. “Look closer.”

Aleksei clenched his fists and looked again at the rock. Several seconds went by, and the boulder started to waver, the image becoming blurry. It was so quick that if he hadn't known what it was, he would never have noticed it.

“There is a *blur* in place?” How could he have not noticed this before? “We searched this area. Why didn't we realize this before? Why didn't we feel the power surging through the rocks?”

Aleksei knew only certain beings of the *Otherworld* had the ability to *blur*, and *Seekers*, Blood Breeds, and the *Bloodless* were not

among the select few who had that special gift. The rogues had help from a being from the *Otherworld* that could *blur*, and without Osip, they would have never found Lana.

He motioned for Osip to continue walking since they were just wasting time, and God only knew what those monsters were doing to Lana. If someone were looking at them from the outside, it would have seemed that they were walking right into the rock. There was no rock, though, and they walked right into a tight opening on the side of the mountain.

It was dark and cold inside—the sound of water dripping loud in the distance. The tunnel curved down, going farther into the core of the mountain. All Aleksei could smell was rock and dirt—the smell of earth spearing through his nose and penetrating his senses. After what seemed like they walked miles, Osip abruptly stopped. The smell of depravity filtered through toward them, masking the strong natural smell of dirt. Two *Bloodless* males walked toward them, their attention on the ground as they got closer. They seemed to not even notice them, but all the warriors tensed for a fight.

Osip looked behind him and smiled as he held his finger to his mouth in a gesture to be quiet. Aleksei remembered *Seekers* had the ability to cloak their appearance and any other being they chose to. If he wanted Lana back, then he had to trust the male who kidnapped her, and that proved to be the hardest thing he ever had to do. He could see the struggle for Osip to cloak all of them, his large muscles shaking and straining from the effort.

The males passed them, not even aware of their presence.

“No need to tire yourself when we might need you to fight. Boys, let him free.” Aleksei nodded to Adrik and Garrik, who had a tight grip on Osip.

The two Breeds reluctantly let go, all the while grumbling under their breath. Osip rubbed his forearms and started walking again, this time taking the way the *Bloodless* had come. Aleksei motioned for his men to follow as they made their way through the stone tunnel.

Lighting crested in front of them, the dull light showcasing an entryway.

Osip held up his hand to stop and tilted his head to listen. He turned around and spoke quietly but quickly. "There are four rogues ahead. If we keep down this tunnel it will branch off into three chambers. There are four males in the last chamber on the left. Work quickly because once they sense you, they will attack and alert all others of our presence." He shook his head. "Listen, I know you guys are bad motherfuckers, but the *Bloodless* in these caverns are not what you're used to."

"What do you mean?" Aleksei's voice was a gruff whisper, and he continued to scan the tunnels around them.

"These fuckers are bad and are trained ruthlessly. They have been fighting from the moment they turned and are taught to fight to the death, and that doesn't mean their death." Osip ran a hand through his hair and breathed in deeply. "They fight dirty and they revel in it. All I'm saying is watch your backs."

"Why the fuck do you care? You took my female from me!" There were seven fully grown Breed males ready to fight to the death for their king's *Chosen*.

"Don't think for one minute that I am not doing this for purely selfish reasons. That bastard in there is denying me what is rightfully mine, and I want my revenge. I may have power and be able to seek vengeance on his ass by myself, but why not make a few allies on the way?"

A low, feminine squeak sounded within feet of them, and all heads turned in that direction. A small female stood in the path, the light showcasing her slim body. In her hand, she held a woven basket filled with fruits. Her little heart beat faster, and her breathing grew shallow.

"Easy, little one." Garrik spoke behind Aleksei in a soothing manner.

She looked around the tunnel and spotted Osip, her eyes growing big in what was clear shock.

“Kasia, be calm.” Osip’s voice was as soothing as Garrik’s except it lacked the actual compassion the Breed male’s voice had. “Run along to the kitchen.”

She looked around before nodding and audibly swallowing. She tightened her grip on the basket and dropped her gaze to the dirt floor. The girl smelled different, and he couldn’t put his finger on where he smelled that scent before.

“Oh, and Kasia?” Osip’s voice was a whisper, but she heard it nonetheless. She stopped and turned around, bringing bright green eyes up to Osip. He smiled at the female and brought his finger to his mouth. “Shhh.”

She nodded and hurried away, a few pieces of fruit falling from her basket in the process.

“What is a mere child doing living here with these vile monsters?”

“I have no idea. They feed and clothe her and treat her fairly well. As well as a leech can, that is.”

Aleksei knew horde leaders were notorious for keeping harems within their horde, but one so young? She was clearly a human female, which went against everything Aleksei and any Blood Breed knew and felt. The female looked to be unharmed, but he saw the fear in her eyes.

“Before any of you go all Rambo on me and charge after the little human, know that she has never asked to leave since I have been here. In fact, she seems almost fearful of doing so.”

Of course she wouldn’t ask to leave, and of course she would seem fearful. She clearly didn’t know the outside world and what it had to offer. Instead, she lived amongst monsters that looked like they were created out of nightmares. They all walked in silence, a deadly air covering them along the way.

They came upon the three tunnels that led to the different chambers. He didn’t need Osip to tell him which one led to the

Bloodless since their stench came through the last one, strong and overpowering. The smell of old and new blood coated the air as well as the walls and the floor.

He stopped right before the last one and split up the Breeds. He went with Garrik, Adrik, and Osip, while the other five split up through the other two tunnels. Osip explained the other two took different routes, but all three eventually led to the main chamber at the center of the mountain. Aleksei unsheathed one of his blades as they moved forward. Garrik and Adrik did the same, and Osip walked ahead of them, his attitude uncaring and nonchalant.

Loud voices sounded close as the light grew brighter. At the mouth of the tunnel, he stayed in the shadows and watched the drunken show. They laughed and slammed their mugs against the table while they sang old Russian songs. Females passed among the vampires, their hands filled with goblets of alcohol and blood. All the women were naked with bite marks on their skin and smiles on their faces. The women were all *Bloodless*, their eyes black pits of lust and greed. The rogue males fondled and groped at the passing women. It was clear their senses had been dulled by the alcohol since they still hadn't detected Aleksei or the three other males with him.

