



# BLOOD ECLIPSE

BOOK 4

# APOCALYPSE

A. J. LLEWELLYN AND D. J. MANLY

Carden, Roy, Thiago and Dennis have survived the carnage of the Vampire/Human war. Carden is destined to battle his uncle for the title of King of the Vampires, whilst struggling with his own urge to drink human blood. He must make desperate choices—but the war is not over and an unexpected new enemy emerges from the fire.

Rory fights for his life and his soul mate. With a new world order emerging from blood and ashes, he's convinced he and Carden can be together. Thiago and Dennis have their problems, too. Dennis is dying from his injuries sustained in his abduction. Will any of them survive the Apocalypse, and emerge from it, together?

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Apocalypse

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APOCALYPSE  
BLOOD ECLIPSE FOUR

BY

A.J. LEWELLYN AND D.J.  
MANLY

## DEDICATION

*A.J. would like to dedicate this to our loving,  
loyal readers and to D.J. Manly for suggesting  
this series in the first place.*

*D.J. would like to dedicate this book to our  
wonderful readers*

## CHAPTER ONE

“I feel like Mad Max.”

“Who?” Carden asked.

Rory sighed. “You’re such a Neanderthal.”

Carden scratched his scalp. They all itched. It was the most maddening sensation. Midges, tiny sand fleas, had invaded the desert. They all felt like they were on fire.

They kept walking, Thiago and Dennis lagging behind them.

“Should I be jealous?” Carden quipped.

Rory stopped and ran his hand across the back of his neck. His skin felt gritty and weird. Red sand caked with sweat seemed to go in and out of his pores, making the damned bugs stick to his skin.

He slapped his arm again. “Jealous? Of what?”

“Whom, baby. This Max guy.”

In spite of every fiber in his being screaming in agony, Rory laughed.

“He’s a movie character, sweetheart. The only thing you should be jealous of is my shocking absorption of three decades of pop culture.”

Carden glanced at him, grinning.

Rory shrugged. “I know. The wages of a misspent youth.”

They’d walked for a day and a half from the house in the woods, back through the desert. In the middle of the night, like thieves, they’d had to run. They were thirsty, hungry, tired. *Exhausted*. Sometimes Rory wanted to curl up on the ground and sleep. They all did. They took turns encouraging each other not to give up. Sometimes images of what he and Dennis went through in the cave before Carden and Thiago found them filtered into his mind.

Sometimes, Rory remembered the sounds of people surrounding the house, anxious to burn it down. The smell of smoke was still in their clothes. Each time, as if reading his thoughts, Carden would touch Rory’s arm or his face and a blinding white light in his brain zapped away the ugly images.

Carden had called it. He said they would be in danger. Carden, being the King of the Vampires, was a king in exile, hunted. But they would survive.

*I just never thought the very people who started out helping us would turn on us. Carden said vampires and*

*those who loved them were in grave danger. Well...there's no turning back now.*

He saw the lure of buildings shimmering in the distance at the exact same moment Dennis did.

Dennis broke between Carden and Rory. "You were right, Carden, there it is."

"I'm always right."

"It's beautiful." Dennis sounded breathless.

"It isn't Camelot," Rory responded. "It's only the MGM."

"To me, it looks like Camelot," Thiago said. "Lookit. Neon signs. I bet they have running water."

Rory grinned. "Yeah, and food."

"Pizza," Dennis said. "For some reason, I crave pizza."

Rory bent down and slapped his ankles. The goddamned bugs loved his feet.

"It figures that just about every other frickin' thing gets destroyed, but the bugs are multiplying."

"It's how it's always been." Carden's voice was quiet. They all stared a moment longer at the Las Vegas strip's former casino, now a rumored blood bank.

Music blared from the hotel.

"I don't see people anywhere," Thiago said. "That's spooky, huh?"



"It's a blood bank, remember? This won't be easy," Carden said. "Let me go in first. You stay here and wait for me."

Rory put his hand on Carden's arm. "We don't need another hero, Max. We're all in this together."

Carden glanced at Thiago. "Oh, but—"

"No." This time Dennis asserted himself, even though of all of them, he was nursing the worst injuries. "There's no *you* and *us* anymore. We're all in this together."

"You're not getting any arguments from me," Thiago said. "I'll even shower with my honey, you know, to save a bit of water."

Dennis coughed.

"Are you okay?" Thiago asked him.

"Peachy. I'm ready for that shower now."

They stood on the southern curb of Las Vegas Boulevard and they all peered up and down the strip. It was weird not to see cars jamming the street. A few were parked to the sides of Las Vegas Boulevard, right next to *No Parking Anytime* signs.

*Not a good sign.*

Traffic lights blinked red and up ahead toward Flamingo Avenue, Rory thought he saw a man crossing the street. He blinked again. Tumbleweed.

*It's like a post-apocalyptic movie.* He didn't voice the opinion. Things were weird enough as it was.

"You know, this is like that movie...the one where the guy wakes up in an animal lab and finds himself all alone," Dennis piped up. "He's like the only person in London. What was it called again?"

"*28 Days Later,*" Rory muttered.

"Right!"

Carden cocked a brow at him. "*28 Days Later?*"

"Boy," Rory said, "before me, you sure didn't get out much, did you?"

"Before you, I had no life at all." Carden's gaze was intense but his voice, soft. "Let's cross." He took Rory's arm. Rory felt the slight pressure from his lover's hand and he gave him a sidelong glance. He'd seen the best and worst of Carden and loved him for all his many shades.

The music coming out of the hotel was trance music. It thumped and pumped its hypnotic, yet irritating beat making Rory's pituitary gland react in a violent way. He swayed, Carden holding him up.

At the entrance to the hotel, they saw a bank of taxis out front. Not a single vehicle held a driver. Suitcases lined the sidewalk, but the concierge's stand stood empty.

"Hmmp," Carden said.

"This is supposed to be a blood bank?" Thiago asked. The automatic sliding doors remained closed as they stood in front of them. The revolving door remained locked as they tried to enter the casino.

"There are other places." Rory gestured up the boulevard.

"No. We're here now," Carden said. "Dennis can't go much further without water."

He leaned forward and smacked the palm-sized metal plate for handicapped patrons and the sliding doors opened, emitting a fetid air that almost gagged them.

"Holy shit," Dennis said. "Did someone die in here?"

They walked in together, huddled.

"Stay close to one another," Carden shouted over the music.

To their left, the gigantic casino floor revealed lit-up poker machines and empty gambling tables. Some still had cards fanned out, cocktails on napkins. It was as if everybody got up and left, soon to return.

Rory glanced at the high-stakes *Pai Gow* table. A few chairs were overturned. He couldn't think beyond this. His brain felt like it was going to explode from the music.

The front desk directly in front of them revealed a long-line marble counter with phones

turned around, facing the doors. Suitcases stood on the ground in a line in front of the check-in counter. A gigantic screen overhead played an endless loop of two half-clad boxers posed on a rocky outcrop in the desert. *LEWIS vs. TOLLERMAN: APOCALYPSE!*

A crack of lightning, images of fireworks, shot-cuts of the two fighters training and back to the image of them nose to nose in the desert, before turning to face the camera again. An artificially inserted crack of white lightning skittered between them.

Carden was the one who moved behind the counter, found a unit with switches and pressed them. Nothing happened at first and then the music stopped.

"Thank God for that," Dennis gasped. "I thought I'd go mad."

He rubbed his eyes with the back of a grimy hand.

"Recognize either of these fighters?" Carden asked Rory, gesturing to the footage still playing over and over on the screen above them.

"I know both of them peripherally."

On the screen, the loop started again.

"What day is it?" Rory asked.

Carden shrugged. "I lost all track of time."

"Wait." Dennis tapped his digital watch. "January 15."

Rory pointed at the screen. "That's the date of the fight."

Sure enough, on the screen in blood-red lettering that ran down into pools of blood before the loop replayed, it read, *JANUARY 15 at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino.*

"So, there's supposed to be a big title fight here?" Carden asked.

"Yep, and where there's a fight, there's a weigh-in, which should have happened yesterday."

"And?"

Rory smiled. "Where there's a weigh-in there's refreshments. Bottled water, baby."

"No pizza though," Dennis cracked, coughing again.

"Where would they have this weigh-in?" Carden asked.

Rory thought back to the last time he'd been here. "There's two places. Either downstairs in the Grand Garden Arena..." His gaze flickered to the screen again. "But that's only for the big fights. Over there on the right wall, there's a kind of ball room where they might have had it."

The others followed him.

It was eerie to see the lights on and nobody, literally, home.

Each of them seemed to be going through their own thoughts and emotions as they walked

through the billion-dollar hotel that held venerated restaurants and nightspots like Crazy Horse, Studio 54, Emeril...now silent, empty.

"This is real spooky," Dennis muttered.

At Room 21, as it was called, the doors were all locked. Carden spotted a table out front with two chairs and two boxes containing dozens of oversized cards.

"Fight credentials," Rory said.

"Well, it looks as though you're right. The weigh-in was supposed to happen here, but it looks like it never did. Nobody seems to have claimed their cards." Carden studied the images of the fighters on the top of the credential, the name of the reporter covering the event, their assigned seat number and the photo of the reporter below this.

Hologram stamps were in the corner of each photo on the laminated cards.

Underneath, the eerie word, *APOCALYPSE*.

"These holograms are also on the back to reduce piracy," Rory said.

Carden turned the card over. Sure enough, two more holograms were on there. He glanced at Rory.

"These credentials are like gold. You have no idea what just a single one is worth on the black market. For a fight like this, easily a thousand bucks. Something really bad has gone down here."

He pointed to the gambling tables. "It worries me that all those cards are out, poker chips just sitting there. They're all usually heavily guarded by security."

Rory and Carden stared at each other for a moment. They'd worked together at the Eclipse Club long enough to know how it worked. Theirs had been a sex club, not a gambling den, but Rory had managed the club, Carden had been its most-prized whore.

"It seems like that was a lifetime ago," Carden said, his finger grazing Rory's chin. For long seconds, he didn't seem to want to leave Rory, but he joined Thiago, trying all the doors to Room 21 as Rory and Dennis rifled through the credentials to see if they recognized any of the names, checking if any credentials had been collected against the lists on the table. Rory recognized many names and faces. Top TV reporters, cable companies, network reporters. Rory's heart sank when he saw the names of high-level government officials, actors and sports superstars.

"All the doors are locked!" Thiago reported.

"Geez," Dennis said, studying the credentials in his hand. "I hope they're all okay...like you know...maybe all the people changed their minds about coming to Vegas."

“Not a chance,” Rory said. “Lookit. These are all photos taken specifically for the fight. See the MGM logo behind them?”

“Holy crap,” Dennis said and coughed.

“There’s about three hundred photo IDs. A ton more peripheral credentials with no photos. We’re looking at about five hundred people missing,” Rory said.

“Yeah, not to mention the people running the show, the fight promoters, the boxers...everyone in the casino.” Dennis wiped his sweaty brow. “This sucks.”

“Can you hear voices?” Thiago suddenly asked.

“I can,” Carden said, coming back to them after trying the main door to Room 21 one more time. His head swiveled in several directions.

This was one of those rare occasions when Rory *hated* not being a vampire. They could hear and see things humans couldn’t.

“I don’t hear a thing.” Dennis sounded as depressed as Rory felt.

“Neither do I.”

Thiago pointed to the ground. “It’s coming from down there.”

Carden looked at Rory. “You seem to know the hotel. What’s down there?”

“An underground network of shops. There’s also a tunnel to the Mandalay Bay across the road.”



“Let’s go.”

Despite the lights being on, none of the elevators worked.

“Fire stairs,” Carden said. They found one door unlocked and as Carden turned the handle, the putrid smell that had greeted them earlier blasted them.

“Christ on a rock,” Rory said, covering his nose and mouth. “That’s foul!”

Carden led the way as they took the stairs down. The first door didn’t open, but the second one did. They found themselves in a brightly lit corridor.

“Hello?” Carden called out as they all clustered around him.

Nothing.

“I still hear the voices,” Carden said.

“Of course you do,” Rory said. “Being human is such a disadvantage sometimes.”

Carden gave him a playful punch to the chin. “Come on. They’re coming from this way.”

They walked down the corridor, the smell of death strong now. Carden put his hand out to Rory who clasped it at the precise moment Thiago and Dennis gripped each other’s hand.

“I hear the voices now,” Rory said. He tried to tune into what was being said.

The voices stopped.

"There was a discussion between two men," Carden reported. "I have a horrible feeling it was a TV."

He tried the first door. Locked. They kept walking down the corridor. The smell ebbed away.

"Phew," said Dennis. "Just as I was getting ready to barf."

They came to another door and Carden opened it. They stepped forward, greeted by the startling sight of a huge, headless statue outside a bar.

"Oh, it's Lenin's statue," Rory said. "This is the Red Square Bar. How weird. We've crossed all the way over to the Mandalay Bay Hotel."

"What happened to his head?" Carden asked.

