

Changeling Press

# Bad Blood

Mychael Black

# **Spirits of Abaddon 1: Bad Blood**

## **Mychael Black**

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Jesse doesn't like vampires, and he purposely avoids Gabriel whenever he can. But he can't deny the attraction he feels for the man, either.

When Jesse witnesses a murder, he finds himself on the run -- caught in a deadly cat and mouse game. With Jason and Julian on vacation in Greece, Jesse's only choice is to turn to the one man he's been trying to ignore.

## Prologue

"Why did you wake up?"

Gabriel Walsh glanced up from his book to find Julian Kristados in his office doorway. "I received word of trouble."

"How?"

"Voices." Gabriel sat back and sighed. "I don't know how else to describe it."

"Why have you never told me of your past?"

Focused on a point just beyond Julian, Gabriel wondered at the wisdom of divulging his secrets. Julian had never pushed for details -- not even when they'd been lovers long ago. The same urge to protect him also kept Gabriel silent.

"My past is more than I can explain in a single evening." When Julian started to speak, Gabriel raised his hand. "But I will tell you this: I am the oldest of our kind."

Julian's eyes widened. "What?"

"I was created ages ago -- longer than I can remember, to be honest."

"Who made --"

"That is for another night." Gabriel stood and went to Julian. "As your sire," he whispered, "it is my duty to protect you."

"Protect me from what?"

"My past."

## Chapter One

Thunderous beats vibrated through Jesse's body, igniting every nerve. He loved the opening for "Martyr," loved the power he wielded behind his set. Marcus' bass joined, accenting the drums. Then the guitars kicked in, and the crowd went wild. Screams and shouts almost drowned out the music, and they only grew in intensity when Jason's voice cut into the mix. The lights dimmed, dropping them all into darkness. A single spotlight, hazy with smoke, shone down onto the stage. All music stopped, leaving only the lyrics for a moment as Jason growled them into the microphone.

"Destined to hate, life drowns in darkness..."

Jesse began the beat again, just the kick drum, setting the pulse of the song. A single strobe light flickered in time.

"Kingdoms crushed beneath the apathy..."

Slow, melodic chords filled the space between lyrics and drums. The crowd tensed, knowing the song well.

"Of a thousand martyrs!"

\* \* \*

Energy hummed through Jesse, and he left the techs to break down his kit. The crowd normally gathered in front of the stage had dispersed, some to the bar, others scattered around the small but popular club. He grinned and caught a bottle of water when the bartender tossed it to him.

"Good show."

Jesse closed his eyes and barely suppressed a shiver. He clutched the cold bottle, hoping it would put out the heat surging through his body. He knew that voice. He

heard it every night in his head, every time he wrapped his fingers around his own cock.

"Thanks." He forced himself to turn around and meet an enigmatic grey gaze.

Gabriel Walsh embodied everything Jesse had ever wanted: gorgeous looks, expressive eyes, a body built for sin, and all in all, a decent personality. Only one problem... Gabriel also had fangs. And drank blood. *Human* blood.

That fact alone scared the hell out of Jesse more than he cared to admit.

Yet he couldn't resist panting Gabriel's name every night, even if no one else heard it.

Jesse struggled for something to say, but his voice refused to work beyond one-syllable words. Gabriel smiled, the effect disarming until his fangs came into view. Unlike Julian, Gabriel didn't hide them. Jesse wondered if there were more differences between them -- namely feeding. Julian didn't kill, but Jesse had a gut feeling Gabriel did, and would gladly do so again.

"Jess!"

Grateful for something to break the tension, Jesse turned away from Gabriel and waved at Jason. "I'll catch you guys later!" Then he returned his attention to Gabriel. "Um, I need to go."

Gabriel nodded and motioned toward the door. "I'm sure we'll meet again."

"Yeah."

Jesse hurried out of the bar and only stopped walking fast when he neared his car. He got in and shut the door, but instead of turning the key, he rested his forehead to the steering wheel, eyes closed, and concentrated on breathing. Why, out of all the guys in Atlanta, did he have to fall for the one who scared the ever-loving shit out of him?

A knock on the driver's side window startled him, and he jerked his head up to see Gabriel crouching beside the car. Jesse rolled down the window, hoping the door itself would be enough of a barrier between them.

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah, yeah. Just... tired, I guess. Long show."

"Why do you fear us?"

"I don't." Jesse shrugged. "I don't like vampires; that's all. At least Julian doesn't freak me out anymore."

"And me?"

Jesse refused to meet Gabriel's gaze. "You aren't like him."

"Oh?"

A single touch, a finger beneath his chin, drew Jesse's face back around. This man embodied sex appeal so strong it chipped away at Jesse's defenses little by little. Gabriel Walsh also was, without a doubt, dangerous.

"I would never hurt you."

Jesse wanted to believe it. He wanted it almost as much as Gabriel himself. Gabriel traced Jesse's jaw with his fingertip and it took every ounce of willpower on Jesse's part to not chase that finger with his mouth. He stared at lips he'd fantasized about, only to realize he hadn't heard a word Gabriel said.

He blinked and looked up. "Um, sorry. I wasn't..." Gabriel smiled slowly. "I didn't..." He watched, entranced by the lips nearing his own. "I..."

*Stop. Stop, stop, stop...*

The first touch stole his breath and the protests died on his tongue. In a momentary lapse of reason, Jesse gave in. Gabriel took control, tongue sweeping through Jesse's mouth, hands on either side of his head. Before Jesse could even think about how far he really wanted this to go, however, Gabriel drew back.

"I know you don't trust me, but I'm here should you ever need me."

Jesse watched Gabriel walk away and a part of him screamed for more than a kiss. Much more.

\* \* \*

Sitting in his car and staring out the windshield, Jesse figured it probably wasn't a good thing that he actually didn't remember the drive home. He wanted to chalk it up



to lack of sleep or even the remnants of a post-gig energy buzz, but the truth unsettled him far more.

Since the first time Gabriel showed up at one of the band's rehearsals, he hadn't left Jesse's thoughts. Jesse tried to ignore the man, but he found it almost impossible. Gabriel invaded his dreams and his fantasies to the point where jerking off had become more an act of desperation than simple release.

With a sigh, Jesse got out and locked the car. No sense in dwelling on things -- or people -- he couldn't change. He started toward his apartment building, twirling his keys around his finger, when he caught sight of movement on the far side of the parking lot. He stopped and squinted. A moment later, his heart nearly stopped.