"I can cloak all of us long enough to slip past them if you want to skip the beat down."

Aleksei didn't bother replying to Osip's statement. He itched for a fight, and he knew all of his warriors felt the same way. Osip raised his hands in surrender and bowed his head in understanding. Aleksei focused his attention to the four *Bloodless* males in the room and reached out with his mind to gain an advantage as to what they were thinking. The only thing that came through was that all of them were lusting over the females in front of them.

The rogue males were massive, their fangs huge and glinting off the light when they grinned. The bottomless black eyes roamed over the females' naked bodies with desire and hunger. It was true all Blood Breeds looked like that when they changed, but when it was

paired with the immoral sickness of what a *Bloodless* thought and did, it made them the monsters they truly were.

Aleksei turned to the other two Breed males and nodded to let them know it was time. Adrik and Garrik closed their eyes and let the change overtake them. Aleksei did the same, his body stretching and growing and priming for a fight. He looked into Adrik's and Garrik's bottomless black eyes and smiled. His fangs scraped against his bottom lip, and he couldn't wait to sink them into his enemies' flesh.

The three of them looked over at Osip in unison. He didn't change—couldn't change, but still, he was as muscular and large as they were now. He didn't know too much about *Seekers*, but knew the bastards were deadly—they had to be in order to track and hunt their prey. In one swift move, the four of them charged through the tunnel's opening and gave a deafening roar of the oncoming war.

* * * *

Lana's eyes went wide at the man who stepped out from the shadows. His hair was dark as the night and fell to his broad shoulders. He stood well over six and a half feet tall, and she could tell under his expensive suit that his muscles were massive. There was something familiar about him, but she couldn't put her finger on it. He smiled at her, his straight white teeth shining brightly in the dim lighting.

"Please, have a seat so that we may speak." He swept his hand toward the table and chairs in front of the fireplace, his voice a soothing concoction to her ears. She eyed him hesitantly before slowly inching her way toward one of the seats. He hadn't moved any closer to her, just stayed where he was and watched.

She sat down, the fireplace's warmth seeping through the thin dress and into her skin. The neckline was obscenely low, and Lana felt exposed in front of this man. She brought her hands up to her neck and rubbed nervously, all the while watching the man watch her.

His eyes latched onto her neck, the area where she was rubbing, and she heard him swallow.

She cleared her throat before dropping her hand in her lap. "Who are you?"

He smiled and gestured toward the seat across from her. He didn't speak, but his actions were clear. He wanted her permission before moving forward. She swallowed and nodded, her heart beating so fast and hard she could feel it in her throat. He moved forward and sat down, the chair groaning at the extra weight. A table lay in between them and gave Lana some measure of relief.

"Who are you, and why are you keeping me here?"

"My name is D. Well, you see, you might not like my answer." He leaned forward and uncorked the wine bottle before pouring the red liquid into the glasses. He pushed the filled glass toward her and leaned back in the chair. His eyes never wavered from her face, making her feel extremely uncomfortable.

"So, you would like to know why I have kept you."

Why did he seem so familiar?

"You see, my dear, you are very special...very special, indeed." He rested his elbow on the chair arm and ran lazy circles over the red leather, all the while smiling at her.

"W-What do you mean?"

"I see he did not tell you. Well, that really doesn't surprise me. You, my sweet, are the *Prophesied Female* and my future queen."

Lana looked around the room as the conversation went from strange and awkward to horribly frightening. Had she heard right? The *Prophesied Female*? His future queen?

"Look at me, Lana." His voice held no room for argument, and she looked him in the eyes.

Everything around her went fuzzy around the edges, the room blurring away so the only thing that was clear was him. His face was frightening in its intensity. An unforeseen force held her in her place and made her focus on this lone man, although he wasn't a man at all.

She watched in horror as his eyes started to go black, the darkness slithering out of his pupils and moving toward the whites. He smiled at her, and she watched with mouth open as his flat canines grew to sharp points. His body grew as well, his already large form filling the chair and blocking out everything behind him.

“You see, my dear Lana, you were supposed to be mine. *He* got to you and corrupted you. Although I am but a male and will take you as I can get you.” He inhaled deeply, a distorted growl leaving his mouth. “It is truly a shame that he has already claimed you and left his mark within you.” He shrugged and smiled. “The child we will have will give me more power than anyone could imagine.” He reached out and ran a big finger down her cheek. “He will be raised and trained to fight next to me and overcome all of the *Otherworld*. Of course, you will be kept for my sole pleasure. Maybe I will let some of my minions sample you if they behave themselves.”

She wanted to slap his hand away, but she sat there frozen, her body no longer hers to control. He licked his lips, his body leaning forward so he was mere inches from her mouth. Why couldn’t she move? She screamed on the inside, needing to move away from the mental hold he had on her.

“I might want to keep you all for myself, though. You do smell incredibly delicious, and I bet you taste even sweeter.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Aleksei and the three males behind him moved with deadly focus as they charged through the tunnels. The four *Bloodless* males had been too easy to kill in their drunken stupors, and he was sorry it hadn't lasted longer.

The other Breeds just came out of the other two tunnels, blood coating their clothing and smiles on their faces. They regrouped and made their way toward the main corridor that all three tunnels eventually led into. Before they even reached the entrance, Aleksei could hear guns being cocked and swords being drawn. He drew his own weapon of choice—his ancestral family sword. The sword fit nicely in his palm, and the shining silver moved through the air with clarity and precision.

The light of the main corridor broke through the tunnel as the Breed males rushed in and gave a war cry. The main room was filled with *Bloodless* either lounging or fucking—typical behavior of the lazy bastards. There were ten male rogues that filled the room, and at the Breeds' roar, they jumped up and took fighting stances.

They stared at each other—the Breeds on one side and the rogues on the other. The room was filled with tension and anger that pulsed like a living entity. A male stood out in front of the others, the leader of the pack. He smiled the widest and had the most blood covering his mouth. He looked around and started to laugh, causing all the vampires behind him to do the same.