"The management decapitated him after getting complaints from patrons...you know, promoting communism or some such rubbish. His head is just inside the window." He pointed to the right of the statue and there it was.

"Look at all those bottles in those fridges," Dennis breathed, his gaze on the long line of fridges against one wall. "All those lovely cold bottles."

"Vodka, darling," Thiago said.

"I don't care what they are. I'm not driving anywhere."

They walked inside. The bar had cocktails in various stages of completion on its smooth,

polished surface, as if everybody ran out for an emergency and would soon be coming back.

“Creepier and creepier,” Dennis said. He opened a fridge and extracted a bottle of vodka. He twisted off a cap and poured himself a shot. Then another.

“Bottled water.” Rory found a stash behind the bar. He handed them each a bottle and they opened them. Nothing else was said as they all drank deeply.

“Oh, wow,” Dennis said. “I needed that. Is there more?”

Rory handed him a second bottle and Dennis opened it, sitting on one of the high-backed barstools. “I may never get up again.”

“You’re going to have to,” Carden said. “I feel danger all around us. We have to keep moving.”

Dennis finished his second bottle. Rory tossed them each another one. “For the road. Let’s boogie.”

They followed Carden who came out of the club again and hesitated.

“Casino’s to the left,” Rory said. “The parking lot’s to our right.”

Carden nodded and took Rory’s hand in his. They walked toward the casino entrance. Once again, the lights were on but not a single soul in sight.

Then they turned left just inside the casino entrance. The smell was terrible.

"It's coming from there." Carden pointed his finger at Rumjungle, a rustic-looking bar with bamboo curtains and psychedelic lighting.

The sound of a TV came back on as they rounded the corner.

"This is the same conversation I heard before," Carden said, staring at the huge, flat-screen TV high on a bamboo-lined wall. Four men sat at the bar, not moving, their backs to Carden, Rory, Dennis and Thiago.

The bad smell was intense.

"Hello?" Carden called out.

None of the men responded. He held a hand behind him to keep the others back, but as usual, nobody listened.

Rory gasped as they came closer. The men's hands were blue. As they stepped around the bar and faced them, he thought he would be sick. He stared at the men. Their faces were distended and blue, their eyes open wide.

One man had undone his shirt buttons, his hand on the bar, his mouth open. The others looked as if they were waiting...but Rory knew they were dead.

"Jesus Christ, what happened here?"

Carden stepped forward and touched the first man's wrist. He stared into his eyes. He turned back to his companions.

"I have no idea how...or why, but these men...they all died of hypothermia."

## CHAPTER TWO

“Hypothermia?” Rory couldn’t believe it.  
They all looked at each other.

“But it isn’t even cold in here,” Dennis said.

Rory glanced from Carden to Thiago. Something was going on. Some silent communication they weren’t sharing with their human partners.

Furious now, he was about to say something when Carden held up a hand.

“I hear a train.” His gaze fell on the ground. “I feel it under my feet.”

“There is an underground monorail,” Rory said. It’s a small one. It runs between the Mandalay Bay, the MGM and makes a couple of other stops, but finishes at the Sahara.”

*I thought it was us now. We’re all in this together, you know? I thought we agreed no more you and us. It’s we. Tell me what is going on.* He sent the silent

message to Carden, not sure if he'd get it or even if he cared.

"We need to get down there," Carden said. "Now."

Rory received a strange image of people milling around, being herded. He heard screams and shouts...a child crying.

Carden glanced at him, his expression bleak. He strode off toward the stairwell that had led them here, the others following him.

Rory looked up and noticed a strange blue smoke seeping into the room from an air vent to his right. He wanted to say something, but Carden put his fingers to his lips.

They reached the door to the fire stairs.

Locked.

All the lights in the casino went out.

"Oh, my God," moaned Dennis. "I feel like shit."

"You'll be okay," Carden said, putting his arm under Dennis' arm, supporting him. Dennis' knees buckled and Thiago slipped his arm around him from the other side.

"What's the matter with him?" Rory whispered.

Carden shook his head. "Rory, you know another way out?"

"Yeah. Follow me."

They walked in silence, Dennis stumbling and dragging his left leg as they moved forward.

When Rory turned to look at him, Dennis' head lolled about in a bizarre way. He walked like a broken marionette doll.

"Where was the fight supposed to happen? The actual fight?" Carden asked Rory.

In the darkness, Rory somehow got them from the casino back to the corridor of shops.

"It would have been at the—"

"Think it," Carden said, right in his ear. "Don't say it."

Rory glanced at him. *Think it?*

*Yes.*

Rory blinked as the word *yes* shot into his brain. In his whole life, he'd never had this kind of communication with anybody. It was jarring and intrusive...and yet really, really sexy.

Carden gave him a disarming smile. Rory knew he was waiting.

*The Mandalay Events Center.*

Carden held out his hand. Rory could see it now, indicating that he should lead the way. They came to the collection of takeout places and Rory felt a rumble of hunger. What he wouldn't give for something to eat.

"I'm hungry," Dennis said, suddenly normal again.

Lights glowed from the pizza joint to their left.

"Pizza!" he shouted, running toward it.



“Wh—” Rory watched his friend, stunned by his transformation.

Carden stared at him. Rory was certain Carden was giving him information, a message, but he wasn't tuning into him. He saw disappointment skitter across his lover's face, but it was so fleeting, he wondered if he'd dreamed it.

Thiago followed Dennis into the restaurant.

“What's going on?” Rory hissed at Carden.

Carden ignored him and followed the others inside.

“Don't eat anything that can't be nuked,” Carden said. Thiago and Dennis went into the men's room. Carden's gaze swiveled around the restaurant. Once again, it looked like people had been eating and drinking and simply...vanished.

“Oh, hell, there's a guy in the john, frozen solid,” Dennis said, coming back to the front of the restaurant. “He died standing there with his dick in his hand, taking a leak.”

“It's so weird,” Thiago said. He glanced at Dennis. “You're feeling okay?”

“Of course. Why wouldn't I be?”

He moved behind the restaurant's open-plan kitchen and opened the fridge door.

“Barbecued chicken anyone?”

Thiago and Carden never ate, being vampires. Rory glanced at his lover, saw his stricken

expression and read the thought clearly and strongly. It was as if Carden said it aloud.

*I'm hungry.*

As Thiago and Dennis fooled around in the kitchen, Rory took his lover's hand and led him to a quiet corner.

"I know you need to feed. Bite me."

Carden smiled. It was the first light moment they'd shared since leaving the desert caves.

"You want me to bite you."

"Yes. Please. Carden. We need you sharp and focused."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't hurt me. I...Carden, turn me. Make me a vampire."

"I'm not going to do that."

"Why not?"

"It's a ritual that takes time." Carden's uneasy expression worried him.

"We don't have much time?"

Carden's nod was almost imperceptible.

"So if you feed from me, you'll feel better."

"I'm so fucking hungry, Rory..." his voice cracked and blood-tears appeared in the corners of his eyes, "I'm afraid I won't be able to stop. I'm afraid I might kill you."

"No, you won't. Just bite me. Get it over with."

"I can't. I made a vow not to hurt you. I—"

"But I love you, Carden."

“Oh, God.”

Carden covered the space between them in a few seconds. Their kiss was long and deep. Rory struggled for breath, but Carden wrestled him to the floor.

He felt Carden’s tongue touching his throat, a gentle flick of heat that roared through his entire body. He felt his head turning. He saw the gleaming, perfect canine teeth aiming at his throat and he held his breath in restless anticipation.

Carden had just enough energy to swamp his lover with plenty of pheromones to shield him from pain as he bit into his jugular vein. He sent images...visions...an absolute belief of undressing Rory and licking his whole body. He focused on Rory’s nipples.

Ah...blood...this was bliss. *Entasy*. He felt his internal organs respond, like a sonata to an orchestra leader’s demanding baton. He could hear his inner music again...

He gorged on Rory’s blood as his lover twisted under him, in the throes of his own sexual song. Carden’s hand snaked to Rory’s cock, rigid in his pants.

*Come, my love. Come.*

Rory came, his heartbeat pounding in Carden’s head. Carden knew he had to withdraw. He took his teeth from his lover’s willing neck, watched him gasp in pleasure and pain. Carden swallowed,

craning forward to lick the few spilled drops at Rory's neck and to seal the fissures.

Carden's lips moved over Rory's open mouth and they kissed once more.

He heard the noise, the movement. They had to go.

Carden stood, hoisting a dazed-looking Rory to his feet.

Rory stared down at his fully clad body.

"Oh, my God...I could have sworn..."

Carden grinned. He watched Thiago and Dennis fooling around. "Thiago, you need to feed, come here quickly. Then we need to leave."

He handed his wrist to Thiago, whose teeth elongated. He chose his spot on Carden's wrist and fed noisily.

"I feel so jealous," Dennis said. "I can't wait until I'm a vampire. Why can't he feed from me?"

"Because you're still weak. The food making you feel better?"

"Yeah. I'd murder for a beer though."

Carden extracted his hand from Thiago's guzzling grip.

"No. No beer. We have to go." Carden looked at Rory. "Which way to the train?"

"Did I just come in my pants?"

"Yeah, babe."

"Oh, man. I hate that squishy feeling."

"Get used to it."

"Hey, we saw some suitcases upstairs in the MGM lobby. Maybe I can find some clean gear."

"Good idea," Carden said. "Let's go."

He and Rory led the way. Carden noticed Dennis picking up a bottle of beer and Thiago removing it from his fingers.

Carden kept his thoughts neutral, his only goal to reach the underground train.

"It doesn't go far," Rory said, "Only between the hotels."

"We'll see about that," Carden said. "Which way?"

They arrived at the entrance from the Mandalay. It was closed.

Carden gritted his teeth.

"We need to get back to the MGM. Now."

"Well, there's another way. The street."

"No." Carden's voice came out as a bark. He told himself to calm down. "Not the street."

They heard a ping.

"That's the parking garage elevators," Rory said and took off at a run.

The others followed and saw the numbers moving to the basement.

Carden hit the button. The elevator stayed on B. He hit it again and again and suddenly it moved up to where they were on G.

"Wait," Rory said as the elevator door stayed closed and the floor indicator went black.

Carden nodded.

The elevator remained closed. Thiago made a sound.

"This is getting really freaky."

"This way," Rory said and ran back through the shop corridor. The others followed him. He turned at the entrance to the Grand Garden Arena.

"Follow me," he said.

They blew through the security checkpoint just inside the entrance. A long table covered in a cloth and bowls of flowers sat outside the gigantic arena used for major sporting events and rock concerts.

"Oh, fuck," Dennis said. "The smell."

The smell grew stronger as they neared a door leading into the arena. It was cracked open.

"I don't think I want to look in there," Rory said as Carden pulled the door handle toward them.

The smell was like a physical force that almost threw them back on their asses.

Coughing, retching, spluttering...Dennis was on his knees, Thiago leaning over him.

As long as he lived, Carden didn't think he would ever forget what he saw, the horror and shock mirrored on his companions' faces.

The stench of death was putrid. It became impossible to breathe as they stood and looked at what must have easily been five thousand people sitting in stadium seats above a stage in the middle. They were all dead, frozen in their seats.

“Holy shit.” It was Rory, tears streaming down his cheeks. “What the fuck did this to them?”

Carden took his arm. “Come on.” He pulled Thiago out with them, Thiago dragging Dennis.

“Oh, my God,” Dennis moaned, not for the first time. “Are we in hell?”

“Almost,” Carden said, shutting the door behind them. “Rory. The train.”

They stepped forward and a shadow crossed their paths.

“Carden!”

“Jensen!”

They all greeted him, but Carden could tell the others were mystified to see the young man who’d helped them in the woods.

*What is he doing here?* Carden read Rory’s thoughts.

“I followed you,” Jensen said. “Well, I kinda lost track of you, but I found you now.”

“Indeed you have. We wanted to get to the monorail,” Carden said, his hand curling around Rory’s tightly.

“The monorail?” Jensen smiled, but it was a peculiar smile. “I know a way. The lights keep going on and off. The electricity is dicey.”

“We noticed.” Thiago kept trying to catch Carden’s gaze, but Carden wouldn’t look at him. The four friends followed Jensen to an escalator.

As Jensen led the way, Carden held Rory closer to him.

"Small, shallow, breaths," he whispered in his ear. "Pass it on."

He stood in front of Rory, following Jensen down the escalator, which wasn't moving. He made as much noise as he could, aware the others were behind him. He covered their whispers with the clatter of his feet.

"Everything okay?" Jensen asked, turning around.

"Lost my footing," Carden said. "Sorry."

Jensen frowned for a moment, but kept moving. As they stepped off the escalator, he pointed.

"This way."

They all followed him, Dennis looking horrible. Carden slipped his arm under him, but he wasn't as bad as the first time he'd been attacked.

They arrived at a stairwell and followed Jensen inside. He led the way with a practiced air. They moved along a straight line, turning once. They turned again after another long walk. Carden noticed another door to their left as Jensen moved swiftly ahead.