A hulking figure rose from the shadows and towered over the top of a hedge. Massive, bat-like wings spread out, and a scream shattered the unearthly silence. Frozen in terror, Jesse could only watch as the creature threw back its head and roared. Then it found him. Red eyes narrowed to slits, and Jesse felt the gaze penetrate into the depths of his soul.

"Help me!"

The beast snapped its head back around. A woman clawed her way out of the hedge, her skin bloody and scratched. The thing disappeared a split second later, and the woman screamed, her eyes wide. Blood poured from her mouth. Jesse finally managed to move. Cursing himself for a coward, he ran up the steps to his apartment and fumbled with the keys, hands shaking. He got the door open and leapt inside, slamming and locking the door behind him.

He had to call the cops, but what the fuck would he tell them? That he witnessed a woman get torn apart by something not animal but not human?

His heart thundered in his chest as he struggled to catch his breath. No fucking way had that thing been real. He'd never seen anything like it and had no idea what it was. The cops sure as hell wouldn't believe him. Hell, if anything, they'd lock him in the psycho ward. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw blood spewing from the

woman's mouth, and sinister red eyes staring at him from over the top of the hedge. Sleep was definitely out of the question.

When the phone rang, Jesse's heart shot up into his throat. He couldn't bring himself to move, though, and the answering machine picked up.

"Dude, it's Jason. Julian and I are heading out for Greece. If you need anything, Gabriel is watching our place. Jess, he's okay. He won't hurt you. I promise. See you in a month."

The machine beeped when Jason hung up. Jesse let out a shaky breath before sliding down to the floor. He didn't know what to do. He couldn't tell anyone and expect them to believe him -- no one except Gabriel Walsh, anyway. With a background in demonology, according to Julian and Jason, Gabriel seemed to be the most logical person to go to, but Jesse knew damn well he couldn't do it.

## Chapter Two

Something wasn't right. Gabriel felt it deep in his bones. It'd been ages since he'd sensed anyone, but his younger siblings carried the same energy echo he did, though to a lesser degree. Why one of them stirred now brought up many questions. His kind generally avoided humanity.

*Unless it suits them to do otherwise.*

Gabriel opened his eyes and stared at the bedroom ceiling. The soft voice drifted through his mind.

*Come speak with me.*

When *she* called, he obeyed.

Gabriel got out of bed and didn't bother to dress before heading to the one room in his home no one knew existed. Hidden from view behind Rosetti's *Lady Lilith*, Gabriel's sanctum served as a sanctuary, his haven from a world in which he truly didn't belong. Candles flared as he passed by them in the narrow passage. Shadows danced across the mossy grey stone walls, their shapes twisting until they began to coalesce into distinct forms.

The corridor opened into a circular room lit by iron sconces on the walls. A round granite altar stood in the center, its smooth surface inlaid with amethysts. Serpents curled around the four legs, and owls lined the outer edges. Two candles, one white and one black, framed a pentacle, its ring formed by the Ouroboros.

Gabriel stepped before the altar and the candles flickered to life. Their glow illuminated the table and reflected in sparkles off the gems. Eyes closed, he breathed in deeply, centering himself. He opened them once more when he felt her presence.

Cream-colored diaphanous silk, edged in crimson, draped over her voluptuous figure. Curls the color of a blazing fire cascaded down her back and shoulders, and emerald eyes ringed with gold watched Gabriel closely. He bowed deeply to her, righting himself only when ghostly fingers touched his head.

"What do you wish of me?"

She smiled, the expression deceptive. "I've need of you. One of your brothers has taken it upon himself to pass into the mortal world. He is feeding. I want him destroyed." A moment passed before she continued, her gaze reaching into Gabriel's soul. "Your human is in danger."

"He isn't my --" Her smile stopped him. Refuting her words did no good. Instead, he focused on what she'd called him for in the first place. "You wish me to kill one of your offspring?"

"I see no need to spare one of my children when he has outlived his usefulness. As my acolyte, it falls on you to take care of him."

Gabriel bowed his head. "As you wish, my Lady."

She faded away, nothing but a quiet wisp of breath across his face to signal her departure. Gabriel sighed. He cared nothing for his siblings. He much preferred to avoid them. Now he had no choice but to hunt one of them down. Killing didn't bother him, but Jesse's place in the scheme of things did. What had she meant by Jesse being in danger?

Gabriel left his temple and went back upstairs, mulling over everything he remembered about his family. He'd been asleep for so long -- one thousand years, to be exact -- that details were still fuzzy. As a general rule, he avoided contact with his own kind, save for his mother. As an acolyte of a demon-goddess, he knew his loyalties, and she was the only being in existence he obeyed. Although he entered the mortal world to escape the constant company of his brethren, he didn't particularly like humans either. He found them, at best, petty and useless.

Then he'd met Julian Kristados, a human who'd managed to turn his thoughts around about the entire race. Gabriel remembered the first nights with Julian, of how

the man had shown him pleasures to be had at the hands of a mortal. Gabriel marveled at the attention shown to him, when in the past, his trysts with his fellow beings tended to be for the prizes they could gain by bedding their goddess' favorite son.

Gabriel didn't begrudge Julian and Jason their happiness, as he cared more for Julian as a creator than a lover now. His interests remained captured by Firestarter's drummer. Something about Jesse Eldridge drew Gabriel in like a moth to a flame. Such an innocent, unsuspecting human, and yet Gabriel knew Jesse held the means to his destruction, if only through the power of raw need.

\* \* \*

A solid knock startled Jesse awake. He blinked, brain struggling to catch up, and realized he'd fallen asleep in the foyer, back against his front door. Another knock sounded and he froze. He squeezed his eyes shut and held his breath, silently praying whoever it was would go away.

"Jesse."

Gabriel.

"Please let me in. You know I won't hurt you."

"Go --" The word came out hoarse and Jesse cleared his throat. "Go away."

"I can help you." A few seconds of silence passed, and just when Jesse thought Gabriel had left, a soft whisper caressed Jesse's mind. *I know what happened.*

"Impossible," Jesse said under his breath.

"Nothing is impossible," Gabriel said aloud this time.

Jesse swallowed hard, unable to move. A moment later, black smoke poured from under the door. Eyes wide, Jesse stared, vocal chords refusing to work as the smoke took on a man's shape.

"I told you," Gabriel said, as he crouched in front of Jesse, "nothing is impossible."

"You... No. How?"

"You were right. I'm not like Julian, but the hows and whys will have to wait. You're in danger, Jesse."

"What the fuck was that thing?"

"A demon. A lesser demon, but still very dangerous."