“Boys, it looks like we have a dance tonight.” He dragged his tongue over his lips and licked off the blood. “You just missed one hell of a meal, brothers.”

Aleksei growled, causing the males next to him to do the same. “I am not your brother.”

“Slice his head clean off, Stefan.” The rogue held his hand up for the *other Bloodless* to be silent, his smile big as he stared at Aleksei. “Silence. These fine warriors are our guests. Tell me, fine warrior, did you lose something and have come here to retrieve it?”

Aleksei knew he was being goaded, and it was working. It took all his control to stay where he was and not charge them.

“I don’t blame you for wanting her back.” He licked his lips again. “I bet she tastes real good. I bet her pussy feels real good, too.”

Just as Aleksei was about rip the little fucker’s head off, a tray clattered to the floor. All heads turned to stare at the same female Aleksei saw earlier...Kasia. Her green eyes were wide and she gasped. She quickly covered her mouth and stared at a room full of fully changed vampires.

“Fuck! Kasia get out of here now!” The leader, Stefan, looked panicked to see her. She held her hands up, and that was when Aleksei formed an idea.

“Youri, step forward.” Aleksei called to one of the Breed males who had a *gift*, one that would be useful at this moment. He kept his eyes on Stefan as the male looked around frantically, eyes wild.

“Bring her here.” Aleksei smiled at Stefan, who bared his fangs and crouched forward.

“You don’t touch her! Kasia, stay the fuck where you are.” The female looked around, her hands in front of her like a shield.

* * * *

Kasia was in a far worse hell than she could have ever imagined. Not only were there ten of those monsters in the same room with her, but to top it off, the ones she saw in the tunnels earlier, the ones who looked like men, were no more than the same crazed monsters she lived with. She looked around frantically, wanting to listen to Stefan,

but at the same time wanting to run. She despised Stefan, but he always made sure none of the other monsters touched her.

She stared at Stefan, who looked scarier than she had ever seen. As one of the men called forth someone, she whipped her head around and stared at hollow black eyes. His head was shaved to his skull, and his eyebrow was pierced. He was the same as everyone else in the room—massive body and scary eyes. He smiled down at her and held his hand out to her. She could vaguely hear Stefan issuing a command for her to leave at once, but staring into the stranger's eyes had become paramount at the moment.

His eyes started to swirl in color, white twisting with black until she felt like she was in a dream. She could hear a male voice in her head, a voice urging her to come to him, and she was helpless to stop it. She couldn't hear anything other than his voice in her head, and she was filled with such a peace from it. He stood in front of her and smiled down at her as she stared in a daze. She placed her hand in the warmth of his much larger one. Her eyelids grew so heavy the act of keeping them open seeming like an impossible act. She was so tired of everything that all she wanted to do was lie down and sleep.

The world went dark around her, and she welcomed it with relish. She wished she could stay in this peaceful dream forever...hoped she would never wake up.

* * * *

Aleksei smiled as Stefan became frantic when Kasia moved toward Youri. How he wished he could mesmerize like Youri could. Stefan yelled at Kasia to leave, but she was too far gone to hear. The other rogues stared at Stefan as he became a shaking mess. It was clear this one had feelings for the human female, and Aleksei planned to use it against him.

Just as Aleksei thought, Stefan charged after Youri in an unorganized way. His movements were sloppy and uncoordinated,

exactly what he hoped for. The males behind him took the cue to charge forward. Metal clashed and bullets flew as Breed males came up against *Bloodless* males. Aleksei charged for Stefan just as he was about to wrap his hand around the female. He brought his sword down and smiled when the silver sank into Stefan's forearm. Stefan roared and stumbled back, gripping his flesh as blood poured from the wound. He stared at Aleksei with murderous intent and stalked forward.

"You wish to take what's mine? Never!" Stefan reached behind his back and brought his own sword down. Aleksei moved to the side, just barely missing the blade as it struck right by his thigh. Aleksei jumped up as Stefan circled him. All were engaged in the fight, and Aleksei felt the adrenaline race through his blood. Stefan laughed and lunged forward again. Their swords clanged together, and Aleksei smiled at how uncoordinated Stefan was. Stefan's moves were predictable, sloppy in their appearance, and gave everything away.

They continued to circle each other, Stefan swinging his blade around and taking slices in the air. In Stefan's sloppy attempt to slice at a body part, he finally succeeded in sinking the blade into Aleksei's thigh. Stefan's distorted laugh echoed around him, and Aleksei moved as Stefan's blade came in for the head shot. Aleksei ducked and pushed his blade into Stefan's stomach. The rogue's eyes went big as he fell back, the blade never leaving as he hit the dirt ground. Aleksei twisted the blade for good measure and watched as bright red blood seeped from the wound. He brought his sword up and intended to bring it across his neck when Stefan's words stopped him.

"You will never find her without me!"

His blade was mere inches from Stefan's throat when his words brought him to a dead stop. "She is my *Chosen*! There is no place in here that I won't be able to find her."

"Oh, no? You wouldn't have been able to find this place without the traitor's help." Stefan coughed up blood, the wound most assuredly painful but not fatal. "The female is hidden within these

walls, and the black arts surround us. So I mean it when I say you won't be able to find her without me." He spit a mouthful of blood out and stared at Aleksei.

He weighed his options. He could either attempt to use his instincts and find Lana without the vampire's help, or he could use him while he could and then cut his head off later. Looking around, he scanned the fallen *Bloodless* that littered the ground. The only ones left standing were the Breed males and Osip.

"Get up." Aleksei's voice held no emotion as he watched Stefan pull his body off the ground. "What do you want in return?" Aleksei knew the male wouldn't do this for nothing, and in his head, he already knew what he would want.

"I want freedom, and I want Kasia."

He knew he would want to be released, but he hadn't actually thought Stefan would want to keep the human. Youri came to stand next to him, the female in his arms and passed out. Youri temporarily immobilized her, and until Aleksei gave the order to undo it, she would stay that way. Stefan growled deep and low, the sound reflecting the possessiveness he felt toward the female. If Aleksei didn't know better, he would think the male found his *Chosen*.

"Is she your *Chosen*?"