Carden tried the handle. It opened. He pushed his way in, Dennis lolling against him, Thiago and Rory right behind him.



“What the fuck?” Thiago said as Rory and Carden leaned against the slow-closing fire door. “That little shit...he’s trying to set us up.”

Carden locked the fire door behind them.

Jensen shrieked at them from outside it. “You’ll never get away. They’ll find you, you’ll see! You can’t get away. You can’t!”

His manic cackle shocked them all.

“Shit. Let’s go,” Rory said.

“We still need to find the monorail,” Carden said.

“I’m lost,” Rory said. “Once he turned up, he threw me off my bearings.”

“Wait...I hear it,” Thiago said. He pointed up. “How did we get underneath it?”

They moved to the next fire door and stepped out.

“I don’t believe it,” Rory said as they walked into the MGM Grand Casino again. “How did we do that?”

“Your sense of direction is better than you thought,” Carden grinned. “Which way, babe?”

“Well, the monorail’s this way, but...”

Carden inclined his head in the direction Rory was pointing. They walked in a cluster to the massive check-in desk. They all stopped.

The suitcases they’d seen earlier had vanished, but the entrance to the monorail in the far right corner was open.

"I feel like Alice about to go down the rabbit hole," Rory said.

Carden kept his expression grim as he focused on each of them in turn. "Stay very close."

They approached the monorail entrance and could feel the drop in temperature as they descended the stairs to it.

Rory's fingers wriggled against Carden's grip. He loosened his hold, realizing he was cutting off Rory's circulation.

The entrance to the monorail closed behind them.

Rory stiffened beside him. Carden tried giving his fingers a reassuring squeeze.

They passed the empty ticket seller's booth and rounded on the monorail platform.

Half the lights on the platform had been smashed, but they all stopped now.

Carden took in the people, dozens of them, huddled, looking down the line.

"It's coming!" someone shouted.

Carden held Rory back as people materialized out of nowhere. Far too many people for the narrow platform. They clamored, pawing to move to the front as they felt the rush of air of the monorail approaching.

"Stay with me," Carden shouted above the monorail's burst of noise.

Carden, Rory, Thiago and Dennis moved behind the mass of people desperate to get away.

“Watch it!” a guy snarled at Carden, misunderstanding his attempts to get around the guy, not push in front of him.

Carden overcame his natural anger, his friends sticking to him as they wended their way behind the masses. They pushed past the crazy pack of people trying to board the monorail.

Carden heard Rory’s gasp as Carden suddenly threw himself, pulling Rory right behind him, into a hidden doorway inside the walls of the station.

Blue lights inside what looked like another tunnel showed Carden they were alone...for now.

On the other side, people screamed as the monorail doors closed, leaving dozens more stranded on the platform.

Thiago and Dennis piled into the secret entrance, Carden closing the door behind them. They heard the shouts outside.

“Don’t move,” Carden whispered. “We’re on a ledge.”

Voices rasped outside the hidden door.

“Are they on?” a male voice asked. “Did he get on here?”

The four friends froze. The voices were right outside. Carden put his full weight against the opening, Thiago right there with him.

"Yes," someone shouted. "They got on the last carriage."

Carden felt Rory's fingers squeezing on his.

"Gas them all," a low voice said. "We gotta be sure."

The monorail rolled out of the station.

A voice came over a loud speaker.

"Attention citizens...there will be another train in exactly ten minutes. Please be patient. Your cooperation is appreciated. Thank you."

The people left on the platform started to shout. The two men outside the door stopped speaking.

For long moments, none of the four friends said anything. Footsteps moved away. Somebody tried to push the secret door open, but Carden realized they were trying to gain access along the entire wall.

They stood, panting on the ledge and then, when everything was silent, Rory spoke. He was crying. His hot tears splashed on Carden's hand. "I just understood the images you were sending me, Carden."

Carden's head fell back against the sloped, dank wall.

"I wasn't sending them, you read them," he muttered, feeling very, very old. "You took them from my mind."

"It's another Auschwitz." Rory swallowed down his tears. "All those people think they're

getting away, but they're going to die, aren't they?"

## CHAPTER THREE

“They’re on a death train?” Dennis asked.  
“Oh...oh...this is barbaric. They pushed us...herded us all out to the train like lambs to the slaughter. But why?”

“Yes,” said Carden. He sighed. “We need to push on.”

“Where are we?” Rory asked. “Another cave?”

“Something like that.”

“They tortured us,” Rory said.

Carden read...saw the images back in his lover’s mind again.

Rory looked terrified. “Please tell me we’re not going back there.”

“We’re not going back there.” Carden’s hand tightened on Rory’s.

Rory blanched. “I just remembered something burning my legs. A tazer?”

“No,” Dennis said.

"Fuck...I remember now. They poked us with a cattle prod."

"They did it to me in my ribs. I'm sore as hell." Dennis let loose a wild, rattling cough.

"You're getting worse," Thiago fretted.

"No, no. I'm fine. I just need...rest."

"They got me in the legs. The ankles," Rory said. "No wonder my legs felt like they were on fire when the bugs got to me."

"Babe, I'm sorry." Carden tried to keep his voice soothing, though rage against those who hurt his lover scarred his psyche. "I wish I'd gotten there sooner."

"You came though. I knew you would."

Carden couldn't resist. He had to kiss Rory. He could hear Thiago and Dennis swapping spit, too, and smiled. Love *could* perhaps conquer all things.

"I want to know what's going on," Dennis said as Carden started moving along the ledge again.

"Come on," Carden ordered over his shoulder.

"What's going on?" Dennis said again, so loudly Carden lost his temper.

"I'll tell you what's going on. Methane."

The other three stopped walking.

Carden turned around. In the blue lights from the tunnel, the shocked faces looking at him were eerie. Everybody was frightened. He understood that, but they were still in danger.

"Methane? As in the gas?" Rory asked.

Carden paused. He listened for signs of any activity...human or vampire. He couldn't hear anything. "Yes, exactly," he said when he was sure they were still alone.

Rory removed his hand from Carden's and folded them across his chest.

"Lucy," he said. "You got some 'splaining to do."

Carden narrowed his eyes. "Lucy? As in the character from the TV show?"

"Figures you'd be familiar with a TV show that's more than seventy years old," Rory said. "Now. 'Splain."

"I think it holds up pretty well for such an old show," Carden deadpanned. He cleared his throat.

"It's an odorless gas and on its own, it's harmless. However, its use speeded up the greenhouse effect...global warming. In the twentieth century and earlier in this one, they used it as natural gas and enhanced the smell so people could tell if they'd accidentally left the stove on or whatever."

The others still stared at him.

"Its function as a source of energy was initially seen as viable, except that in confined spaces, it cuts off oxygen."

"Right," Rory said. "I get that. And so..."

"Well...you see...methane reacts with other compounds in different ways. Sometimes, a very



bad way. You can use it to cause a fire, if it's combined with certain things or—"

"Oh no...simulate hypothermia. Death by freezing."

"What are you saying?" Thiago said. "They're just killing everybody? This was supposed to be a blood bank."

"That's the rumor...that's also the key," Carden said. "There is no synthetic blood. They're using everyone who turns up here as a guinea pig."

"So...humans and vampires are affected by this combination of gases?" Rory asked.

"No. Only humans...but vampires who are starving, which many of us are...they can be weakened...controlled. They're the ones whoever is doing this is interested in. They want to isolate them...to figure out what works...and what doesn't."

"So why did the man outside want to make sure you were on the train?" Rory asked.

Carden looked at him. "Oh, no...they weren't talking about me."

"They weren't?"

"No, they were talking about Dennis."

"Me!" Dennis squeaked. "What do they want with me? What did I do?"

Carden paused. "You drank the vodka. Whatever was in it reacts to the gas. You're the only one who drank it and whenever we passed

vents where they were pumping out the gas, you reacted. I don't think they can figure out how you survived it. They think you're a freak...you're ruining all their schemes."

"Jesus," Dennis said, clutching his throat. "What the hell did I drink?"

"I don't know yet, but you've already built up a tolerance."

"This is...a nightmare," Dennis said. "Am I going to die?"

"I don't know. I have no idea what was in the vodka, but you had a small dose. And we were moving. After a strong dose and not expecting it, hosed with a strong blast of methane...you could have died like all those others. Right where you were standing or sitting."

"But I took two pretty good shots of it. Wasn't that enough?"

Carden gave him a sweet smile.

"You and Thiago love each other. You have fed on him in the throes of...passion and vice versa. You have his blood in you. It protected you. Otherwise you'd be dead right now."

"You bit him?" Rory asked incredulous.

"It was sex fun," Dennis said, defensive now. "Carden, what the hell could be in that vodka?"

"We'll find out, but for now, let's keep moving."

They started along the ledge again.

“What about Jensen?” Rory asked. “Did you have any idea he was a rotten little weasel?”

“He’s not rotten...well, maybe he is. And yes, I read all these thoughts in his mind.”

“So why did you bring us here?” Rory was really pissed now.

“I had to play the game,” his lover said. “Besides, I kinda like the idea of having a little rest in a nice warm bed and figuring out our next step.”

“What warm bed?” Rory asked.

“I’m thinking the Wynn. I’ve always wanted to stay in that hotel. The rooms look very good.”

“Won’t they be patrolling that hotel, too?” Dennis asked.

“Oh, I doubt most people make it past the outside hotels on the strip. Depending on which way they’re coming from, they might hit the Sahara on the north end or the MGM or Mandalay on the south end, like we did.”

“God...it’s a nightmare,” Rory said.

Carden held him a little bit tighter. “The good thing about nightmares is you finally wake up.”

“Well,” Carden asked, “did I come through or not?”

“You said the Wynn. This is a flophouse on the bad end of Las Vegas Boulevard. I’m afraid to even lie on top of the bedspread.”

Carden shrugged. "The sheets are clean. There's clean towels in the bathroom."

"It's a flophouse. The sheets are made of nylon and those clean towels of yours are about the size of a postage stamp. Everything is nailed down. The TV is bolted so high on the wall, we can't touch it and there's no remote."

"I never promised you a rose garden."

Rory stared at Carden for a moment, then started to laugh.

"Man, we need to get you listening to some hipper music. That song's like a hundred years old."

"Not quite." Carden's tone was icy. "She was my first love, Lynn Anderson."

"The singer?"

Carden nodded. Rory was stunned when his lover said, "I saw her on television when I was young...it was some country music retro thing...she looked like my mother. To me she's my mother...reaching from beyond the veil to remind me that life isn't always fair, that danger always lurks. But there can be good times, too."

"That's fucking tragic," Rory said.

"Sad but true."

Rory inched across the scratchy bedspread and put his arms around Carden.

"Oh, baby, I'm so sorry. I'm being such an ass and you're trying so hard."

"It's okay, I understand."

"I'm scared."

"No need to be scared."

"You're hungry again, aren't you?" Rory asked.

"I'll survive. I'm not feeding from you again."

"Why not? Carden, listen to me. Turn me... make me one of your kind."

"No. absolutely not."

"It's probably my only chance for survival."

"It's probably a good way for you to become hunted...constantly under threat."

"I already am."

Carden sighed. "You need to eat and the good thing about flophouses is they have vending machines. That's why we came here. No TV. Anything electronic is a good way for the enemy to zero in on us. I promised you a warm bed. And I'll give you one."

His lover's searing gaze sent a ripple of pleasure through Rory.

"We'll get you some food, have a shower...rest a few hours and move on."

"Shower first," Rory said.

Carden opened some drawers. Some underpants, a bra and a woman's selection of floral blouses.

"Lovely, very you," Rory joked, holding one against Carden.

"We can have a shower and go commando in our jeans...but we'll have clean shirts at least."

"And our game plan?" Rory asked as they walked to the front door.

"Head for the coast. And the boats."

"The boats?"

"Let's take it one step at a time, shall we?"

Carden opened the door to their room and stepped into the hallway. Rory was so bone tired it took all his strength to follow him.

Thiago and Dennis were already at the vending machine at the end of the corridor.

"We had the same idea," Rory said.

"I was going to bring you these." Dennis handed Rory and Carden bottled water from a busted-out drinks machine behind him. "I really wanted a soda, but I was afraid it would make me thirsty."

Thiago had somehow managed to wrench open the grill door covering the snack machine. "Pick your pleasure," he said, opening it wider. "It's a load of junk, but better than nothing."

"I gotta have corn chips...these are nacho flavored," Dennis said. "Oh, the cookies look good."

He and Rory loaded up on food and the two couples returned to their rooms, right next door to each other. Dennis was limping, but seemed in good spirits.

Inside their room, Rory and Carden stripped and held each other.

"I'm going to fucking kill somebody," Carden said, his hands roaming Rory's body.

When they were first reunited, Rory's bruises hadn't been evident. Now they showed a pretty nasty beating. He stared at himself in the mirror as Carden ran the bath taps.

"Bad news. Only the cold water tap works."

"I don't care," Rory said. "It's water."

"Don't drink any. We need to be quick."

"Quick? It's cold in here and all we have is cold water. I can promise you I'll be quick."