"How did you know?"

"That's something I can't explain right now. Please..." Gabriel stood and held out his hand.

Jesse didn't know what to do. He'd never forget what he saw. He'd never get the woman's screams out of his head. He closed his eyes and shivered. When he felt Gabriel lift him and those strong arms encircled him, it took everything Jesse had to keep from falling apart.

"I swear," Gabriel murmured. "Nothing will harm you, Jesse."

"It saw me. That... *thing* saw me. It killed a woman -- tore her apart." Jesse fisted his hands in Gabriel's shirt, torn between wanting to run and wanting to beg Gabriel to never leave. "Where did it come from? Hell?"

"In a sense... yes."

Gabriel tipped Jesse's head up and for the second time that night, Jesse found himself lost in eyes he'd only dreamed about. Seconds ticked by, so slowly that Jesse felt like he'd go mad. For a brief moment, he wondered if Gabriel would step away. Then the man's mouth came down on Jesse's and stole his breath. Jesse let out a surprised gasp, then surrendered. The nightmare a few hours before faded until nothing but Gabriel existed. Trapped between the door and Gabriel, Jesse had no choice but to succumb to whatever the man -- the *vampire* -- wanted. To what he himself wanted, if he dared to look deep enough.

"Tell me now," Gabriel whispered on Jesse's kiss-swollen lips. "Yes or no?"

Jesse nodded as best he could before Gabriel captured him in another kiss. Need swept away the last vestiges of fear and Jesse caved in, arms going around Gabriel's neck. Hardness dug into the crease of his hip, but with a slight shift from Gabriel, their bodies pressed tightly together. Jesse moaned and forgot about everything except the way Gabriel felt against him.

"Bed," Jesse finally managed to gasp in between breaths. "Before I come to my fucking senses."

Gabriel chuckled and, Jesse's hand in his, led the way down the hall to the bedroom. Jesse didn't bother to ask the man how he knew which room. Hell, he wasn't sure he really wanted to know the answer. Gabriel freaked him out, but the second the black leather trench coat hit the floor, revealing the muscular body clad in all black beneath, Jesse couldn't bring himself to think about anything but getting his hands -- and mouth -- on every single inch.

"Jesse."

"Huh?" It took a lot of effort on Jesse's part to drag his gaze back up to Gabriel's face.

"You can do more than look, you know."

"God, please tell me you're a top," Jesse muttered.

Gabriel didn't answer. He cupped the back of Jesse's head and pulled Jesse close, the next kiss enough to make the world tilt on its axis. Vampire or human, the man had a mouth guaranteed to drive Jesse insane.

Somehow, Jesse got Gabriel's jeans undone, then dipped his fingers beneath the waistband. Heat met his fingertips and he felt the full-body shiver as it ran up through Gabriel. Emboldened, Jesse ventured further until his fingers wrapped around the hard length of Gabriel's cock.

"Jesse..." Gabriel groaned.

To know he could reduce this man to moaning his name gave Jesse the confidence to go on. "I wanna suck you..."

He didn't give Gabriel a chance to reply and sank to his knees. Gabriel's hand brushed over Jesse's spiky hair, and Jesse let the man urge him closer. He breathed in deep, flying on Gabriel's scent. Earthy, musky...

Jesse gave the round head a tentative lick and shivered at the moan drifting down over him. He looked up and, locking gazes with Gabriel, sucked the man's thick cock into his mouth.

"Oh, fuck." Gabriel hissed and his fingers tightened in Jesse's hair. "God, that feels good."

Hell yeah, it did. With every suck, Jesse felt pleasure echo through his own cock. Gabriel filled his mouth, strokes slow and shallow at first. Then they sped up and Jesse held onto Gabriel's hips, encouraging the thrusts. Gabriel's other hand rested on Jesse's shoulder, then stopped him altogether.

"Up. Now."

Jesse rose up and scooted backward onto the bed. Gabriel wasted no time in getting Jesse undressed, and his subsequent gaze sent a rush of heat along Jesse's spine.

"Guess it's a stupid question to worry about, uh, protection, huh?"

Gabriel smiled and crawled onto the bed, spreading Jesse's legs to nestle between his thighs. "Yes. Unless you really want me to use a rubber..."

"Fuck that. You're a vam -- oh, fuck!" Jesse gasped, hips lifting as Gabriel's cockhead brushed just beneath his balls. "-- vampire! God, fuck me, Gabriel, please!"

"One thing I won't skip on is lube."

Jesse motioned toward the bedside table. "Drawer. Hurry, man."

Chuckling, Gabriel grabbed the tube, slicked up his cock, then stroked two fingers over Jesse's hole. Jesse whimpered and lifted his legs. Just as he grabbed them behind the knees, Gabriel's fingers pressed inside.

"Oh, my God..." Jesse couldn't begin to be still. He rocked his hips upward, driving Gabriel's fingers deeper into his ass. "Fuck. That..."

"Feel good?" Gabriel whispered, adding a third to work Jesse open.

"Fuck yes," Jesse muttered. "Cock. Need it."

"As you wish."

Gabriel withdrew his fingers and with agonizingly slow movement, pushed his cock into Jesse's body. Jesse's eyes rolled back and he finally closed them, focusing only on the sensation of fullness, of Gabriel's weight above him. Gabriel kept the strokes slow and deep, his pelvis rocking just enough to drive Jesse crazy with every thrust inside.



“Gabriel...”

Jesse moaned when Gabriel’s lips met his, and it didn’t take much more than that to set Jesse off. He dug his fingernails into the backs of his legs as his entire body jerked, come spilling between them.

Gabriel broke the kiss and buried his face in the crook of Jesse’s neck, and, for a brief moment, Jesse almost expected a bite. Then Gabriel let out a low growl and thrust hard, grinding against Jesse as he came.

The ghost of a kiss -- a tiny little nip on his skin -- followed, and Jesse bit his tongue before he could ask for the one thing that scared him the most.

## Chapter Three

The beast paced the length of the cage, its red eyes visible even in the darkness. Lazarus watched the thing, curious. If he discovered its strengths and weaknesses, perhaps it could be of some use. Demons and their ilk were as varied as human beings. No two were identical, which made his work quite interesting and, at times, difficult.

Lazarus reclined in his overstuffed chair, wine glass in hand. "How did you get here?" he mused quietly.

"Mortals often forget their gateways."

Glass poised at his lips, Lazarus studied his captive closely. "So... you *are* intelligent."

The demon sneered. "Are you?"