At the question, Stefan bared his fangs and hissed. "What she is doesn't concern you. All you need to worry about is finding your sweet little Lana."

"You do not speak her name, or I will tear your throat out with my teeth right here."

"No, you won't. If you do, then you'll never see your little *Chosen*."

He rushed toward Stefan and grabbed him by the throat, lifting him off his feet. "If you say her name one more time, I swear I will snap your back in half and haul you with me until you show me where she is. You can either keep your mouth shut and show me where she is, or you can keep talking and be dragged behind us with a broken

back.” He leaned in so they were nose-to-nose. “So, what will it be?” He sensed the anger radiating off the male, but he kept his mouth shut and nodded. “Good. Now get up and show me where she is!”

* * * *

Just as his mouth started to descend on her lips loud voices sounded outside the room. Metal clanged together, and in that instant Lana felt that invisible hold on her vanish as his attention was drawn to the door. He let out a string of vile curses and got up so fast the chair flew backward and broke against the wall. He reached out and grabbed her, placing her body in front of his like a shield. Her back pressed tightly against his chest as his hand snaked up and gripped the side of her neck. He tilted her head to the side, the angle awkward and uncomfortable.

The door burst open suddenly, shards of wood splintering forward and cutting her bare arms. An animalistic roar echoed throughout the room, causing everything to go eerily silent. She slowly opened her eyes, expecting to see a hundred more of those vile creatures, but what she saw shocked her and had her heart singing.

Aleksei stared at her, his breathing ragged and blood covering him—he truly was a frightening sight. He didn’t look at anything else in the room, just stared at her face with an almost pained expression. Other vampires stood behind him, all of them scary in their own right, but lacking the determination that poured out of Aleksei. Her heart skipped a beat at the realization that she was going to be saved. All of those happy thoughts were torn from her as her captor ran his finger back and forth over her neck. A deep growl shot out of Aleksei and had her eyes growing wide.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Aleksei stood in the doorway and stared at Lana, relief filling him that she was alive. Nothing else mattered at that moment, nothing even registered as he stared into her big blue eyes. His anger diffused as he stared into her face but soon came back full force when he saw the large hand stroking her neck—stroking the mark he gave her. A growl escaped his throat at the thought of a male daring to touch what was his, to be so blatant in touching his mark. His eyes snapped to the male holding her and his world truly tumbled into hell. He stumbled back as the Breed holding Lana smiled, showing elongated fangs.

“It can’t be.”

Curses and gasps sounded behind him, and he knew his warriors were just as shocked at who stood in front of them.

“Brother, it has been too long.”

Aleksei bared his fangs and growled as Dorian’s nail pressed into Lana’s neck. His nail sliced through her skin, her blood sliding down her neck and disappearing beneath the bodice of her gown. She gasped and closed her eyes, and Aleksei took a step forward, ready to tear Dorian’s throat out, brother or not.

“I wouldn’t do that, brother of mine.” He clicked his tongue and smiled. “Let’s all be calm. We wouldn’t want me to accidentally snap your *Chosen’s* pretty neck now would we?”

He gritted his teeth and sensed his men move forward. He held up his hand, knowing Dorian spoke the truth.

“I suggest you stay where you are. It would only take a flick of my wrist and her delicate neck would break in two.”

Aleksei held his hands in front of him, showing his brother he wasn't a threat. His eyes darted between Lana and Dorian, fear making his words tight and clipped.

"You're supposed to be dead. How can you be alive?"

Dorian's smile faltered somewhat, as if he, too, felt the pain at seeing his family in the flesh. All these years he thought his brother died, but here he stood, flesh and blood, and threatening to end his love's life. The male who stood in front of him was no longer his brother. Even though he looked like Dorian, even smelled like Dorian, he now worked with the *Bloodless*.

He dipped his head and ran his tongue over Lana's flesh, Dorian's eyes never wavering from his. Aleksei bared his teeth and hissed, taking another step forward with his fists clenched.

"I would stay put, brother." Dorian opened his mouth, his fangs elongating and pressing against Lana's pale skin. Tears ran down her cheeks, and Aleksei wanted nothing more than to hold her in his arms and make her pain go away.

"What do you want?" Aleksei stared at his brother with rage boiling inside of him.

"Can't read my mind, Alek?"

It pained Aleksei to hear Dorian call him by the nickname his family used. His family lived hundreds of years thinking their brother was dead. Dorian was still a Breed, and that alone gave Aleksei a small twinge of hope that Dorian could be reasoned with. He was vaguely aware that Milo and Luca stood closely behind him and were stone silent.

"You know I can't." Dorian had always had a strong mental block that was impossible to breach. "I will ask you once more. What do you want?"

"Come on, Aleksei, you should know what I want." He ran his tongue along her flesh and smiled. "She tastes so good."

"Don't do that again." Aleksei kept his voice calm and low even though a whirlwind of emotion barreled within him. When he got his

hands on Dorian—and he would—he was going to slowly tear each and every one of his body parts off.

“What I want I have. If you were wise, you would leave us.”

“You will never have my *Chosen*. Let her go so we can finish this like real Breed warriors.”

Dorian laughed and stroked Lana’s hair with his other hand. “You killed many of my minions, brother. Very disappointing since that means I will have to go searching for others.” Dorian’s eyes traveled to Osip, his lips curling in disgust. “I see you have switched teams, *traitor*.”

“You betrayed me when you didn’t have the dagger you promised me. You brought this upon yourself.”

“Couldn’t fight me alone, *Seeker*?”

“Don’t think for one moment that I couldn’t have taken you out with my bare hands. I thought this would be a better show, more dramatic.”

“You and your fucking cloaking. I should have killed you when I had the chance.”

“Enough of this. Give me Lana, and I’ll kill you quickly.” Aleksei had no intentions of doing that, but until he had Lana safely in his arms he would say anything.

“No reminiscing? I’m slightly hurt.”

Is this how it would go? Cat and mouse games to placate Dorian? “What happened to you?” He asked the question without emotion, his eyes on Lana’s too pale face.