"Think of the end result," Carden said, drawing Rory to him.

"Which is?"

"Warm sheets and a very hot cock."

They soaped each other vigorously, but the cold water made their teeth chatter. Carden turned Rory around, scrubbing his head from behind.

When Rory looked down, the water was a rust color, dead Midges floating on the surface.

"Lordy...were they in my hair?"

"Yep."

He turned to Carden. "Your turn." As he scrubbed at his lover's hair, one hand trailed around Carden's body to his cock.

"Somehow, I don't think you'll find any Midgies there." Carden's tone was soft and silky.

"You never know. I need to check. I'm thinking a full body search, especially cavities."

Carden laughed. "I fucking love you, Rory."

"Yeah. I know."

They stepped out of the shower, drying off with the impossibly tiny towels that had seen better days. But as Carden had pointed out, they were still clean.

"They won't be expecting us to come to a dive," Carden said, rubbing at his hair with a hand towel, "but we need to be prepared to leave quickly."

"Last one to the bed has to fulfill the other's wishes."

Carden moved so fast, he was in the sheets, looking at his nails before Rory even finished his sentence.

"Damn!"

"What took you so long?" Carden asked. "I'm ready and waiting. I'm kind of interested in learning more about this cavity search."

\* \* \* \*

"You've never tried a nacho chip?" Dennis asked. "Have you ever wanted to eat food since you turned?"



"No," Thiago said, with a laugh. "And since I am in love with such a foodie, it seems a shame. You take such joy in it."

Dennis bit down on a chip. It didn't taste so good.

"What's wrong?" Thiago asked.

"I don't know...I normally love these things. I feel..." He tried a second bite. It was like trying to swallow sandpaper. His mouth and throat refused to cooperate.

Thiago, who lay on the bed in black silk boxer shorts beside him, sat up. "Oh...no...Dennis, it's my fault."

Dennis gazed at him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean...you have some vampire blood in you...remember?"

"And?"

"We don't eat."

"Shit."

"Especially that."

"Wait. You mean, I might want to eat, but I can't?"

"Right."

"Will I always feel this way?"

"I don't know."

"I'm sort of half-turned?"

"You're not turned at all. You're maybe a sixteenth turned."

“But I could starve to death! I wanted the chicken earlier.”

Thiago was staring at him, worried.

“Maybe it was that stuff in the vodka. Maybe it’s doing weird things to my body.”

“Let’s relax...Carden said you were building up a tolerance. Come here...feed from me a little. Let’s see if that makes any difference.”

“I want you to fuck me,” Dennis said, discarding the chips. “I need you inside me, Thiago.”

His lover’s embrace comforted him, his soft lips at his ear restoring his equilibrium.

He fell on the bed, his body caving into the feeling of carnal need.

“Oh, Thiago...you just do it for me, you know?”

Thiago’s mouth claimed his and Dennis sighed with contentment as his man’s hand rubbed at his cock through his tattered, dusty jeans.

They kissed each other hungrily, Dennis aware of Thiago’s sharp canine teeth scraping at his tongue. He knew that although Thiago had fed from Carden, he craved the connection with Dennis. They kissed with total abandon.

“I haven’t brushed my teeth,” he said, breaking their bond.

“Neither have I.”

Dennis felt Thiago's teeth elongating. It was a terrifying feeling and also a major thrill. The element of danger in their coupling had intensified ever since Thiago rescued him in the cave.

*I can't live without him anymore. I want him to make me his.*

Thiago's mouth moved from Dennis' face down his body. He snatched at the clothing that separated them. Thiago tore at the button and zipper on Dennis' fly. He pulled them down, ripping at the white boxer shorts beneath them.

When Thiago tore the shorts in two, he grabbed Dennis' cock, which went from soft to hard in seconds. He knew Thiago considered a soft cock in his grip to be an insult. He always delighted in Dennis walking around hard, to be in a perpetual state of arousal.

Thiago's mouth gobbled him up. Dennis flopped back on the bed, at his lover's mercy. It had always been this way between them since the first time they made love at the Eclipse Club. Thiago had been his rent boy. His vampire for hire. After the intense orgasms he experienced with him, Dennis was hooked. He loved and needed Thiago and knew that now, after long resistance, Thiago needed him.

He watched his lover's teeth recede as he gave him expert head. Thiago sucked cock like he was

born to do it and Dennis felt a small pang of regret. He wanted to be fucked and bitten. It was now his obsession. Thiago gripped Dennis' balls as if he'd tear them from his body, but he knew that Thiago had figured out what got Dennis' motor running and having his cock and balls sucked and manhandled roughly, sent him into the stratosphere.

Thiago came off his cock and gave Dennis his mouth again. Dennis could taste a trace of his own semen on his lover's tongue as Thiago kissed him. He kept up the vigorous stroking on Dennis' cock.

He wanted Thiago's huge shaft in his ass. He wanted to come with his lover buried deep inside him, but Thiago's tongue moved to his chest now, flicking at Dennis' nipples.

"Don't let go of my cock," Dennis moaned.

Thiago moved down, claiming it once more with his hungry mouth. Dennis felt Thiago's right hand moving down to his ass and Dennis opened his legs. Thiago took his mouth off Dennis' cock to let his spit fall on the ass just inches from his face.

Dennis went wild as Thiago lubed him this way, using his thumb on Dennis' ass.

Thiago's thumb moved into him swiftly, his mouth landing on Dennis' cockhead again. Thiago moved down to Dennis' balls, feasting on them, sucking and licking them until they ripened in his heat-seeking mouth.

Dennis lay on his back, holding his legs in the air in spite of the pain in his chest from the beating in the cave. He longed for his lover's tongue in his ass, waiting...waiting as Thiago prepared him for absolute bliss—licking his balls, pulling on the sacs with pursed lips, returning to the rigid, leaking cock and finally, letting his tongue trail over Dennis' impatient ass.

When Thiago looked up into Dennis' eyes as his tongue touched Dennis' ass hole, Dennis came. He saw white lights, fireworks and screamed his lover's name. "Bite me, feed me. I'm starving for you."

Thiago looked at him, a myriad of emotions crossing his face. Dennis swept aside Thiago's cock from his black silk boxers and pointed it where he needed it.

"You're sure?" Thiago's voice was thick. It always got this way when his teeth elongated and when he was emotional.

"Yes."

Thiago entered him quickly, pushing past the tight ass that gripped at him.

Dennis turned his head, uttering a silent mantra of need. *Please, please, please...*

Thiago fucked him, begging Dennis to play with his cock.

"Stroke it for me, baby. I want this to feel good."

Dennis took his cock in his fingers, felt Thiago's teeth at his neck and then...the world exploded. He saw colors and felt a fire...a blast in his belly that threw him high off the bed.

*Stay with me...stay...it's okay...*

He knew it was Thiago's voice...inside his head. Dennis lay back on the bed as his lover sucked at his neck. The pain was intense and then something else happened. A strange sense of peace, of well-being flooded his senses. The lights, the flames behind his eyes became rivers of water...blue, calm waters and Dennis sobbed as he came again and again as his cock spewed between Thiago's hard-thrusting body and his panting, pliant one.

Thiago took his teeth from Dennis. Red tears flew from his cheeks.

"You have to bite me." He offered his throat to Dennis who was shocked when lovely, long teeth shot out of his mouth. He felt Thiago taking his cock in his fist.

He put his teeth at Thiago's neck and heard...

*Now...*

And Dennis flew overhead, watching himself bite into his lover's throat. He watched Thiago kneeling over him. Watched himself as he drank, sucking, biting, licking. He returned to his body and drank and drank until Thiago pulled himself away again.

"Swallow," Thiago urged, but Dennis was too busy having another orgasm. "It will always be like this," Thiago said at his ear.

Dennis swallowed. He was still coming when the blood hit his throat. He felt his whole body relaxing, felt the heartbeat easing in his head.

He laughed when Thiago opened his legs again. "My turn to come, bitch."

"Fuck me from behind," Dennis said. "God, I'm still hard."

"You'd better be. I took you in bliss."

\* \* \* \*

Rory dreamed of a boat. He and Carden were rowing...a canoe...he felt his lover's mouth on him and yet he was paddling. He was aware of other canoes around them. It was dark, but the canoes were full. Children sat in front, holding kerosene lamps high. He glimpsed faces, paddles...gigantic ice floes...they were leaving, fleeing...and then came the sound of knocking.

He felt Carden pulling out of him.

"No," he shrieked, returning to the room where he and Carden had fallen asleep after a wonderful romp.

"Get dressed," Carden said, pulling on his jeans and buttoning up one of the floral shirts. "They're here."

"Who's here?" Rory fumbled in the half-darkness.

"The children of course."

Carden opened the door and there stood six children.

"Told you," one of the kids said to the others. "I told you he would be here."



## CHAPTER FOUR

“How do you know he survived?” Jensen demanded. “You promised me, Declen, that he’d be mine and that fucking mortal leach would be dead.”

“Calm yourself, Jensen. Things are working exactly the way I planned.”

“You can guarantee me that?”

“Don’t you think I’d know if my own son was dead?”

Jensen took a few steps away. He had common sense enough to show fear. Declen had needed him in the beginning, but now, his presence was more of a nuisance than anything else. His battle with the humans was being waged and those who were strong became his. Already he had assembled more than three thousand vampires. The methane had been a stroke of genius.

“Your Highness,” a voice said suddenly, interrupting his thoughts. It was a vampire named

Scott, newly turned but brilliant. He'd been a high-ranking commander in the Russian military. He was quickly becoming his right hand. "I'm sorry to interrupt." He cast a look at Jensen.

"You're not interrupting anything," Declen muttered, indicating to Jensen that he should leave his sight. "What is it?"

Scott waited for the room to empty, then he spoke. "It's the children. They've made contact. They've gone to Carden."

Declen's eyes blazed with fury. "I told you to find them before they found Carden! Can't any of you do anything right? Do you know what this means? He has the sight. He has the damn sight!"

\* \* \* \*

Rory stared at the six children curiously. They were certainly bizarre. There were three girls and three boys and they looked exactly alike, all blond, blue eyed and dressed in white. The expressions on their faces were surreal, as if they really just floated somewhere above this world, rather than were a part of it in any way. When they walked in, they knelt in front of Carden as if he were king. And they all spoke together in one voice and it seemed to echo back, bouncing off the walls of the room.

"Carden, we are yours. We serve you."

It sent shivers up Rory's spine.

"Rise," Carden said. "I am pleased you are here. Tell me. It is as I feared. He has returned already?"

"Yes," came the united reply. "He knows you alone will survive. He waits. He has no plans to give up his only son."

Rory gripped Carden's forearm. "It's Declen."

Carden ignored Rory, his concentration on the children. "Can he hear us?"

"He doesn't need to. He knows how to bring you to him...on your knees."

"Rory?"

A unanimous nod was the answer.

Rory gasped as Carden opened his wrist and the children raised their opened mouths. Carden moved his bleeding wrist from one mouth to another. Not a drop spilled. "You must shield him," he commanded. "Rise."

The children's heads lowered. "He will be safe," they mumbled.

"And Dennis, the other mortal. You must take him, too."

"Take him...take who...no..." Rory protested, "I'm not leaving you."

Carden looked at him. "You must. These entities will protect you and Dennis until I can—"

"No."

“Rory, he will use you to get to me. He wants to control me. He wants to rule the world.”

“He’s your father. He’ll listen to—”

“He’s not my father, remember? My father is dead. He’s my uncle.”

“But he’s blood.”

“Don’t you see, Rory? This is destined. I must save the humans. I must destroy Declen. I can’t do that if I think you’re in danger. And Dennis can’t go on. He—”

The door opened suddenly and Dennis stood there, Thiago behind him. He looked different, strong. Rory’s eyes opened. “He’s...my God, Dennis. Thiago, you turned him.”

“I feel wonderful,” Dennis said, eyeing the six figures all standing there with bowed heads. “Who are they?”

Thiago looked at Carden. “Then they do exist.”

“Yes,” Carden said, stepping forward and taking Dennis’ chin in his hand. “Thiago?”

“It was almost an accident,” Thiago said. “He drank far more than he should have. He was on the brink of becoming one of us. I’m sorry, Carden, I know you don’t approve.”

“No, I don’t approve,” he snapped. “What in hell are we trying to save mortals for if we keep turning them into vampires? That’s what Declen is doing. We have no right to take life.”

“I don’t feel dead.” Dennis laughed.

"But you are," Carden said intensely, meeting his gaze.

Silence settled over the room. Dennis paled. Thiago took him into his arms and rocked him. "It's okay, honey. He didn't mean to scare you."

"Yes, I did," Carden replied hotly. "I meant to tell you the truth, Dennis. You are no longer alive. I can't hear your heart beating anymore. The only mortal in this room is Rory. And," he looked at him, "it's going to stay that way. Is that clear?" He glared at Dennis and Thiago.

They both nodded at him.

"Now, Thiago, you're coming with me and Dennis and Rory are going under the shield."

"What does that mean?" Rory demanded.