"Tsk, tsk..." Lazarus shook his head. "Such a way to treat your host. Didn't your mother ever tell you not to bite the hand that feeds? Now, what is your name?"

"Do you take me for a fool?" Clawed fingers wrapped around the enchanted metal bars. "Your magic is little protection, sorcerer. My brothers and sisters know how to find me. You will perish soon enough."

Lazarus leaned forward and smiled. "And if I tell you where to find one such as yourself?"

"I know how to find my --"

"One who lives as a human," Lazarus interrupted. "A vampire, to be specific."

"Bela."

"Ah, so you know of whom I speak. He is the ruler of the vampires of this world. The bane to your existence, is he not?"

"How do you know him?"

Lazarus sat back once more. "That, my friend, is not important. Suffice it to say, I have known, through my studies and various inner circles, what he is for a very long time. He has been a thorn in my side, thwarting me at every turn."

"Why do you want him?"

"I want his blood," Lazarus said. "Half-vampire, half-demon. His blood is potent, a prime ingredient to an elixir I am creating."

"If you know so much, why have you not captured him?"

Lazarus raised his hands in mock surrender. "I am but a mere mortal." Then he pointed to the demon. "But you... You can bring him to me."

"How?"

"By swearing your allegiance to me. I will free you, tell you where to find him."

"What's in it for me?"

Lazarus smiled slowly. "A permanent portal -- a gateway between worlds that never closes."

The demon seemed to think on it, then nodded. "Semoriel."

At the sound of his true name, the bars surrounding the demon faded. He stood straight and wings unfolded from behind him. Lazarus looked his fill. Let that fool witch try to stop him. Lazarus held all the aces this time.

\* \* \*

Gabriel stood on his balcony and watched the rain come down in a curtain off the edge of the roof. Beyond his shelter, the earth lay drenched, the yard threatening to flood. Thunder rumbled in the distance and lightning lit up the black clouds. Gabriel felt uneasiness creep back into his bones.

"I woke up and you were gone."

"I couldn't sleep."

"You *don't* sleep, do you?"

"No." Gabriel turned to face Jesse.

"I thought vampires had to."

"Daylight weakens me, but it will never kill me."

"What about Julian then?"

"He must rest during the day. He was human before."

"And you aren't." Jesse regarded him coolly. "You never were, were you?"

Gabriel shook his head. "My mother is a demoness. My father lost his humanity when he joined her."

"Do you age?"

"I stopped when I reached maturity -- for my kind, anyway." At Jesse's confused expression, Gabriel added, "To a human, it would be around thirty."

"Ah. So... how old *are* you?"

Gabriel sighed. "Honestly? I lost count. If I had to guess, though, I'd say around five and a half thousand." He narrowed his eyes a bit. "You're taking this all quite well."

Jesse shrugged and leaned back against the doorframe, arms crossed as he stared out at the yard. "I think a part of me is convinced it's all a twisted dream, and I'll wake up and the world will be normal again." Gabriel raised an eyebrow and Jesse met his gaze. "Another part reminds me that a few hours ago, I had the most amazing sex of my life... with a guy who isn't even human. Kinda hard to wrap your brain around something like that. So at this point, I think I've hit the 'go with the flow' part."

"Understandable." Gabriel took in the sight before him, remembering the night before. Jesse had been nervous, almost terrified, but when that faded, Gabriel found Jesse to be quite bold. "Cold?" he asked when Jesse shivered.

"A little." Hazel eyes swept over Gabriel like an errant caress, and he realized cold had nothing to do with the tremor that ran through Jesse. "I must be out of my mind..." Jesse murmured when Gabriel stepped closer.

"Why is that?"

Jesse looked up at him, breath hitching the slightest bit. "Because I can't get last night out of my head."

"Is that a bad thing?" Despite wanting to do much more, Gabriel stroked a fingertip along Jesse's jaw, then across the lips he'd kissed hours before.

Jesse's whisper puffed against Gabriel's finger. "No."

"You know I won't hurt you." Gabriel replaced his finger with his tongue, drawing it over Jesse's lips. He heard Jesse swallow, the drummer's pulse kicking up.

"What if..." Jesse gasped when Gabriel took a chance and gently nipped his lower lip. "...I wanted you to?"

Surprised, Gabriel pulled back just enough to see Jesse's face fully. "I can mask the pain of a bite and make it pleasurable."

"I want to try it."

"Are you sure?"

Jesse nodded. "Yes. I haven't been able to stop thinking about it since last night."

Gabriel slipped an arm around Jesse's waist and drew his young lover close. He nuzzled Jesse's neck, warming the soft skin with every exhale. Jesse shivered in his arms but didn't back away. Gabriel let his fangs barely touch the surface and a soul-deep ache washed through him. He didn't need to drink to survive, but blood fueled his magic. The tentative promise of Jesse's blood held much more than a boost in power, though. Gabriel wanted to taste and consume, to mark this young mortal as his and his alone.

"Gabriel."

Eyes closing, Gabriel sank his fangs into Jesse's throat.

Jesse cried out, going stiff in Gabriel's arms. Then he moaned and like a cat in heat, ground against Gabriel in time to the slow, sucking swallows. "Oh... fuck..."

Sweetened blood flowed over Gabriel's tongue, drugging him until he felt the world spin. Jesse was like no other. Every drop guaranteed Gabriel's eternal damnation at the hands of an innocent mortal.

## Chapter Four

The tea bag dipped into the steaming water, suspended over the mug by nimble fingers. Semoriel studied his companion. Lazarus intrigued him to no end, more so than any other creature ever had. Whatever the man was, it certainly had nothing to do with being human.

"Bela is, I'm sure you know, not one to trifle with."

It'd been ages, but Semoriel remembered enough about his eldest brother -- Lilith's favored son -- to know what to expect.

"Don't be so sure of yourself," Lazarus said, shooting Semoriel a wary glance from behind a tiny pair of glasses.

"You can read minds."

"Among other things, yes." Lazarus stirred his hot tea, then set the spoon aside. "What I can do is no matter. Your only concern is to bring him here -- alive. I must take his blood while his heart still beats."

"What sort of elixir are you making?"

A hint of a smile touched Lazarus' lips and Semoriel found himself entranced. Breath puffed over the top of the mug, and the once-scalding hot tea froze into solid ice. Semoriel's eyes widened.

"What sorcery is this?"

"My sorcery." Lazarus set the mug aside and, for the first time in his existence, Semoriel realized he might very well be in danger. "My needs regarding Bela are my business. Do I make myself clear?"