“They attempted to kill me, brother, just about succeeded. Drained me almost dry and left me for dead. Of course, I got the better of them. I killed their horde leader and claimed the horde for myself. You see, I could have gone back to the family, but what would I have been? Nothing. You were the eldest and therefore would be king. I would have just been one of your loyal subjects, and that I couldn’t have.”

Aleksei shot his gaze to Dorian, his story unbelievable. “You were always selfish, Dorian. Ever since you were a fledgling, you thought of only yourself.”

“Well, Aleksei, you can’t count on anything or anyone in this fucking world but yourself. So, as you can see, I am now a king in my own right.” He bent down and kissed the side of Lana’s neck. “I have a queen, too. It’s just too perfect. Don’t worry, I’ll make sure to take care of your child that she carries.”

It took Aleksei a minute to process what he just heard. His child? He looked at Lana, her eyes wide and confusion and shock pouring out of her at what she also just heard. “It’s all lies that come out of your mouth. I would have known if my *Chosen* carried my young.”

“Would you have? She has been with me this whole time, and I assure you my senses are not tainted by wanting to claim her.” Dorian laughed, his hand moving to her stomach and rubbing slow circles. “I have to admit, though, I have thought about what she would feel like beneath me.”

“I will give you anything for her back in my arms safely.”

Dorian seemed to think about it for a minute, but Aleksei wasn’t fooled. “You see, dear brother, what she carries is what will give me the power over all others. I know you must remember the prophecy.”

“You think our young will have the power to rule over all others?” Dorian lifted Lana’s dress, Aleksei growling deeply in warning. She whimpered in protest but didn’t move. Her long, creamy thigh was revealed and then her stomach. She didn’t look as though she was with young, but he knew that didn’t mean anything.

Right by her belly button was a crescent moon within a circle—the marking of the *Prophesied Female*. The prophecy played through his mind, and he couldn’t understand how he missed something so significant. He memorized her body, every curve and dip—every inch of her creamy flesh. How could he have been so blind with the need to claim her that he could have missed the significance of her birthmark—a mark he kissed and licked countless times?

"I am sure when a male finds his *Chosen* all other rational thoughts are gone." Dorian spoke the words as if he had read Aleksei's mind. "Believe me when I say if there was any other way I would have taken it."

Memories flashed through Aleksei's mind of when Dorian was but a fledgling. Those were memories Aleksei had gotten strength from, his memories that helped the guilt he hadn't been able to save his brother.

"Join me, brother. We will treat you well, and you will only have to answer to me."

"I will always be *your* king, Dorian."

Anger distorted Dorian's face. "Well, you leave me no other option, then." He opened his mouth and descended on Lana's neck.

Aleksei watched in slow motion as horror rushed through his blood stream. Lana pleaded with him silently and closed her eyes as Dorian's fangs sank into her neck. Aleksei was vaguely aware of Dorian humming his approval and the other Breed males standing behind him shouting. His eyes rang, and his blood rushed to his ears. Aleksei snapped out of whatever haze he had been in and ran across the room. Dorian ripped his mouth free from Lana's neck and she sagged limply in his arms. Dorian scooped her up and ran to a door off to the side.

He was fast, much faster than a Breed should be. There was something tainted about his brother, something dark and deadly that coiled around him and seeped with power. He reached out, about to grab Dorian's jacket, when his brother's arm came out and slammed black magic into his chest. He flew backward, hitting the wall on the other side, the rock crumbling behind him from the impact.

He shook of the dizziness and stood. He caught a glimpse of Dorian going through the door and descending a set of stairs. His men stood off to the side, their gazes straight ahead and blank. He called out to them, but none of them answered, their gazes still trained ahead as if they were frozen in time. Dorian was using black magic.

He raced toward the door and down the stone stairs, no light penetrating the unusual darkness that greeted him. He could smell Lana's blood, and it became stronger the farther he went. The stairs ended, and a dirt floor greeted him, the smell of rich earth thick in his nose. No light penetrated the stone walls on either side of him, but it made little difference against Aleksei's superior vision. He moved quickly but cautiously, not wanting any surprises on the way. The tunnel opened up to reveal a large cavern. Stalagmites and stalactites littered the cavern and looked out of place around the modern furniture sporadically placed around the room. Candles flared to life, their shadows moving against the rock walls as if they were living, breathing entities.

A huge bed took up one wall, its black silk canopy hanging around it. Water dripped from somewhere within the room, and the earth scent did little to mask Lana's blood. He inhaled deeply and moved toward the massive bed. He reached out and pulled the black draping that hung from the canopy away.

Lana lay pale against the dark sheets, her blood steadily dripping from the twin puncture marks that marred her neck. Inhaling deeply, Aleksei tried to pinpoint Dorian's scent but had no luck. He bent down and swiped his tongue across the small holes on her neck, sealing them and stopping the flow of blood. His jaw clenched at the taste of his brother on her skin. His hands fisted on the sheets around her as his gaze traveled across her body to assess any damages. Aside from the marks on her neck, she appeared unmarked.

"I'm sorry, my love."

"That really is a beautiful sight." Dorian's amused voice boomed in the room.

Aleksei spun around and hissed as Dorian's scent finally hit him. "Why am I just now sensing you?"

"I have friends with benefits, and well, let's just say they've shown me a thing or two." He looked behind Aleksei, a smile

covering his lips. “She really is splendid, dear brother. She tastes better than the oldest aged wine.”

Aleksei launched himself toward Dorian, who in turn did the same, causing the two to crash together in the air. Aleksei wrapped his hands around Dorian’s neck as the two fell to the floor. Aleksei swung his arm out, catching Dorian in the head, and causing him to stumble back and laugh.

“You have trained well, brother. How about we skip the new age shit and go back to the old ways?” Dorian circled him as he reached behind his back and withdrew a sword Aleksei remembered well. “Ah, you remember this don’t you?” Dorian spun the sword in his hand and took a fighting stance.

Aleksei reached behind him and withdrew his own sword, smelling the blood that marred the steel from his earlier killings. He gripped the sword in his hand, bringing the metal over his head and around his body before taking up a similar stance.

“You were always good with the steel, weren’t you, Alek?”