"The children will ensure that no one can find you. And they will place you in a universe where all dreams are fulfilled."

"You'll be there?"

"In spirit."

"But it won't be you," Rory protested. "It will be an illusion. Is that what you're telling me?"

"I'm telling you that whatever you dream will become reality."

"And meanwhile, you and Thiago are in mortal danger! It's not going to happen, Carden. What about all the talk of us being in this together?"

“The children change things. I have a window now, a clearer view and a way to ensure your protection. I can’t just throw that away.”

“Jensen grows tired with Declen,” the children began to speak suddenly. “You have your chance to bring him over to your side. He wants you, Carden. He can be swayed by sexy promises and he is a wealth of information.”

“Jensen?” Rory wrinkled his nose. “He tried to get us killed.”

Carden came over to Rory and placed his hands on his shoulders. “Please do as I ask you to. If I know you are safe, I can concentrate on defeating Declen.”

Thiago and Dennis were hugging.

Rory was going to protest, but Carden pulled away. He turned to the children. “Do it,” he commanded, “surround them.”

\* \* \* \*

Dennis glanced around the living room as if he was seeing it for the first time. “How did this happen?”

“I have no idea. Are we home?” Rory asked him.

Dennis glanced out the window. “Seems like it, yet I can’t see anything out the window.”

“What do you mean?” Rory came over to the window and peered out. “Shit. Where’s the gas station across the street?”

“I have no idea.”

“Dennis, how are you feeling?” Rory asked him suddenly. “You look strange.”

“Thiago gave me his blood. I feel high.”

“Are you mortal or vampire?”

“I have no idea, but I’m not hungry...for food or blood.”

“Strange. Who were those children?”

“I don’t know, but they seemed very powerful.”

“I wish Carden was here.”

“I am here,” a voice said suddenly and there was Carden – beautiful, smiling. He wore a pair of jeans, no shirt, his hair was gleaming, his eyes bright. He held out his hand. “You want me, Rory?”

“I always want you, but...”

“Then take me upstairs to bed.”

Rory took his hand. Dennis was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly, just like that, they were in bed. Carden unzipped his jeans, doing a slow strip on his knees in front of him. Rory licked his lips. It didn’t matter if this was real or not, it sure as hell felt like real.

“I want to fuck you, Rory, nice and slow. I want to fuck you all night long.”

"Um, sounds..." he reached up and dragged Carden down on top of him. Carden kissed him deeply and Rory was lost.

\* \* \* \*

"So, are you still pissed at me?" Thiago asked, having done all he could do to keep pace with Carden.

"I'm not pissed at you. I'm disappointed at your lack of control."

"It's what Dennis wanted. Rory wants it, too. He wants to be with you always."

"I won't do that."

"Do what? Share your precious gift?" It came off as sarcastic.

Carden stopped, glared at him. "If you want to say something, just say it."

"You say you love him. Are you prepared to lose him?"

"I don't just say it, I mean it."

"As much as you loved Daniel?"

Carden had started walking again. "They're two different men."

"And you don't want to talk about it."

"No, not especially."

"And why are we meeting up with that worm Jensen again?"

"The children advised it."



“Are they really...you know...divine?”

Carden stopped and looked at him. “I believe it and as long as I believe it, they are. I see Declen. I know where he is.”

“Good. Then we go there and –”

“Impossible. Vampire count is now three thousand, four hundred and fifty-eight. He’s killing the weak and recruiting the strong. The government has fallen and the military, most of them vampires, hunt humans.”

“And Jensen can help us how?”

“He wants me. He was with Declen when the gas was produced. He knows where it is housed. He will lead me there.”

“In exchange for?”

“My cock,” he glanced at him ironically.

“And what about Rory?”

“Rory is safe and happy. I will use what I have to in order to put an end to this. And so will you.”

“Jensen doesn’t want my cock.”

“His loss,” Carden smirked.

“Why, Carden, you’re getting frisky on me.”

Carden smiled faintly, his fangs exposed. “I’m starving. A good feed combined with a good fuck never hurt anyone, especially when it’s for a good cause.”

“I hear something,” Thiago said as they continued walking down an alley that to a mortal

would have been pitch black. But Carden and Thiago could see just fine.

"It's Jensen. He's coming. Keep walking."

"How do you do it, resist feeding off Rory?"

"I haven't. I fed off him a few times, but I don't take much. I exercise control, but I'm never satisfied. My hunger is always on the edge. I'm afraid I'll kill him one day."

Thiago placed a hand on Carden's shoulder. "You won't."

"You can't know that. You did Dennis."

"Dennis wanted to turn."

"And you allowed that."

He sighed.

"There must be some rules, Thiago. We just can't go around making vampires. That's Declen's plan, not ours. We want to live in harmony with the humans. I, for one, am deeply attracted to their warmth and their fragility. I wouldn't want Rory if he were a vampire. I know that."

"You mean you'd stop loving him?"

"Maybe not that, but I'd stop wanting him. When I hold him in my arms, he's so warm, he has a pulse and a heartbeat and I can hear it. I don't want him to change."

"Isn't that touching," a voice sneered.

Carden put up a hand, indicating to Thiago that he should stop moving. "He'll come to us."

"There he is, that fuck," Thiago said under his breath.

"Play nice," Carden told Thiago. "We need that fuck. Are you hungry?"

Thiago smiled at Carden suddenly like a cat that had his prey in its claws.

"I sense hostility from your slave," Jensen announced, walking out into the open. "I want no trouble. I only want to talk."

"Just to talk," Carden whispered, "Ah, but I had other things in mind."

Jensen moved closer. "You're real good."

"I am," Carden said, licking his lips. "Want to see?"

"I want to fight at your side," his voice sounded pleading.

Carden moved quickly. Jensen was suddenly on his knees at Carden's feet. "Do you now?"

"Declen tricked me. He promised you to me and he can't deliver. In fact, he had no intention of it." Jensen wrapped his arms around Carden's legs. "I want only you. I'll feed you."

"Oh, I know that you will," Carden hissed, "but not here. We need a quiet place where we can...ah...get seriously acquainted."

*We're vampires tonight, Thiago. Forget your manners. It's time Jensen learned some.*

Thiago chuckled from behind. Something told him they were going to have a little fun.

\* \* \* \*

Carden's cock penetrated his ass deep. He gasped with pleasure as strong arms wrapped around his waist and Carden pumped him hard. "Turn me," Rory screamed. "Make me truly yours, Carden, with your blood. Make me immortal."

"Um, my pleasure," Carden growled and he bit deeply into his jugular. There was no pain, only mind-numbing bliss. Carden's cock continued to impale him and Rory came with an orgasm so intense he screamed. He could feel his life force draining away, being replaced by something else. Strength and vigor and a power he'd never felt before. "Fuck me! Fuck me!"

The fucking continued as his face was turned into Carden's chest and he drank the rich, potent blood. It tasted like honey and went down his throat like silk. "I love you, Carden."

"I love you, Rory. We're together forever now. Remember that. Forever."

\* \* \* \*

Thiago marveled as Carden picked Jensen up with one hand and hung him on a meat hook in the defunct freezer of a deserted butcher shop. Right beside him hung a side of beef.

Slowly Carden undid Jensen's pants and then ripped them off with one hand. Thiago pulled the shirt apart and that, too, lay in tatters on the ground. The hook had gone right through the flesh of his left shoulder and dug deep into the muscle. The blood ran freely, pooling on the floor under him.

He looked terrified and turned on at once as he swung there. His cock was hard, his gaze remaining on Carden. "I'd be content to perish here if you'd fuck me," he told him, licking his lips.

Carden shook his head. "You're pathetic, a pathetic little worm and to think I had some affection for you before you turned on me."

Thiago was getting a little high on all the blood and when Carden nodded at him to go ahead and feast, he moved behind the bleeding vampire and began to drink, his hands moving over his naked flesh at the same time.

Jensen began to swoon, his gaze on Carden who stood back, his arms folded across his chest.

"Touch me," Jensen begged him.

"When you tell me where he is."

"I...um...oh...God...my cock is on fire. I'm losing too much blood."

"Tell me where he is and I'll feed you and I'll fuck you."

"You're lying to me. What about your little mortal boy?"

"He's busy. And I will fuck whom I may. I am my own master. So, tell me, Jensen. You want this cock?" He moved his own hand over the bulge in his pants. "I'm always hard."

Thiago was still drinking and suddenly Jensen gasped as Thiago undid his own pants and buried his cock in his ass. It had nothing to do with Dennis. It was lust, pure and simple, fucking for the sake of it and it felt fantastic.

Jensen bucked and twisted on the hook, his cock pumping, moaning deep in his throat as he began to weaken. "I know," he hissed, "I'll tell you. Make him stop. I'm fading."

Thiago felt Carden's hand on his arm. He pulled him back. "Enough," he said.

Thiago wiped his mouth and pulled out his cock. "Nice little piece of ass if I do say so."

Carden moved around to the front again. "Where?"

"Take me down and I'll tell you but alone. Not with him here."

Thiago shrugged. He did up his pants. He felt a lot better. He glanced at Carden. If Carden started feeding on him, that would be it. He'd finish him. Maybe that was his intention.

\* \* \* \*

Dennis lay on the sofa, clapping his hands. "You're a vampire. Carden made you one of us."

Rory shook his head. "No, Dennis, you're the vampire." He stared out the window as Dennis continued to look glassy-eyed, staring into space.

"Where in hell are we?" He reached down and stilled Dennis' hands. The guy was acting nutty. "This doesn't feel right."

"I don't know, but Thiago just fucked the shit out of me. It was fantastic."

Rory shook his head. "It's a dream."

"I'm not sure about that. It felt real to me. It had something to do with those children. I heard their voices...like little whispers. It almost sounded like...like..."

"The wind," Rory finished. "Yeah, I felt it, too. Can we leave here?"

"No."

Both Dennis and Rory glanced up. The voice came from above them. They weren't alone.

"None of this is real, is it?" Rory shouted at the ceiling. "Let us out of here."

No answer.

Rory ran to the door. He tried to open it. It didn't even seem like a door. "Where in the fuck are we?"

"Protected," Carden said suddenly, standing in front of him. "Don't fight it, my love. It will be all right."

"You're not real. You're not here with me at all."

"Yes, I am."

"Thiago is an illusion as well, isn't he?" Rory demanded.

"He is here...and he's not."

"Then who in the hell was fucking me a while back?" Dennis shook his head.

Carden disappeared.

"Whoever he was," Dennis said with a smirk when no one answered, "he was good."

\* \* \* \*

Carden lowered Jensen to the floor and knelt beside him. "The answer now."

"Fuck me first."

"You're in no shape for that now. Where is Declen's lair?"

"You can't go to him. It's what he wants. He's killing off the weak humans, converting the strong into vampires. He wants to rule the world...says it's his destiny. He wants you under his control. Join him, Carden, and live."

"Where is he?" Carden demanded, picking him up and shaking him a little.



Jensen's arms slid around his neck. He pressed his mouth on his.

Carden allowed the kiss for a moment, the smell of blood intoxicating. Jensen wasn't going to tell him, but there was another way to get the information. "You want to get fucked, here," he said, wrenching his mouth from his and sinking his teeth into his neck, *you're fucked*.

As he drank, he absorbed. He saw and knew everything. He knew where Declen was. He knew where the gas was being manufactured and which country was next. He had to destroy the factory and he had to do it alone.

\* \* \* \*

Six clean slices. A simple exchange of information. Declen laughed as the children's heads rolled across the floor. "How did you know?" Scott asked him in wonder.

"I knew Jensen would run to Carden. He wanted his cock. And I knew that Carden would feed on him to get the information he needed. In that way, I could find the children."

"I thought they were immortal."

"They are," he said. "But this sword renders them out of commission. Without their heads, they live but are useless. Pick up the heads and bury

them in the cemetery outside. Leave the bodies here.”

Scott nodded, bowing his head. “Right away, my lord.”

Declen folded his arms across his chest and smiled. “You know, don’t you, my son? You know the children can no longer help you and they can no longer protect your precious mortals.” He began to laugh and for the first time in a long time, he was really feeling it.

\* \* \* \*

Carden didn’t wait for Thiago. He told him where he was going and for him to follow and then disappeared like a streak in the night. He couldn’t believe that Declen had violated a sacred trust and dismembered the children. It meant that he would stop at nothing, nothing to get what he wanted.

*It’s more than that, Carden. He wants your power.*

They were talking to him. Even if Declen severed their heads, something was getting through.

*You are the most powerful vampire on earth. He wants that power. Be careful. He knows your weakness ...he knows...he knows...two...you are the moon...she is the sun...find the sun.*

\* \* \* \*

“Come with me, Rory, it’s all right now.”

Rory moved toward Carden, his hand out. “I’ve missed you. Don’t leave me again.”

“Where’s Thiago?” Dennis asked, staying back.

“He’s coming right behind me.”

Rory went to take his hand.

“Wait, Rory,” Dennis said. “That’s not Carden.”