Semoriel swallowed and nodded. Caught in a corner of the kitchen, he couldn't decide if his predicament was to his liking... or not.

"Good." Lazarus stepped closer, and the space between them shrank to a pinpoint of chilly air. "You are right," he whispered. Cold breath did nothing to drown the heat of those lips so near to Semoriel's. "I am not human. Nor am I demon. What I am..." A single fingertip traced down Semoriel's throat, leaving an icy trail in its wake. "...is your lord and master. You will do my bidding without question."

"Yes."

\* \* \*

"I'm still not comfortable with this."

"Just real quick -- in and out. I promise." Jesse stared at the steps leading up to his place. He hadn't been back here since Gabriel had shown up the night before. He forced himself to avoid looking in the direction of the hedges. Crimes in this area were frequent and violent, so a woman murdered didn't seem to garner the attention one would expect. "I don't get it," he muttered.

"What?"

"Why no one -- not a living fucking soul but me -- even acknowledged what happened to that woman."

"I don't have a real answer, to be honest. The demon..." Gabriel sighed and raked a hand through his hair. "Christ, Jesse. I don't know how the hell to explain this."

"Okay. Five minutes. Just long enough for me to grab a few things. Then we go back to your place."

"There's a catch, isn't there?"

Jesse nodded. "I want to know what the fuck is going on. And who you really are. 'Cause, man, sexy or not, you're *not* just a fucking vampire."

"No. I'm not."

They got out of the car and Jesse led the way up to his apartment. Gabriel would've made an excellent thief with his penchant for total silence, but Jesse felt the man behind him with startling acuteness. He told himself he was perfectly fine coming back here, but the second he started to unlock the door, that proved to be a lie. His hand shook, and Gabriel's fingers covered his, strong and steady.

"Nothing is going to hurt you," Gabriel murmured.

Jesse took a deep breath, closed his eyes for a moment, and nodded. "I know. Okay. I can do this."

He opened the door, not sure what to expect. Nothing had changed though, and he let out a sigh of relief. With Gabriel right behind him, Jesse went into his bedroom and started grabbing clothes and stuffing them into a bag. When done, he turned, only to find Gabriel staring at a painting on his wall.

"Yeah, I know," Jesse laughed a little. "Most guys -- even gay ones -- have more provocative art on their walls." He motioned to the portrait of the only woman he'd ever felt anything for. "It's a Rosetti."

"*Lady Lilith*," Gabriel added.

"I'm a fan of the classics, I guess you could say." Jesse walked over and stood beside Gabriel. "I don't know why, but I've always been drawn to her."

"You mean the portrait?"

"Well, the woman in it -- Lilith."

"Do you know who she is?" Gabriel asked him.

Jesse nodded, then glanced away. "Yeah. Sounds weird, but a few years ago, I dreamed about her. She looked just like that painting. I know she's a goddess, and that she was Adam's first wife -- before Eve."

"She is also a demoness, consort to Cain -- Adam and Eve's son, the one who killed his brother Abel."

"I know. I, uh, did a lot of research on her, just out of curiosity."

Something passed over Gabriel's face -- an expression Jesse couldn't quite place -- then it was gone. "We need to leave."

"Um, okay. I'm done." Jesse slung the bag over his shoulder before heading back outside, Gabriel following.

As soon as they reached the car, Jesse started to unlock it, but Gabriel's hand on his stopped him. He opened his mouth to ask what was wrong when movement in the shadows across the parking lot sent a chill straight to his bones.



"Get in the car."

"Yeah." Fumbling with the lock, Jesse finally got the door open and scrambled inside. Gabriel closed the door and the locks clicked down into place on their own.

A hulking figure emerged from the darkness, and once again, Jesse froze in utter terror. The beast's hooves sparked on the pavement as it stalked toward Gabriel. Several yards away, it stopped and spread out its wings. A split second later, it launched itself at Gabriel.

"No!" Jesse pounded on the window and fought with the door, but neither would move. He looked up just in time to see Gabriel's black trench coat drop to the ground as massive, bat-like wings stretched out behind him.

The beast slammed into Gabriel and Jessie screamed. Gabriel's nails lengthened into talons and tore at the creature's skin. His heart hammering painfully in his chest, Jessie watched Gabriel lift the demon over his head and hurl it across the huge parking lot. Then the two combatants shimmered and disappeared.

"Gabriel!"

## Chapter Five

"Is your pathetic brother really that hard to catch?"

Semoriel gritted his teeth and bit back the retort. "No. But he wasn't alone."

"And?" Lazarus shot him a dark glare from over the tops of his glasses. "This is a problem?"

"Bela was protecting the one with him."

Lazarus stopped reading and glanced up, giving Semoriel his full attention. "I see." He set the book aside and rose from the plush chair, his long, lithe body moving in ways that made Semoriel ache. "This person... Human?"

"Yes."

"Hmm." Lazarus approached Semoriel, the chill of his presence no longer hidden or shocking. Nor did it cool down the desire Semoriel felt simmering in his blood. "Bring the human here. Alive. Bela will have no choice but to follow. If this mortal is so important to him, I'm sure Bela would be willing to... trade."

"What are you?"

Lazarus surprised him with a smile. "Magic flows through my veins. I command the energies of winter, wind, and water. I can turn liquid to ice, and ice into a weapon, but Bela holds the key to an elixir I am determined to perfect -- one that would grant me power over all the elements at once."

"Why him? Why not another demon?"

"Because he was the first-born, possessing far greater potency than you and the rest of your brethren. I daresay he is stronger than your father."

Semoriel would have scoffed at such a thing, but something in Lazarus' cold blue eyes told him the mage spoke the truth. "Are you saying I am not strong?"

The mage's smile took on a different edge and Semoriel felt his body respond swiftly. "In a great many things, I'm sure you are."

Semoriel pressed forward, closing the distance between them. "Like what?"

Despite his smaller stature, Lazarus held Semoriel spellbound. Semoriel slipped the mage's glasses off and set them on a nearby table. Not for a second did he think Lazarus would be pliant, yet the mage offered no refusal. Blue eyes darkened to cobalt a moment before deceptively warm lips met Semoriel's. It took him by surprise, but he wasn't about to let the opportunity go to waste. Hands on Lazarus' hips, Semoriel lifted the mage and Lazarus' legs wrapped tight around him, grinding their bodies together.

"I bow for no one," Lazarus muttered.

"I know." Semoriel also knew, from the way Lazarus moved against him, that the mage would make an exception. "But you will for me."

Lazarus groaned, icy kisses trailing down Semoriel's neck. "Fuck me."