“Don’t call me that. You are my enemy now, and you shall die at my blade like they all do.” Dorian took a step toward Aleksei and brought his sword down.

Metal clashed together, the sound echoing off the large cavern walls. For several minutes, their swords slammed together as metal against metal created a deafening roar in the cavern. Dorian’s blade occasionally caught Aleksei in the arm or thigh, but that didn’t cause him to falter in his moves. He welcomed the pain—it reminded him of what he was fighting for...Lana.

“I remember when we used to spar together in the forest behind mother and father’s home.”

“Shut the fuck up! You are no longer my brother.”

“You were always good in a fight. Although I do remember beating you a few times.” Dorian flipped into the air and brought his sword down across Aleksei’s leg. The blade came down, cutting into his flesh and hitting the bone. He hissed in pain but didn’t let it slow

him down. The injury slowly started to knit itself back together, leaving a raised pink scar. By tomorrow the skin would be unmarred.

“It’s really a shame. Our injuries heal so quickly you can’t fully bask in the pleasure of inflicting your enemy, or in this case, *my* brother, with pain.”

Aleksei crouched down and brought his leg out, bringing Dorian’s legs out from under him. Jumping up, Aleskei spun his sword around his head and brought it toward Dorian’s sword arm. Dorian fell to the ground and rolled out of the way. Aleskei launched himself at Dorian again and brought his sword across Dorian’s stomach. Dorian howled in pain and looked down to see blood gush out of the wound. Dorian’s face changed from amusement to fury, and he lunged at Aleksei, sword dropped on the ground and fists raised. His fist connected with Aleksei’s face, crushing bone and sending him slamming into jagged wall. Aleskei shook his head, his brain scrambled from the impact and his bones crushed beneath his skin. Flesh wounds healed instantly, but broken bones took a little longer to heal. Spitting blood out, Aleskei wiped his arm across his mouth and stared at Dorian.

“Your little *Chosen* will be a good fuck, *brother*.”

He stared at Dorian, his adrenaline surging within him and allowing him to stand even with his broken bones. “You will never have her!”

“That’s where you’re wrong. Her blood is in my body, and so you see, she is already a part of me.”

He roared and charged toward Dorian. The two of them slammed together, two massive bodies locked in violence. His body screamed in protest, his broken ribs rubbing together and causing him excruciating pain. He gritted his teeth and thought of Lana, her sweet face giving him the strength he needed.

Aleksei threw his fist repeatedly into Dorian, the blood that ran down Aleksei’s face starting to make it difficult to see. “You will never have her!”

He fell to the ground with Dorian, and the two rolled around. Crunching bone echoed off the walls, and blood coated the floor as his fists continued to plow into Dorian. He rolled him over and pinned him on the ground, all the while bringing his fists against his face. His knuckles were bloody and swollen, but Aleksei relished the pain, it was what made him stronger. He was vaguely aware of Dorian lying lifeless on the ground beneath him, but he still didn't ease up on his brother—his enemy.

"Aleksei?" Lana's weak voice came like a shot to Aleksei's violence-filled brain.

He stopped throwing the punches and turned to see Lana sitting up, dazed and confused, on the bed. She looked so pale and fragile, the dark circles around her eyes standing out in contrast to her pale skin. She stared at him like he was a monster. He knew he looked like a monster. Blood covered every part of him, even dripping from his hair. The ground was slick with the fluid, and he slipped as he stood.

Dorian lay unconscious on the ground, his face unrecognizable for the moment until his body healed itself. He wouldn't be out for long, but long enough that Aleksei's men could transport him back to a holding cell. As much as he wanted to kill his brother right now, he knew that wasn't the best course of action. Questions needed to be asked, and answers needed to be given. He didn't move toward her, didn't want to frighten her any more than she was. It was hard, though, so very hard not to pull her into his arms and kiss her soft lips.

* * * *

Lana looked at Aleksei as he got off the lifeless form on the ground. She couldn't tell who it was because the face was so beaten up it was unrecognizable, but she had a good idea of who it might be.

"Aleksei?"

She didn't know what to say. She couldn't remember what happened after Aleksei burst through the door. Everything seemed so fuzzy and mixed up, a cloud of disorientation still surrounding her. Her neck hurt, and she felt so cold. He held up his hands and slowly walked toward her. It was Aleksei, but there was something different about him, something dangerous and powerful.

"Lana, please don't be afraid."

She was so tired and let her body fall back on the pillows. He was in front of her in a heartbeat, his body covered in blood and the air around him charged with energy.

Loud footsteps sounded near yet far, and she saw out of the corner of her eye men rush in. She recognized some of them from the club, but the others drew up blank. Lana looked into their faces, all of her memories crashing back to her in a wave of clarity. She rolled over and emptied her stomach as nausea washed through her.

Pregnant.

The word bounced around in her heard, and she instinctively placed her hand on her stomach and looked into Aleksei's worried eyes. He still stayed a distance from her, and she knew it was because he didn't want to touch her with all the violence on him.

"Is it true?"

Aleksei stared at her for long moments as if he didn't know how to answer her question. He finally closed his eyes and nodded.

"I'm so sorry, Lana. I didn't mean to bring you into this, I swear it."

He sounded so torn and hurt, so distant. She smiled and spoke the words that would either tie them together or tear them apart.

"I love you."

He stared at her with wide eyes, and to Lana's amazement walked toward her and dropped to his knees. He took her hand and placed it on his chest—over his heart.

"You are my life, my world, my very soul. You are what makes me whole. I love you with everything I have, and will do so for as

long as I still have air in my body.” He lowered his head and stroked her hand.

She was speechless, utterly speechless. She looked over at the men watching her and saw amazement and confusion in their eyes. No doubt they had never seen their leader do something like this before. He stood up, giving Lana’s hand one last kiss and turned toward his men.

“Adrik, Milo, and Luca, take him to the holding chambers.” He pointed behind him at the bloodied and mangled body. Everyone was quiet.

“Who? There isn’t anyone there. Just a lot of blood.”

Lana pulled herself up, looking around Aleksei and the empty floor. Her heart pounded in fear. “Oh my gosh, please, don’t let him come for me.” She couldn’t stop herself from crying, the very idea of being a prisoner again too much to bear. Aleksei took her hand and kissed it, telling her everything would be okay and that he would never let anything happen to her again.