“What?” Rory glanced at him. “Of course—”

A hand reached for him and pulled Rory into his embrace. “Don’t listen to him. He’s insane. You know me, don’t you, Rory? You love me.”

“Let him go!” a voice called out suddenly.

Dennis ran over and stood beside Carden. “Thank God. I knew that wasn’t you.”

The figure holding Rory changed suddenly and a stranger stood there, tall, red-haired. He grinned down into Rory’s frightened face, fangs exposed.

Rory struggled, trying to get free, but the vampire held him fast.

“I won’t hurt him if you come with me, Carden.”

“No,” Rory called out. “Don’t, Carden.”

“I’ll come. Release him.”

“No, Carden,” Rory screamed.

The vampire laughed. “Oh, no. You think I’m a fool? I know you can overpower me. Over there in the corner in that box is a set of pure-silver cuffs. They have a special metal, which will render you

powerless. Have your lackey there," he indicated a trembling Dennis, "put them on you. Then I'll let the mortal go."

"I won't do it," Dennis protested.

Carden looked at him. "He'll kill Rory." Carden looked at the redhead, then back at Dennis. "Trust me. Listen with your mind."

"Make up your mind, Carden, oh great one," he sneered.

Carden took Dennis by the arm. *Take the chains out of the box. When he lets Rory go, drop them on the floor and run. Do you hear me?*

*Yes, somehow I do. This is wild.*

*Not wild. You're dead. Get used to it. Let's do this.*

Carden met the redhead's gaze. "I'll go over there. Dennis will ready the chain. You let him go. I'll accept the chains at the same time." *Rory, run like hell.*

*What about you?*

*I can take care of myself.*

"Let's do this," he said, taking Dennis by the arm and propelling him to the box.

Dennis opened the box with shaking hands. He lifted out the chains and held them up.

"Let him go," Carden said.

"Run, chickee," the vampire scoffed, releasing Rory as Dennis tossed the chain. Carden ducked out of its reach and lunged for the vampire.

Dennis grabbed Rory and they ran like hell.

"Where in the fuck are we?" Rory tried to catch his breath as they ran through a darkened tunnel.

"Damned if I know. And where is Thiago?"

"You're not winded, are you?" Rory asked in wonder.

"Carden informs me very nicely every time that I'm dead."

"You are, I guess."

"Great. So where's my dead lover?"

Rory shook his head. "I don't know. I hope Carden is all right."

"I wouldn't worry about him."

"Where are we going?"

"Somewhere we can hide until Carden can find us. Stop," he said, standing still. "Okay, this way. It's quiet here."

They came out of the tunnel and Rory looked around. "Yep, makes sense. It's a graveyard. Perfect."

Dennis made a face. "Guess so, since I'm dead."

"Will you stop saying that? You're creeping me out."

"Sorry. Want to hear something creepier?"

"Not really."

"Well, there's someone or something standing over there on that gravestone. I think it might be an angel."

"You're hallucinating," Rory accused.

"Ah, Rory," Dennis poked him, "I...ah...don't think so."

There in front of them stood a woman with long, flowing black hair. She wore a long white gown of lace and satin, her eyes a brilliant blue. She gave them both the most loving smile. The light she gave off was luminous, blinding. "Come," she said, "I will protect you. Carden will find us. I will lead him."

"Who are you?" Rory asked her, his jaw slack.

"I am the light, the other half. It is my time to unite with my brother to restore the balance to the earth. Quickly, we must go. Touch my hand."

Rory didn't hesitate. He touched her hand. Dennis took the other and then there was nothing but calm.

\* \* \* \*

The soldiers were frozen in their tracks. Declen watched them turn into statues, one after another. This was so easy, like taking candy from a baby. And soon, Carden would be his. He would either join him or perish. It made no difference. A new army now was emerging, feasting and making others, destroying those worthless mortals who could add nothing to his new universe. At one time, they'd tried to wipe him out. They'd killed the only woman he'd ever loved, even if she'd

never loved him. Carden's mother was so beautiful. And she was his, even if she thought of *him* every time he touched her.

*Don't hurt my son.*

"Shut up, get out of my head," he protested, focusing instead on the beautiful music of carnage.

\* \* \* \*

Carden struggled up from the floor. He'd been powerful, fed on Declen's blood. Not so easy to destroy. He licked the blood off his hand and left the room, heading through the tunnel, moving without thinking. He knew where he was going. He'd find Rory there. *There are two. We have released her. She is waiting.*

*Who is waiting?*

*The light to your darkness, Carden, the balance. Your sister.*

"Sister?"

"I'm here, Carden."

Carden blinked, glancing around the cemetery. "Who are you? What have you done with Rory and Dennis?"

"They are with me, safe. Come, come to me. I must give you something. Hurry. I am only here for a short time."

## CHAPTER FIVE

“Are you real?” Dennis asked her.

“A She seemed to float rather than walk. “In a manner of speaking.”

“You aren’t mortal?”

“No. I am an entity, not of this earth, more of the spirit world.”

“I don’t understand,” Rory intercepted. “You are part of Carden?”

“I was in the womb with him, but not born. I am spirit, not flesh.”

“You can help us?” Rory asked softly.

“I can give Carden what he needs to defeat him.”

“Can’t he do that now?”

“His darkness gives him a weakness. I will take away the darkness, fulfill his destiny.”

“Which is?” Carden asked suddenly, standing in front of them.



Rory whimpered a sob. He wanted to run to him, but Dennis held him back.

"No, wait," he said.

"Who are you? Who am I?" Carden cried out and fell to his knees.

"You will save this world. You need only reclaim what was left behind."

"And that is you? You are my...sister?"

"In a sense, I am light to your darkness, Carden. I am unborn. Embrace me."

"But there is a price," Carden glanced up at her. It wasn't a question.

She reached down and touched his hair. "My beautiful, Carden. You know the answer to that question."

Rory felt his entire body tremble. "I won't let you hurt him."

"His destiny will be fulfilled," she answered, hardly visual now, her essence an unearthly illumination.

"No," Rory started to cry. "I won't let you do this, Carden. This could be dangerous. What is this price?"

"I must," he stood up. "It is my destiny, what I was born for." Carden walked directly into her embrace and disappeared inside of it.

Rory howled with protest as Dennis held on tighter. "Carden!" he screamed.

Suddenly, the woman disappeared and Carden was left standing there alone. All around him there was a light, which lasted a few seconds, then gradually faded. Something profound had just happened and Rory was sure that it would change things forever. And he was terrified to find out how.

Carden said nothing as the three of them made their way through the cemetery. He just walked on, eyes straight ahead. Dennis clutched onto Rory's arm for dear life. Rory knew he was thinking the same thing he was. *What in the hell had just happened?*

*What was the price Carden would pay?*

"Don't worry," he said, turning to look at him, but the expression on his face was pained.

Rory gasped when he saw his face. There was something different about him, something not quite earthly. "My God."

"It will be all right," he said and kept walking. At the end of the tunnel, he turned and looked at them. "Thiago is here now. He'll take care of you. I have to go."

Rory reached out to touch him.

"Don't," he said. "Soon it will all be over. Things will return to normal gradually. I don't know when I will see you again, Rory." He paused, leaned down and kissed him on the

forehead. "Live your life. Live every moment and always remember, Rory, I loved you."

"I don't understand," Rory's tears streamed down his face. "What are you trying to say to me, Carden? You're not coming back?"

He put up a hand. "I don't have time to explain to you what this means, Rory, you wouldn't understand."

Thiago appeared suddenly. He looked confused as he noted Rory's tears and Carden's strange appearance.

"Carden?" he voiced, reaching for Dennis' outstretched hand absently. "What in the hell is happening? I feel...as if everything has changed."

Carden smiled at him and then suddenly he was just gone.

"Don't worry," Thiago said suddenly, looking at Rory and Dennis, "Carden has told me where to go, where you'll be safe until it's over. I'll take care of you. I'll take care of both of you."

\* \* \* \*

Declen wasn't sure why he suddenly had the strangest sense of dread. He stood in the middle of his underground factory, watching as the newly made vampires produced more of the lethal poison and all of a sudden, his body was wracked with pain.

Then he heard a voice calling to him, plaintive, urgent.

"Declen, production has completely stopped on the other side. It's as if the vampires are being affected by the gas, frozen to the spot."

It was Diane, a high-ranking scientist in the military. He'd made her specifically to replace Scott, who'd left Declen to infiltrate the government. "What should we do?"

Declen looked around him. One machine, then another slowed to a halt and the vampires all turned to stare at him. "What in hell is wrong with you? Get back to work!"

"You see," Diane muttered, then looked up to see six headless figures floating in the air. "Declen! Look!"

"How?" he voiced.

"Your destiny has been fulfilled, Declen," the six voices echoed together as their heads descended to surround Declen and Diane.

"How?" Declen demanded, watching in awe as the bodies suddenly danced over to each head and reattached.

"He is coming for you. There is no place for you to run, Declen, no place to hide. You return to the place from whence you came."

Declen pushed away and began to run. *It was true. There were two. One born and one unborn, together they were the force of the universe. Don't do*

*this, Carden, it will mean your end as well as mine. I love you, son.*

*You're not my father. And you have never loved me. Say your goodbyes, uncle.*

\* \* \* \*

The explosion rocked the abandoned cave where Rory and Dennis huddled with Thiago. Debris and rock fell just inches from their heads. Thiago threw his body over them and shielded them from harm.

As quickly as it started, it was over. "Carden!" Rory cried. "Thiago. Is he all right? Can you tell?"

Thiago brushed himself off and stood. "I have no sense of him. He gave me two commands, take care of you and lead you here. That's all. I asked to go with him and he refused. I don't think he needs my help."

"How long are we supposed to stay here?" Dennis asked.

"Carden told me he would guide me. I have to be patient and wait for his order."

"If he's still..." Rory put his face in his hands. "I'm so confused. What was that female, his twin, his spirit, what?"

Thiago sighed and perched against a rock. "I think there were two. I remember Blane talking about it long ago, some speculation that there

were twins, but only one would be born physically, the other was mere spirit, but was somehow a completion of the other."

"Why not merge at birth right away?" Dennis asked, examining what he began to realize were vampire teeth forming in his jaw.

"The power would be too much for one being to manage. It was to remain in limbo until needed."

"And what will happen now that Carden has this power?" Rory shook his head. "Will it destroy him?"

"I don't know, Rory, I'm sorry. I just know that no one, including Carden, could sustain that kind of power for long."

"I think I need blood," Dennis announced, "and Rory is smelling mighty good right about now."

Thiago glanced at Dennis. "Hold on. There is no way I can get you blood now. If I let you drink from me, I'll weaken and then I'll need to drink. Not a good idea because I don't know how long we'll be here. Do you feel faint?"

"No, just, ah...hungry," Dennis muttered.

Rory moved away. "I think I'll stand over here."

Dennis nodded. "Good idea."

"Don't worry, Rory, we won't eat you, unless it's an emergency." Thiago laughed.

"Very funny," Rory muttered. "Ha, ha."

\* \* \* \*

Everything was at a standstill. Even his vampire recruits weren't moving. He tried to communicate with them, give them the order to come to him. He needed his army. Nothing.

"Diane," he called out, moving deeper underground. "Where are you? Come to me."

"She's busy," a voice said, a voice he recognized.

Declen cowered in the corner. He blinked as a blinding light surrounded him. "No, Carden, you didn't. You know what this means, my son."

"Don't pretend to love me. You lied to me all of my life. We are not your children. My father is dead. My mother is dead."

"I loved your mother with all my heart."

"And took from her the man she really loved. You're a piece of work, Declen. I know now why I was meant to resurrect you, because it's my job to destroy you, to punish you for what you've done to my parents and to the world—vampire and human. No more will they be your slaves."

"Stop this, son. You will pay for—"

A hand reached out for him. "It is finished," a voice, which sounded like two voices, announced. "Say goodbye."

\* \* \* \*

Thiago fought sleep, but it overtook him like a hypnotic dream. He struggled with the urge to succumb. He had to stay awake to protect Dennis, but he caught a glimpse of Carden, smiling at him.

*Remember.*

He had a strange dream. In it, he was a young man, a teenager living in his native Sao Paulo, Brazil. *Why am I dreaming this?* Remembering the past always hurt him. He never thought about the past...his desire to be a soccer player.

Thiago saw himself in the street where he lived. He was handsome and the girls liked him. He liked a few of them, but found himself looking at their brothers, feeling ashamed at the rising impulses deep in his belly. He thought he was sick, a devil. He longed to talk to someone. Then he noticed a man watching him. He didn't know how long he'd been there, on the street, in the shadows following him. At first...yes, at first, he believed the man was a soccer recruiter and returned his smiles.

*But I knew. Secretly, I knew he wanted me.*

Thiago felt himself tossing, turning, fighting the image of the faceless, nameless man gliding from the past toward him. *Oh, no. Not this. Why am I dreaming this now?*



He was alone in his bed. The man came for him. He'd come for him before, Thiago realized now as he watched the dream he'd lived so many times before...but hadn't dreamed for years. The first time the man came for him, he had been thwarted by Thiago's father, who'd heard his son's screams.