Ignoring the voice in his head telling him there was more to the act than sex, Semoriel turned them and lay Lazarus on the floor. The mage's cryptic smile set Semoriel's blood boiling, and Semoriel couldn't get them undressed fast enough. He would've opted for simply ripping the mage's pants off, but he had the distinct feeling that wouldn't go over well.

"Now," Lazarus whispered, legs spreading when his pants were finally off.

"I'm going to regret this..." Semoriel barely caught the smirk before Lazarus' legs clamped tight around his waist, and the mage tugged him down. The initial entry burned without anything slick to ease the way, but Lazarus didn't seem to notice. Head tilted back, neck arched, the mage dug his fingernails into Semoriel's biceps and rode him hard.

Semoriel growled and gave in. He seized Lazarus' hands and pinned them to the floor over the mage's head, then crushed their mouths together. Lazarus shouted and bucked, but Semoriel held on, thrusting hard and fast. His head began to swim, the dizziness almost overwhelming. He tried to slow down, then found himself on his back.

Lightning bolted through his body, quickly drowning out all else, and Semoriel's back bowed as he came.

Lazarus hissed and rose up, nails scratching Semoriel's bare chest. "Yes..."

"What? Oh, fuck!" Pain mingled with the pleasure, and it felt as if the mage was drawing out Semoriel's soul.

Spent, the world graying around the edges, Semoriel couldn't fight the urge to close his eyes. The last thing he saw was Lazarus smiling down at him, cobalt eyes burning bright blue now.

\* \* \*

"Gabriel!"

Jesse snapped awake and looked around the room.

"What the fuck?"

"Welcome." A figure stepped through the doorway. Hands folded before him, the man came to a stop a few feet from the couch on which Jesse had been sleeping. "You must be something special for Bela to protect you."

"Who? Where the fuck am I? How did I get here?"

"Forgive me." The man bowed and from behind glasses, blue eyes watched Jesse closely. "I am Lazarus. Surely you know who Bela is..."

"Uh. No. Where is Gabriel?"

"Ah. So he has yet again changed his name." Lazarus nodded. "Very well." He sat down in a chair across from the couch. "You are in my home, and when Bela realizes you're gone, he'll come for you."

"You are so fucking dead," Jesse said with a scowl.

"On the contrary..." Lazarus leaned forward and smiled, the expression unnerving. "You will be if he doesn't come soon."

"Who the fuck are you? How did I get here?"

Lazarus sighed and stood once more. He wandered over to a bookshelf and perused the titles absently. "Bela -- Gabriel -- is not quite what you think, my young friend. He is a demon."

Jesse stared at the man's back, not knowing if Lazarus was telling the truth or not. "But he --"

"Has fangs? Drinks blood? Turned another?" Lazarus flashed Jesse a wry grin. "Oh, yes. Make no mistake. He is indeed part vampire. He is, in fact, the ruler of the vampires of this world. When his father disappeared, as Cain's firstborn, it fell on Bela to rule the others."

"Cain..."

"Make no mistake," Lazarus said. "Your Gabriel is the son of Cain and Lilith, firstborn, part demon from his mother, possessing her magic, and part vampire from his father. The demon he fought? Semoriel -- one of his brothers, and my chosen servant."

Jesse shook his head. "No... He can't be a demon..."

"Have you seen his wings? His talons? The temple in his home dedicated to his mother whom he serves as her acolyte?"

Images flashed through Jesse's mind of the fight in the parking lot. Wings. Gabriel had wings. And massive claws like the demon he fought. "Oh, God..."

"Oh, your God has no place in this," Lazarus said. "Bela is an abomination like all of Cain and Lilith's children. He is also the most powerful. His blood is the key ingredient in something I am creating, and he will give it to me willingly."

Jesse snorted, putting on a false bravado while praying Gabriel found him quickly. "Like hell he will!"

Lazarus held up a tiny vial and peered at its opaque red contents. "He will. If he wants you alive, I guarantee he will."

"What is that?"

"Antidote."

Jesse's stomach fell and his heart stuck in his throat. "To what?" he whispered.

"My blood. To a human, it is fatal if left for too long in the body. I am what your kind would call an elemental. The cells of my blood act as a virus to yours, attacking it over the course of a week. If the antidote," he gestured with the vial, "is not taken within that time, you will die. Frozen -- from the inside out."

\* \* \*

The fight with Semoriel had done much more than stun Gabriel with his brother's newfound strength. He'd taken them to another plane to keep any humans -- including Jesse -- from witnessing anything further, but the moment they'd reached his intended destination, Gabriel found himself quite alone. In the blink of an eye, he shifted back into the mortal world, only to discover Semoriel gone. With Jesse.

Gabriel tracked his lover via Jesse's blood to an antebellum home outside Atlanta. He also sensed something sinister -- far more dangerous than a lesser demon like Semoriel.

The house seemed unguarded, but if Gabriel knew anything about this particular occupant, it was that Lazarus did not underestimate his enemies. Why he had Jesse, though, remained a mystery.

"Oh, do come in."

Gabriel froze and looked up at the balcony overhead. "Where is he?"

"You're awfully demanding for someone who doesn't hold the cards this time, Bela. Your human is awaiting you. But... I would hurry, if I were you. My blood has been in his veins for..." Lazarus glanced at the black watch on his right wrist. "Oh, about three hours now. A week will pass by quite quickly."

"What?" Gabriel shot up to the balcony, wings fanning the air in agitation. "Jesse!"

"Tsk, tsk." Lazarus clicked his tongue. "Please, join us. I have... a proposition to offer you."

Gabriel landed on the balcony and folded his wings in before following the mage. Jesse shot up from a nearby chair, but stilled a few inches from Gabriel. "He told you."

"Yeah." Jesse narrowed his gaze. "Why didn't you?"

"Because I'd hoped to protect you, Jesse," Gabriel sighed. "Looks like that didn't work after all."

"Touching." Lazarus sat on the corner of his desk and smirked. "In exchange for information on where the antidote vial is, you will give me a vial of your blood, Bela."

"I thought you had the antidote!" Jesse spun around to face Lazarus. "Where is it?"

"You really didn't think it would be that easy, did you? Come now, Jesse. I am, after all, not human. We elementals are a bit more cautious when it comes to such critical things."

"You fucking bastard!"

Gabriel grabbed Jesse and hauled the man backward against him. "Don't," he whispered. "He has the ability to speed up the process, Jesse. Don't piss him off."

"Is it a deal, Bela?"