“Search for him.” Aleksei didn’t let go of her as he continued to speak to the men. “What about Stefan? Is he being held?”

They stared at each other before one of them stepped forward, head bent low but voice strong. “He escaped as well, my lord. We were not able to move until just moments ago. We rushed down here as soon as we were able to. Some unforeseen force held us, my lord.”

Aleksei let out a string of curses that made Lana blush.

“No, it’s not your fault. He used black magic.”

“I don’t feel so well, Aleksei.” She didn’t mean to jump right in, but staying in this creepy cave wasn’t helping matters.

“Let’s go home.” He gently picked her up and made his way out of the cavern, his men tight on his heels.

* * * *

Lana heard voices but nothing really registered. She couldn't lift her eyes, but in all honesty she didn't have the strength. She couldn't remember anything after being carried out of the cave by Aleksei. She strained to understand the voices, but they were muffled. It was almost like she was under water and trying to hear what the people above her were saying. Her mouth felt so dry she would have killed for a glass of water. The voices faded out, and she let herself succumb to sleep. She heard a moan, or maybe it came from her. She could hear voices again, but this time she actually could understand what they were saying.

"The doctor came by today and said the blood loss wasn't too significant. He said she would be weak for a while but that we shouldn't worry."

The gruff voice she knew right away was Aleksei, and all she wanted to do was roll toward the sound that seemed to bring her the most comfort.

"Are you going to change her?" The feminine voice came from Aniya. They sounded close—as if they stood right by her.

"No, Dr. Chenobova said because she is with child turning her would not be a wise decision. He said that she could possibly die along with the baby."

* * * *

"Uhhh." Lana's voice came through like a beacon of light in Aleksei's darkness. He had been sitting in a chair next to her bed for days now and was worried about how she was doing. She hadn't so much as moved an inch since he brought her back to his house.

The Breed doctor assured him her body just needed to recuperate from the blood loss, but the fear gripped him like an iron fist. Dr. Chenobova hooked her up to an IV and assured him they would provide her with the required fluids and nutrients her body would

need to heal. He placed his hand over her much smaller one and rubbed it in slow circles.

“Where am I?” She coughed and then groaned as if in pain. “Water, please.”

She moaned when he gave her a glass of water and the liquid poured into her mouth. She opened her eyes, the blue orbs shinning up at him brightly. He ran his hand over her hair and kissed her forehead. “You’re back at my home in the mountains. Do you remember what happened?”

She nodded and ran a shaky hand over her face. “Are they dead?”

He knew who she spoke of and wanted to tell her that yes, Dorian and Stefan were dead, but that would have been a lie.

“Sleep, my sweet. There is plenty of time to talk about things. You are safe here and no one will harm you.” He kissed her head again and crawled into bed beside her. He wrapped his arms around her and let her small body form around his as they both drifted off to sleep.

* * * *

Kayla sat all alone at her kitchen table, running her finger along the rim of her mug as she stared out her bay window. She looked down at her cell phone, the conversation she just had with Lana moments ago bizarre and frightening.

The fact that Lana almost died was too much to bear and actually caused her chest to hurt. She was thankful Lana was recovering, even if the circumstance that caused her injury sent chills down Kayla’s back. It was still so hard to believe what Lana had told her. Vampires? How could she grasp her mind around such a foreign concept?

She shook her head, remembering when Lana told her about her bizarre relationship with her “vampire” lover. Out of the two of them, Lana was the more levelheaded one, the one who was more skeptical about the things that couldn’t be rationally explained. The way she

looked, though, that intense conviction that covered her face made Kayla believe everything she said.

She looked back out the window, loneliness filling her completely as she watched the sun sink below the horizon. Kaleb was gone for an unknown amount of time, and Lana was recuperating with the man of her dreams. Everyone else seemed to be happy with their lives, happy with how things worked out for them.

Getting up, she walked over to the sink and put her empty coffee cup in, holding the edge of the counter and breathing in deeply. Her thoughts continuously on the one man that she loved...Adrik.

If things just could have been different then maybe she wouldn't be so miserable. Even if that were the case, would she have been happy just being his friend? Seeing the person she loved on a regular basis that didn't feel the same but brotherly love for her? She was a desperate and pathetic person because she would take whatever she could from him.

It had been bearable when he was gone and she hadn't seen him for so long, but now that he was back, her feelings bombarded her. She hated how things ended and wanted nothing more than to take it all back, go back to the way things were when he used to look at her so caringly.

She turned and leaned against the counter, her gaze going to her cell phone that sat on the kitchen table. All she would have to do is pick it up and dial the number. She didn't know *his* number, but she knew the club's, and he did have a room there, so the staff would know how to reach him. Contemplating her idea, she took a deep breath, walked over to the table, picked up her phone dialed the club.

"The Night Phlox, how may I be of assistance?"

Kayla swallowed and almost hit the 'end' button but took a deep breath and spoke. "Yes, may I be connected to Adrik Draykavich?"

"Please hold."

The line switched to some elevator music, and Kayla could feel her heart beating wildly.

“Hello?”

Kayla swallowed and Adrik’s baritone voice came through the line. “Adrik? Hi, it’s Kayla.” The line went silent, and she pulled the phone back, thinking the line had gone dead. “Hello, you there?”

“Yeah, I’m sorry. I’m just surprised to hear your voice.”

She smiled and sat down, glad that pleasure laced his voice. “It’s good to hear your voice, too.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

Three months later

Lana sat in a plush chair in the sitting room of her and Aleksei's home. She got out of the chair and walked to the floor-to-ceiling mirror and stared at herself. She placed both hands on her stomach, the slight bump looking bigger on her small frame. Everything that happened seemed unbelievable even though she was living it firsthand.

Now that she had her nursing degree, she planned on taking care of children. Aleksei told her the Blood Breeds had a health clinic, a building that was built far beneath Stone Brooke. When she finally graduated college, she had no real specific plans for how she wanted to use her skills. Yes, she wanted to take care of people, but whether that was at a hospital or another facility was still undecided for her. Now that she was pregnant and was fully involved in this strange and exciting new world, her decision was cemented on taking care children—Blood Breed children to be more specific.