*My father...oh...I remember now. He brought the family priest over and put a crucifix on my wall and garlic. I remember holy water in the bowl by my bed.*

*But still he came. There was something about him. The second time the man came, he hissed when he saw the cross and the garlic.*

*I saw his teeth. I was afraid, but I wanted to give into him. He was so sexy. I was attracted to him. He saw it.*

*Why me?*

"Because I desire you," the man said, circling him, reading his mind. "Remove the garlic and you can have me. Remove the cross."

The man waited.

Thiago had been frozen in fear and sexual confusion. He wasn't supposed to like men. He felt his cock hardening in his sleep, was surprised when it first started leaking fluid. He thought there was something wrong with him, but then he caught his parents together one night. Watched his father jerking himself over his mother, who feigned sleep. He hadn't thought about her for

years and he felt the tears on his face at her memory.

She had a difficult marriage with Thiago's father, a coarse, sometimes brutal, man who wanted sex constantly. Her only escape was sleep. His father didn't care. He'd stick his cock into her even as she slept on the sofa, which was where Thiago saw them.

Thiago didn't find the sight of his friends' cocks repulsive though. In summer when they swam in the river or the ocean, he found himself mesmerized by other guys' cocks. He wasn't supposed to want their touch...to crave their beauty. The man who had been following him showed up there. Thiago had seen him before, but couldn't say where. Before he'd even seen him on the street, he'd been aware of him.

*He promised me pleasure...the secret of happiness. I was too frightened to do anything that night. I didn't take down the garlic or the cross. He left in disgust and I wept, because I thought I would never see him again.*

Thiago was spared no mercy from the past as he remembered going to confession. His father had nailed his windows shut and the man from the street did not come back. Thiago's father sent him to confession every afternoon after school. He was forbidden to play soccer.

The priest was not attractive, but he liked Thiago. He invited him to supper and Thiago

liked food. Some days his family had none. Some days, his father stole potatoes from one of the neighbor's gardens. He remembered being so hungry and the smell of soup.

He'd eaten and the priest watched him. He'd taken Thiago into his living room and he hadn't minded when the priest asked him if he played with himself. He answered no. Then the priest asked him if he wanted to look at some magazines. They were all photographs of naked men. One photo showed one man with his cock in another man's mouth.

*I remember I thought it was the most beautiful thing, how happy the man with the cock in his mouth looked.*

"Would you like me to do this to you?" the priest asked.

"Yes." Thiago's shame evaporated quickly as the priest undid Thiago's pants. The older man's eyes glowed as he traced his jeweled fingers across Thiago's crotch, pulling down his underpants. He held Thiago's cock in his hand.

"It's so perfect. You are perfect."

Thiago felt a stirring in his loins he'd never felt before. The priest kissed his cockhead, making him jump. He watched the older man circle the tip with his tongue. It shocked him. Thiago knew it was wrong for the priest to be doing this, but he

wanted to be like the men in the picture. The priest liked it when Thiago's cock grew hard.

The priest started to lick and suck Thiago's cock and he watched the priest intently, astonished at how his cock had a mind of its own, tilting at the other man's mouth. The priest wasn't good looking. Thiago just wasn't attracted to him. It wasn't until his gaze fixed on the two men in the photo that he really started to feel aroused.

*That's where I saw the man from my bedroom! In the photo! He was the one sucking the other man's cock! I remember now!*

Thiago had enjoyed the first sensations of orgasm. He enjoyed the way the priest toyed with the sensitive head of his cock. He tried so hard to get the whole shaft in the priest's mouth. *He stroked my balls and asked me if I liked it.* He saw himself now, staring down, fascinated as the priest knelt between his legs. The room reverberated with the sounds of the three o'clock bell chiming from the church tower above them. It somehow added to the bewitching, illicit moment. He came hard for the priest, who crowed with pleasure.

The priest told Thiago that he loved his big, thick cock, which had always embarrassed the teenager. Thiago's father, when he once glimpsed him naked, had laughed saying, "Thiago, you will bring some lucky woman to her knees trying to tame that thing."

The priest asked him to come back the next afternoon. He fell on his knees as soon as Thiago got into his living room. Thiago wanted the magazine again, but the priest said no. Thiago didn't come that time, but enjoyed what the older man did to him. He raced home and with the memory of the photograph in his mind, came in his own hand. He removed all the nails in the boards of his window.

That night, the man from the magazine came. He took more than Thiago's virginity. He took his life. For three long days, he took his time turning Thiago.

He had gone from bliss, to hell and back again. For three days, Thiago's father thought his son was dying. The only time Thiago felt alive was at night with the man fucking him, sucking him...and then he took him away and made Thiago a whore.

Thiago loved Dennis. His hatred of humans had been misguided. He realized now that the man who turned him was the worst kind of vampire. He traded on love. And he traded on a teenager's loneliness.

He forced himself awake.

"Okay," he said, rousing both Dennis and Rory from sleep, "we need to go, now! Move."

Dennis stared at him. "I never knew you liked soccer."

*Shit! He saw my dream!*

Dennis took his face in his hands. "I love you, Thiago."

"I love you, too." Thiago's voice cracked and his heart broke. "I never want to be without you."

He never saw the man from the magazine again once Blane had control of him. He realized now that Carden wanted him to remember so that he could protect Dennis, protect what they had. There must be no boundaries between them.

"Did you like the priest?" Dennis asked. He sounded so hurt.

"No. Only what he did to me."

"I like doing that to you," Dennis said, his grin big and goofy.

"You better like it. It belongs to you now."

Dennis' hand strayed to Thiago's cock, which quickened at his touch. God, nobody made him feel like this, except this wonderful, kooky guy.

They exchanged a quick kiss, Thiago aware of Carden in his head. He moved away from his lover's hand.

*Go now. Quickly.*

As he hustled Rory and Dennis out of the cave and led them through a path deep into the woods, he began to recite something. "And the streets shall run with blood and the ice shall melt. And all atrocities shall be put to rest. And peace shall be restored in the land..."

Rory stared at Thiago as they reached the clearing. Dennis fell to his knees. "I can't go on," he moaned. "I'm all cramped up and—"

Thiago put a finger to his lips. "Wait," he hissed. He reached out and a sharp squeal echoed around them. At Dennis' feet lay a dead rabbit. "Drink," he said. "Drink now."

Rory turned away, his stomach feeling quite faint.

"You shall have all you need," Thiago told him, "soon."

Dennis feasted on the rabbit, announcing a few minutes later, "That was disgusting."

"But you feel better?" Thiago insisted.

"Yes," he muttered. "I'm okay now."

They reached a hill and began to descend. The sun was rising and Rory placed a hand on Thiago's arm. "The sun."

"We'll be all right. There it is," he pointed.

Rory narrowed his eyes. Across the field was a train track. "A train?"

"No. We cross the tracks. We reach the ocean. There's a boat. It's coming," Thiago told them. "I hear it in the distance. It will take us away from here."

Rory paused, looked back. "Carden?"

Thiago placed an arm around him. "You must do as he wished. We must leave here."

## Apocalypse

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Rory began to cry as he saw the boat. Dennis hugged him. "It will be all right."

"And the streets will run with blood and the ice shall melt. And all atrocities shall be put to rest. And peace shall be restored in the land...*and all that was, will be no more.*"

\* \* \* \*

There were others on the boat, a huge thing like an old-fashioned ferry. He was stunned to see it glide through chunks of ice on the river. Vampires and humans alike, weary, dazed, not sure where they were going or even who was steering the creaking, sagging boat, huddled together. Carden had led them here and that was enough for Rory. He trusted him with his life. The sun came out, more brilliant than Rory had ever seen it and as they passed town after town, there appeared to be some life, movement, glimpsed through trees on dry land far in the distance as they curved along a slice of the west coast.

"My love," he whispered. "Could I love you any more than I do already?"

Thiago and Dennis were sleeping. They huddled together in one of the dark corners of the ferry's dank interior, while Rory sat upright, too terrified to close his eyes.



*Carden. Speak to me.* Nothing. There was nothing. He wondered if he was still alive. He heard others sob in the day and night that followed. Three babies were born and children cried from hunger, but it was a reminder they were alive. An old man died and tears streamed from Rory's eyes as the survivors on board held an impromptu funeral for him. His son and daughter, who had brought him on board, wept.

Rory touched the woman's hand. "He knew in the end you were safe and didn't need him anymore."

"I still need him," she said and Rory hugged her hard.

Dennis surprised him by reciting a poem. Silence fell as he spoke.

"They say memories are golden and maybe that is true, I never wanted memories, I only wanted you. A million times I wanted you, a million times I cried, If love alone could save you, you never would have died."

His voice faltered and Thiago slipped his arm around him. Rory knew Dennis still grieved his murdered mother and sister and Rory felt racked with guilt for not staying in touch with his own parents back in Maine.

Had they got out of the war alive?

Dennis went on. There were a lot of tears as the boat creaked on beneath their feet, but Rory felt

the humanity returning to them with Dennis' humble words.

"In life I loved you dearly, in death I love you still. In my heart you hold a place no one could ever fill. If tears could build a stairway and heartache make a lane, I'd walk the path to heaven and bring you back again. Our family chain is broken and nothing seems the same. But as God calls us one by one, the chain will link again."

Dennis wiped his tear-streaked face with his sleeve. "Author unknown," he said and buried his face in Thiago's shoulder.

They arrived in San Francisco Harbor four hours later. Thiago, Dennis and Rory stood, watching as uniformed officials waited on the dock to greet them.

"Food!" someone shouted. "I smell food!"

The people on the dock waved and the survivors on the boat waved back. Another boat crossed them in the harbor and Rory saw them then. The survivors of the boat just leaving. They too, waved to the newcomers.

Everybody on the boat with Rory and the others laughed and hugged each other.

Rory worked hard to feel blessed. He knew he was lucky. He was pierced by grief, however.

He could not lose the feeling that he was never going to see Carden again.

\* \* \* \*

Taylor Montgomery was speechless when Carden walked into his hiding place. He knew who he was, of course. His organization had had him under surveillance for years.

“It was you who restored order again. How?” There was something quite strange about him, something almost holy. He wasn’t just a vampire.

“It doesn’t matter how. It is done. I want you to organize the world governments, bring the vampires and humans together. I’ve destroyed the rogues. The ones who remain want to live in peace. You must make it happen.”

Taylor was mesmerized by his eyes. He found himself falling to his knees. “Yes,” he said, “anything. But you, you can do this.”

“My job is done. I have to be somewhere and it’s quite urgent. Make this work, Taylor. I am entrusting you with this.”

He lowered his head, tears forming. “I will. I promise. I—” He looked up. He was alone. He took a breath and stood, picked up the phone. He knew what he must do.

\* \* \* \*

## Apocalypse

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Carden walked through the city without seeing anything. He was aware of movement around him, but it had no meaning. He felt close to collapse. *It is time, Carden.*

*Is it over so soon?*

*You are very old. I will take this burden from you, Carden. It is time for your transformation.*

*For my destruction, you mean.*

*No, not that. Not yet.*

\* \* \* \*

The house assigned to Rory, Dennis and Thiago was large, along the Oakland Bay. Rory liked that he could see the boats in the harbor from every window. All the refugees who had survived the holocaust would have to work. All of them were given boats.

“We’ve gone back to olden times,” Dennis said when candles, kerosene lamps and parcels of food for Rory arrived via the Red Cross. “I like this.”

Everything was waiting for them as if they’d bought this house and were moving in. Rory walked around as if in a dream, a week passing, then two. The media was restored and reporters discussed the aftermath of an ecological disaster, storms and displacement of people.

Thiago and Dennis were among the first vampires to donate blood to the new bank. No

more synthetic blood. Both human and vampire blood would be stored. All supplies were needed, so Rory, too, gave blood.

He took little notice of other daily developments, however. It all felt empty without Carden. Just as he and his companions had recovered from the previous attack, the living conquered the dead and Thiago and Dennis talked about opening another club.

The day electricity was restored to residential places, Rory felt sad.

"It looks like everything is back to normal now," the broadcaster announced on the very first live TV telecast. It was in black and white.

*Not to me it doesn't. I've survived a loss. A death. And I have no body to mourn. Yes, life goes on, but I can't. I don't want to live without him.*

On the bottom of the screen, the list of known survivors of the Apocalypse scrolled across, state by state. With no way of getting in touch with anybody, Rory knew they weren't the only people huddled around a TV set that evening.

He was relieved to see his parents had survived and somehow wound up in Maine. Thiago recognized a couple of his vampire friends' names. They were in Taos, New Mexico.

Nobody had wound up in Las Vegas, except promoter Don King, who was found staggering

down Las Vegas Boulevard in women's clothing, waving an American flag.

"That guy would survive anything," Dennis said.

"...and in the latest United Nations news, a new alliance has formed between vampires and humans. Head of the counsel, Taylor Montgomery, said today that this represents a new world order, a plan that could potentially bring about peace throughout the world. The weather today is—"

Rory shut it off. "I can't stand it. When are we going to start work?"