Gabriel wanted to tell the son of a bitch to rot in Hell, but with Jesse's life on the line, he wasn't about to risk angering Lazarus. "How do I know he'll be safe?"

Lazarus shrugged. "You don't, but are you willing to risk that?"

"No."

Gabriel held out his arm and Lazarus moved so fast, all Gabriel felt was a cool breeze in the mage's wake. Then came the sharp stab of a needle in his forearm, and Lazarus flickered into view once more, the syringe in his hand filling up with Gabriel's blood. Jesse remained silent as the grave, but Gabriel felt the shivers travel through his lover's body.

"The vial is hidden in Abaddon," Lazarus said as he withdrew the syringe. The wound sealed on its own. "You remember how to get home, don't you, Bela?"

"Yes," Gabriel snapped.

"Good." Lazarus backed up, then bowed low while keeping his gaze on them both. "I shall see you there."

## Chapter Six

"I'm dead."

"No, you're not."

Jesse dropped onto the chair in front of him, body going numb. "What the hell is Abaddon, and how are we going to find the antidote?"

"We? You're staying here."

"Like hell I am!" Jesse scowled up at Gabriel. Had the man lost his fucking mind? "You aren't leaving me here!"

"Jesse." Gabriel leaned down, a hand on either arm of the chair. "Mortals can't go to Abaddon."

"I have his blood in me." Jesse met Gabriel's gaze. "I'm not fully human anymore, am I?"

"It can be --"

"No. I can *feel* it, Gabriel. Every breath feels like my lungs are going to ice over. My skin feels like there's a layer of frost covering every square inch. My blood gives a whole new meaning to the 'running cold' thing."

"Jesse, please. We don't have time --"

"You aren't going without me, Gabriel. Turn me if you have to, but you aren't leaving me behind. Not when I know I'm slowly changing into him."

"If I do, you'd be a prime target because all others would know to whom you belong."

Jesse stared up at Gabriel in silence. Where did he fit into the vampire's life anyway? He felt a connection to Gabriel that defied everything he'd ever believed, but beyond that, he had no idea how Gabriel felt toward him. Was it love? Jesse wasn't



ready to go that far, but it was something. Something worth pursuing... if he lived long enough.

"Please," Jesse whispered. "Don't leave me, Gabriel."

"You drive a hard bargain." Gabriel's fingers brushed over Jesse's cheek, then slowly down to the pulse point of his throat. "I won't leave you. I can't bring myself to change you -- not right now -- but I swear I won't ever leave you, Jesse."

"Then take me with you to Abaddon. You know I'm not fully human anymore."

Several seconds passed and Jesse didn't think Gabriel would agree. Then Gabriel sighed and nodded. Jesse let out the breath he'd been holding.

"Abaddon is nothing like your world. There are things in that realm the likes of which mortals fear, the sort of beings one would encounter in nightmares."

"But you're from there, and you're more a wet dream than a nightmare."

Gabriel laughed, looking rather surprised. "Thank you. But you haven't seen my true form either. As it is, I think I'll stick to this form when around you. My real one isn't quite as... enticing."

Jesse couldn't deny the fact that he was intrigued, but he kept it to himself. "Deal. When do we leave?" When Gabriel didn't answer, Jesse lifted an eyebrow. "Uh, I thought we --"

The kiss startled him with its intensity. He was certain he'd already started turning into an ice elemental because he felt himself melting beneath the scorching touch of Gabriel's lips. He breathed in deep and let Gabriel sweep him away, far from the threat of a cold oblivion.

"My Lady, forgive me," Gabriel murmured on Jesse's lips.

"Huh?"

"I can't lose you."

The bite came swiftly, shocking Jesse into silence. This one hurt like hell, and when Gabriel drew blood, Jesse started to beg for him to stop. Darkness began setting in around them and Jesse panicked. He tried to shove Gabriel away, but impossibly strong hands held him in place.

*Don't fight it.*

He didn't want to acknowledge what was happening. Despite asking for it, the prospect scared the shit out of him. Gabriel stopped drinking and pressed something to Jesse's mouth. Sweet, coppery liquid dripped onto Jesse's tongue, and he struggled to get away.

"Jesse. Please. Drink."

With a defeated whimper, Jesse opened and let Gabriel's rich blood fill his mouth. God, what had he done?

\* \* \*

*You swore you would never change another again.*

"I know."

*You can't hide what you feel. Not from me, and soon, not from him.*

Gabriel gazed up at the figure before him. "I promised myself Julian would be the last."

*Your relationship with Julian Kristados was doomed from the start. I knew that. But Jesse Eldridge possesses something more -- something vital to you.*

"My Lady, I --"

Gabriel stopped mid-sentence when he realized Lilith was looking at something over his shoulder. He knew, in an instant, *who* it was.

"This is the temple Lazarus mentioned, isn't it?"

Gabriel stood and turned toward Jesse, heedless of his nudity. "Yes." He gestured to the altar and the ethereal spirit beyond it. He knew Jesse wouldn't see her, but --"

"Holy shit, she's real..."

"What?"

*I told you.*

Jesse's jaw dropped open and he rounded the altar, coming to a stop before Lilith's shimmering form. "You... You're Lilith."

She smiled. "I am," she said aloud.

"Jesse... you can see her?"

"Yeah." Jesse glanced over at Gabriel, looking just as stunned as Gabriel felt. "She's as clear to me as you are. Just... slightly see-through. She looks like Rosetti's painting."

"It's because we both favor that vision of her," Gabriel offered. "As a Goddess, she can appear in whatever form a person is most familiar and comfortable with. For us, that is the painting we both have an affinity for."

"I shall leave you both for now," Lilith said. "I cannot aid you in Abaddon, but there are others who can. They will find you in due time."

Gabriel bowed and Lilith faded away. Jesse traced the designs on the top of the altar. Only when Jesse's gaze fixed on him did Gabriel even remember he was naked. Beneath that look, he couldn't begin to hide his arousal.

"I know from various sources," Jesse said as he walked around the altar to stand beside Gabriel, "that sex is sacred to Lilith."

"It is."

"Is it weird that I want you to fuck me on your altar? Given that she's your mother?"

"No. I am her offspring, but there is no bond beyond Goddess and acolyte."

"Good." Jesse stepped closer and lifted his hands, fingers ghosting over Gabriel's bare chest to circle his nipples. "Because all I want right now is to know I can still feel you."

Not one to deny a lover anything, Gabriel tugged Jesse to him. He cupped the back of Jesse's head and kissed him deeply. Jesse moaned and Gabriel helped him up onto the altar.