After the baby was born, she had every intention of working at the Breed clinic, but she knew her conventional training wouldn't cover everything for the new species she wanted to help. It was still exciting, and she couldn't wait for the next chapter in her life to begin. She rubbed her belly again as her thoughts drifted toward darker things. She was still worried over the fact that they hadn't found Dorian and Stefan, but she trusted Aleksei and knew he would protect her.

"You are so beautiful."

Aleksei's loving voice came through the doorway, and Lana smiled at his reflection. He walked toward her and wrapped his arms around her from behind. He kissed the side of her neck and rested his hands on her belly.

"So how is Kasia holding up?" Lana turned in his arms and looked up at him.

He bent down and kissed her gently on the lips. "Very well. She is enjoying staying with a young Breed couple in town. She seems to enjoy working at the club and keeping busy. She's like you, though. I can hear her thoughts, and she fears they will come for her."

"Poor thing. I can't imagine what she went through, but I'm glad things are working out for her. I haven't talked to her very much since everything happened and have been worried about her." She laid her head against his chest and let his strong heartbeat go through her body. "What about Osip?"

"He left right after your rescue."

"Well, maybe after the baby is born we can invite everyone over?"

Aleksei growled, and she couldn't help but smile. She knew he was still angry at what Osip had done, but she knew Aleksei would be easy to sway. Osip hadn't physically hurt her, and that was the only reason she forgave him. She ran her hands up his chest and wrapped them around his neck. She pulled his head down and brought his firm lips to hers. He growled deep in his chest and slid his hands through her hair. She loved it when he made that sound. She pulled back and smiled, kissing his lips once more before stepping back. She gasped when he pulled her close to him.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Their lips met in a soft caress and soon they were both panting. Their tongues twined around each other, his hands sliding down to grip her ass and lift her on her toes. His long, thick erection pressed into her and a moan escaped her throat.

"Let's go to our room."

He whispered into her ear and caused shivers to dance across her skin. “You read my mind.” He took her hand and brought it down to the erection that strained against his pants.

She rubbed her hand up and down his cock, the flared head evident through the fabric of his pants. He scooped her up into his arms, making her feel so very feminine even though her belly was swollen and she felt anything but. This was her new life, and she couldn’t have asked for anything else. She was in love with a vampire and carried his child—a being who would have the power to control everything supernatural. How did someone get used to all of that? She felt like she was in a perpetual dream, but then again, if this was all just a dream, she never wanted to wake up.

THE END

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GLOSSARY

Royal Blood Breed Line: An immortal vampire of the Royal Family, known to the *Blood Breed* as the Royal Blood Line. Even though the males of the *Breed* are territorial, the males of the Royal Blood line are even more so.

Blood Breed: An immortal vampire. Sunlight and decapitation are the only way to kill them. They must drink blood regularly to survive. The males of the species are very territorial and possessive in nature. Each Blood Breed possesses a *gift* that is unique to them. A Blood Breed is always searching for their Chosen, the one being that will bring them eternal happiness, the one being that will complete their soul.

The Allure: All Blood Breeds excrete a scent that is irresistible to humans. It is a way to insure that their food source and sexual source are not hard to acquire.

The Prophesied Female: A being written about in the Ancient Scrolls. A female who has been prophesied to carry the offspring of a Blood Breed member. Once the offspring of the prophesied female has matured it will have the power to control all members of the *Otherworld*.

The Changing: The act when a member of the *Blood Breed* converts a human into a vampire. It involves the exchange of blood, and is typically done during a time of intimacy. This process is considered sacred. A human is typically changed because a member of the Blood Breed has bonded with them, but is not always the case. Once changed, they will possess the same physical strengths as the *Blood Breed*, as well as the same weaknesses.

Chosen: An individual who is fated to mate a member of the *Blood Breed*. A Chosen is recognized only after a member of the Blood Breed has tasted their blood. Once a Chosen has mated, the bond is eternal and is only broken when death occurs. Mated pairs only feed off of each other.

The Bloodless: Vampires gone rogue. They are considered outcasts by the “*Blood Breed*”. They have gone mad from bloodlust, and are ruthless and kill without remorse. They typically stick together in close knit “hordes” in areas where they have set as “their territory.” They will, on occasion, wage war against other *Bloodless* “hordes” in order to take over a specified “territory.” They are also known as “rogues”, and will fight for the leader position within their own and other “hordes.”

Halfling: The result when a vampire and a human have offspring. The child is born human with no characteristics of their vampire half. They can go out into sunlight but can’t tolerate heat whatsoever. After puberty the Halfling will start to acquire symptoms that their “change” is near. They start to crave raw meats, start to become exhausted during the day and full of energy at night, and can no longer stand the sunlight. A Halfling does not need the exchange of blood to make the transformation. The transformation can take anywhere from weeks to months or in some cases years. The transformation happens when the offspring is at their strongest, healthiest age.

The Shadow Realm: What beings from the Otherworld consider their “heaven” or “hell.” It’s a place where the dead go to live their afterlife.

Otherworld: Any being that is not a mortal human is part of the otherworld.

The Lykens: The Lykens are immortal beings and known in the human world as werewolves. They do not, however, change into a wolf form. A human cannot be bitten and turned into a Lyken; you have to be born one. The only time they “change” is during battle, and when they are claiming their mate. The change can be suppressed, but only by the strongest of the clan. Only the male Lykens can change their form.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenika lives in the too hot northeast with her husband and their young daughter. Thankfully, he shares her unusual sense of humor, and naughty nature. Along with taking care of their daughter, they have to keep an eye on, Milo, their spunky cat. When not writing, Jenika works a fulltime at a hospital and attends school for nursing. Writing is Jenika's number one passion, but since life gets in the way, she isn't able to write fulltime (at least not yet.)

Jenika started writing at a very young age. Her first story consisted of a young girl who traveled to an exotic island and found a magical doll. That story as long since disappeared, but her passion for writing has stayed strong.

Also by Jenika Snow

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