"Shit!" Jesse laughed. "It's cold."

"Sorry." Gabriel chuckled and grabbed his robe. When Jesse rose up a little, Gabriel spread the velvet cloth beneath him. "Better?"

"Oh, yeah. Now..." Jesse hooked his legs around the backs of Gabriel's thighs and lured him in. "Where were we?"

"I was just about ready to remind you that you can indeed feel me."

"Mmm..." Jesse laid back, feet up on the edge of the altar, legs open. "By all means..."

Gabriel growled and pushed Jesse's legs up to his chest. Then he bent down and licked Jesse's hole before thrusting his tongue inside. Jesse gasped and moaned, writhing on the altar as Gabriel licked and kissed and tongue-fucked him. When he thought it was slick enough, Gabriel straightened back up and spit in his palm. He stroked his cock, then lined up and pushed.

"Oh, God..." Jesse's eyes widened, and he caught his bottom lip in his teeth. "Gabriel."

"I'm here." Gabriel couldn't wait. He started fucking Jesse hard but slow, watching the pleasure on Jesse's face.

"Gabriel. Fuck. That feels good." Jesse reached down and stroked himself, keeping time with Gabriel's thrusts. "God..." Back arching, Jesse grunted, spunk spilling over his fist.

Gabriel struck swiftly, lapping up drop after sweet drop of Jesse's blood before coming himself. Buried to the hilt in his lover's body, Gabriel could no longer deny what Lilith had said. Jesse Eldridge indeed held something vital to Gabriel's existence... his soul.

## Chapter Seven

*Join me.*

Semoriel blinked his eyes, the blackness so thick, he couldn't see his hand before his face. He knew that voice. "Lazarus?" He'd thought himself dead. "Where am I?"

*Safe.*

The darkness began to fade, and Semoriel realized he stood in a room made of highly polished crystal. Everywhere he looked, his confused expression reflected back at him. If there was a doorway somewhere, it remained well hidden. Then a section of the far wall slid away, revealing a brightly lit corridor of yet more crystal. Figuring he had no choice, Semoriel peered into the hall, then stepped through the door. The opening shimmered closed behind him.

At the end of the hall, he walked into what could only be a throne room. The crystal ceiling, floor, and walls gave way to black marble, leaving the elaborate chair on a dais the only crystal accent in the room. Definitely effective in drawing attention, Semoriel thought.

"Thank you."

He almost smiled when Lazarus appeared before the throne -- literally out of thin air. "What is this place?"

"My home," the mage said as he sat down. His cobalt robe draped over a body Semoriel knew to be perfect. "My real home, that is."

"Is this Abaddon?"

"No. It's... somewhere in between Earth and your world. I brought you here to keep you safe from Bela. He cannot reach this place. No one can."

"I thought I'd served my purpose," Semoriel said. "I thought I was dead when you finished with me."

Lazarus beckoned him forward. Instead of forcing Semoriel to kneel, however, the mage rose as Semoriel neared the dais. "You did as commanded. I release you from servitude."

Semoriel didn't know how to react. He'd never been bound by name before, yet now that he was free, a part of him mourned the connection he'd felt with Lazarus. Did he really want to leave? He couldn't answer that.

"What do *you* want?" he asked.

Lazarus smiled. "You."

"Me? Why?"

"Because in over two thousand years, you're the only being that has ever pleased me. I've had many lovers, but none quite as... passionate as you. But..." Lazarus' eyes hazed in what Semoriel quickly recognized as lust. "I want you as yourself. Not in this mortal guise."

"Only if you show me the same."

No sooner had the words come out, Semoriel released his wings. His tail curled around his thigh, unwound, then caressed its tip down Lazarus' torso. The mage dropped his robe and pale skin gave way to shimmering crystal blue. His hair turned white and he set his glasses aside. Semoriel wrapped his tail around Lazarus' waist and drew the ice mage closer.

"Your chill won't affect me," Semoriel whispered over cool but soft lips.

"Nor will your heat do anything to me."

Semoriel silenced them both, drowning in the guttural moan Lazarus made. He lifted the mage and walked up to the dais. When he turned and sat down, Lazarus straddled him, the kiss deepening. Semoriel held onto the mage's hips as they rocked together, their cocks sliding and rubbing alongside one another. Lazarus panted into Semoriel's mouth, the cold puffs of air nothing compared to the heat they were generating.

"Bite. Please."

With a growl, Semoriel fisted a hand in Semoriel's hair and tugged the mage's head back to expose a pristine expanse of brilliant blue flesh. Then he struck, fangs piercing the skin with lightning speed. Lazarus' blood was as unusual as he was. It was the consistency of human blood, but when Semoriel opened his eyes just enough to see it, he saw that unlike human and demon blood, Lazarus' blood looked like the inside of an oyster shell -- iridescent and white with faint rainbows of color.

Semoriel bit harder and drank deeper, the taste sweet and addictive. Lazarus shouted and jerked against him. With his hands cupping Semoriel's head in place, the mage came. Semoriel groaned, but before he could relieve himself as well, Lazarus shimmied down to the floor. Semoriel didn't have time to so much as blink and Lazarus had him, the mage's mouth drawing Semoriel's cock inside. The sensation felt like nothing else in the world. Icy chill met heated flesh, creating a duality of pleasure that left Semoriel reeling. He threw his head back and roared, hips lifting from the throne as he filled the mage's mouth.

Lazarus licked him clean, then rose once again. He held out a hand. "I'm sure a bed is far more comfortable than a throne."

"I'm sure it is. As soon as my legs obey the command to move."

For the first time since their initial meeting, Lazarus laughed. "I'll make it up to you."

Semoriel studied his lover for a moment before speaking. "You aren't quite what I originally thought you to be."

"Even elementals know when to step down from work and enjoy themselves."

"What if Bela comes for you?"

Lazarus' smile turned decidedly wicked, threatening to spark Semoriel's arousal. "I have the feeling your brother will be quite busy making sure his young lover doesn't end up with a chilling future."

Semoriel grinned and stood. "When he comes, you won't be alone."

Arms draped around Semoriel's neck, Lazarus leaned close for a kiss. "I know. I'm counting on it."



## **Mychael Black**

Mychael Black is a best-selling author of many novels and short stories, solo and with his co-author Shayne Carmichael. A self-professed geek and unrepentant bibliophile, he collects books on such topics as the Middle Ages, Druidry, Welsh history, languages, castles and their construction, medieval warfare, the Third Crusade, and, well, you get the idea.

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