Dennis was sitting on Thiago's lap in the corner. Rory was sure he was rubbing his cock because Thiago looked quite content. Suddenly, it hurt him to watch them.

"Don't you care what happened to Carden?"

The others looked at him.

"Of course we do," Dennis said. "It's just—"

"Yeah, I know. I heard it on TV just now. Life goes on."

"He'll be back," Dennis said.

Rory talked over him, "It's just that he fixed everything and now he's gone. As long as everyone else is okay...I guess..." He held back tears. "I'm sorry," he said when he saw the look on Dennis' face.

Thiago pushed Dennis off his lap and stood. "Me, too, Rory. I finally got around to actually liking Carden. He had good in him. He was destined for —"

"Don't give me that crap! He was my lover. And God, I loved him so much," Rory cleared his throat. "How in the hell am I supposed to go on?"

"You just have to," Thiago said. "Your instinct is good, find solace in work."

"Isn't that the irony of the old Nazi death camps? They used to tell their prisoners there was freedom in work."

"You're upset," Thiago said. "I understand. Dennis and I are serious about opening another club. The council has given us one more week to either deliver them a business plan or they'll assign us work. I am not about to start work on a railroad or pulling turnips in a field. How about you go in with us?"

"Where do we get the cash?" Rory asked, drying his eyes.

"I have money," Thiago said.

"Ah, yes," Dennis joked. "Your famous sugar daddy."

Thiago gave him a look that silenced him.

"The state also gives us an allowance. But another brothel?" Dennis muttered. "I don't want you —"

“Dennis, it’s what I do,” Thiago said. “Rory, you manage it and, Dennis, you do the books.”

There was silence. “Well, we need to do something,” Rory sighed. “I’m not in love with turnips either. Let’s get started.”

“Yep.” Thiago grinned. “As I always like to say, these boots were made for walking.”

\* \* \* \*

“Where am I?” Carden demanded. He was surrounded by blackness.

*You will fade away and in your place, a mortal will be born. You will have no memories from your past, Carden. You will be born and die as any mortal man.*

*Then I have a second chance?*

*Is that what you call it? Your immortality is gone.*

*Can I have one memory? Can I remember Rory?*

*No. The chances are you will never meet with Rory in your new form. No memories, Carden. It’s for the best.*

*And of you, my twin?*

*I will always be with you, Carden. Goodbye.*

His eyes closed, the dirt covered his face, clogged his nostrils and mouth. He struggled to see Rory’s face. Nothing. *Please let me see his face once before the end?* Nothing but darkness and then pain, searing pain as the light left him.



\* \* \* \*

*Do you love me, Carden?* Rory sat up straight in bed and looked at the alarm. It was after three in the morning. He'd been doing that, waking up in the middle of the night, unable to go back to sleep.

He could hear Dennis and Thiago fucking in the next room. It made him feel lonely. It was weird being the only mortal in the house. It seemed that Dennis' transition from mortal to vampire had taken no time at all. He was the same Dennis, except there were no more emergency trips to the fast-food joints.

Rory slipped out of bed, treading on the vast array of paperwork he'd been working on before falling asleep. There was so much to do to get the club ready. It kept him happy and busy during the day. At night, the loneliness was excruciating. Tears fell from his heart and splashed onto his feet.

*Where do they come from? I didn't think I could keep crying this much.*

He threw on sweats, his state-issued tennis shoes and picked up a kerosene lamp. He listened for noise from Thiago and Dennis' room. All he heard was man-on-man pleasure.

Rory lit the lamp. He'd come to love the smell now and he threw the hood of his sweater jacket

over his head and slipped outside, leaving the back door unlocked.

There were no keys anymore. They really had gone back to the past. He watched the bobbing boats docked in the inky water of the bay. He could see lights on in some people's homes, but it was weird, like him, they seemed to prefer candles and kerosene. He went down to his slip and unanchored his small boat. He climbed in, the oars inside with him. He let the boat drift.

Straight on 'til morning.

Out here in the water, he allowed himself to sob. The boat nudged another as he held his lamp high. It was only when he glanced beside him that Rory saw them.

All the other men and women just like him. Alone in their boats. Lost. Adrift. Left without love. He saw it in the darkly illuminated, tear-streaked faces.

They'd all lost somebody.

And yearned to speak their names.

## CHAPTER SIX

They worked like crazy on the new club, an old warehouse near the entrance to Fisherman's Wharf, transforming it into a state-of-the-art vampire club. There would be something for every taste—sex, music, exotic drinks and even a spa where you could get a massage.

Thiago's finances seemed limitless. They hadn't even tapped into the council funding yet and he wanted a big, fancy neon sign. The name of the club would be Eclipse.

"The less money we ask the council for, the less they can control us," Thiago said.

Rory had to wonder where all the money was coming from. Finally, on the morning of their first official inspection before opening, he had to ask.

"Thiago, who is this sugar daddy of yours that Dennis keeps talking about?"

His friend smiled. "An old...friend."

"Holy crap. You didn't steal it, did you?"

Thiago looked offended. "No. I didn't steal it."

His tone suggested somebody did. Rory was ready to walk. He couldn't manage a club on ill-gotten funds.

"If you must know," Thiago said with an aggrieved air, "I've lived many years and amassed a lot of wealth." His gaze fell away. "The local priest from my home in Sao Paolo left me all his money. No doubt it was church funds."

Rory stared at him, stunned.

"You mean, this is church money?"

"I don't have much time for organized religion, Rory. I gave a lot of money to children's charities in Sao Paolo. I invested wisely. But I held onto most of my capital. I wanted to do some good. And now the banks are open again, I finally can."

Rory stared at him and started to laugh.

"Power to the people," Thiago said.

Rory shook his head. "Oh my God, you're a nut."

When Taylor Montgomery arrived with his three-man inspection team, Rory felt the guy kept staring at him.

*Why's he doing that? It's weird.*

"You have a fan," Dennis muttered in his ear. But Rory didn't think that was it. He had the peculiar feeling this man knew Carden.

"I like your idea of an opening-night blood and food drive," Montgomery said. "It will not only be a big draw, but it will help us tremendously."

"It was Thiago's idea," Rory said. And it was true. As Thiago had said, power to the people.

Rory went through the motions of opening night, juggling difficult customers, difficult sex workers, booze, blood, food donations...the only difference was that he honestly felt no stress about it. He was in torment with each passing day and no word from Carden. Anything that took his mind off his dreams, off his shattered illusions, he grabbed onto.

"Relax," Dennis would say. "I'll take care of this."

Rory hated to sleep. Carden became less...real when he wasn't there at night. Rory was afraid he'd disappear from his mind all together. It was like Carden had saved everyone, then quietly disappeared. He had nothing but dreams. Ah, he dreamed of him every night, dreamed of touching him, fucking him, having long drawn-out discussions with him.

One night, Carden came to him and it had been bliss, but none of it was real. It was all in his mind.

Thiago had no sense of Carden, or at least that's what he told him.

"It's as if he never existed, Rory. I'm sorry. He's like...really gone. My advice is to forget him."

*Forget him?* That would be like cutting out his heart. *How in the hell am I supposed to do that?*

Thankfully, the club occupied his time. He threw himself into his work. The three of them made a great team and the money began to pour in as they hired the most beautiful vampire dancers they could find.

Dennis moaned about Thiago going back to his old profession, but he was born to it and quickly became the main attraction.

Rory put one foot in front of the other and tried to smile. He didn't anticipate Paul coming into his life, but a few months after the club opened, Rory was back in the ocean with his kerosene lamp. He was one of the few who came out here now.

"Hey," a voice said beside him.

"Hey," Rory said, glancing shyly at the man. He had dark hair and sad eyes. Rory had noticed him before, walking around the marina. They said nothing more that night, but Rory had the disquieting sense he was being disloyal to Carden by breaking his silent vigil. He turned his little boat around.

They saw each other a few more times and then one evening, he came to Eclipse, looking for work.

"My name is Paul," he said, "And I hear you're looking for a dancer."

He was sweet, sexy and the best dancer he'd ever seen. Rory hired him, Thiago pouting that he'd lose the adoration of his fans with this new threat.

Rory watched his new employee in action from his second-floor office. He watched him dancing with one of the patrons and caught Paul glancing up at him. Rory's breath caught and he moved away from the window. He wondered who Paul had lost. Who drove him from his sleep and to the ocean each night?

\* \* \* \*

The psychologist was shining that light in his eyes again. "And you don't remember anything?"

"Nothing," he said. "I just woke up like that." He shuddered.

"You're lucky the construction crew was off that day. You would have been buried alive," Derek Murdock shook his head and lowered the light. He sat back in his chair and studied the young man in front of him. Around thirty-two maybe, tall, well built, incredibly beautiful. In fact, he'd yet to see a more beautiful man. He'd been found buried alive at a construction site two months ago. The foreman had brought him to the hospital. He survived by some miracle, but he'd had no idea who he was or how he got there. No

identification, no record of him anywhere, fingerprinting turned up nothing. He was a mystery. Derek had nicknamed him William because he'd been found at the site of the old Williams' estate.

"What I can't understand," Derek said, "is how come there were no marks on you. It doesn't look like someone tried to kill you or anything. And I don't see how you could have buried yourself like that."

"I have no answers for you. Look, I've been here almost six weeks, before that I was poked and prodded in a hospital ward. Is there any reason I'm being kept here?"

"William, I can't release you. You're suffering from memory loss."

"What if I have no memory to recover?"

"That doesn't make sense."

"I know, but it's how I feel."

"That's common," Derek said, "in young men suffering from a fugue state. A lot's gone on with the new-world order. It's a condition peculiar to young men."

William looked at him. "I feel as if there is just this nothingness behind me, a road un-traveled, a page I need to write on. I'm not crazy, Derek. I'm just lost."

Derek leaned over and touched his knee. He was overcome with such desire for him suddenly.



He wanted him. He wanted him the first time he was brought in here. "Come home with me," he said softly. "Live with me, William. I'll help you."

"And be your lover?"

It was said without emotion.

"Yes. Would that be so terrible?"

"No," he replied, shaking his head.

"Do you feel it, something between us?"

"I feel as if I need an anchor and that's you," William said, reaching out and touching his cheek.

Derek leaned forward and kissed his mouth softly. He felt himself tremble. "God, you're beautiful. I want you to fuck me."

William smiled, pulling back. "That can be arranged," he replied. "Take me home."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

“Can’t we do something?” Dennis asked the minute the music stopped. The new DJ was having trouble with the sound system and the dancers on the stage and on the floor paused, waiting for the next song to start.

“No,” Thiago said. “He needs to move on.” He stood behind Dennis, his arm slung possessively across his lover’s hips, rubbing his now-hard cock against Dennis’ ass cheeks. Thiago, clad in only a silver jock strap and a tiny, thigh-hugging gray satin robe, kissed Dennis’ throat. He was so much more demonstrative now that Dennis was a vampire.

Dennis peered up from the dance floor, watching Rory torture himself, sitting alone in his office. “His grief is overwhelming.” He turned, shooting Thiago a look of reproach. “If I died, would you move on?”

"If you died...shit, Dennis, why do you say stuff like that?"

"It's a legitimate question. Before you turned me, I was very sick, remember. I might have died."

Thiago pulled Dennis tighter into his arms. His lips moved to his ear. "You still have memories of it?"

"Of course I do. It's been a few months...not centuries."

Thiago kissed him.

The music started and Dennis felt the tug of desire.

"You feel like a quickie?" Thiago shouted above the strains of INXS' *Not Enough Time*.

Dennis' heart twisted in pain for his best friend. "I always feel like a quickie," he said, leading the way through the thicket of men crowding the floor. He didn't even mind guys touching Thiago these days. He knew Thiago loved him and since Dennis had turned, their lovemaking had gone from feverish to scorching. He checked the computerized room reservations.

Room twelve was free. They walked down the red-lit corridor and glanced into the rooms whose window shutters were open. Some guys were exhibitionists. Some guys were voyeurs. As Michael Hutchence roared, "I want to be inside

you,” Dennis quickened his pace. He was anxious now to fuck.

He kept the window shutter open. He didn’t care who watched him and Thiago getting it on. It touched him, however, when Thiago closed the shades.

“I want you to myself,” he said, his mouth clamping over Dennis’ in a swift motion that took Dennis’ breath away.

Thiago released him, giving him a little push. Dennis swayed a little. Thiago did that to him, kept him off balance. He felt his face flush as Thiago shimmied to his knees, unbuttoning Dennis’ jeans.

“Oh, Thiago.”

Thiago gave a soft moan as he licked across Dennis’ dusting of pubic hair. He licked down, his mouth closing over Dennis’ shaft.

He pulled the pants down further, only touching Dennis with his tongue.

Dennis held his shirt up with his hands to watch. Half the fun of getting sucked this way was watching.

Thiago sucked his cock, which was now rigid. He tugged on Dennis’ cock with his mouth so hard, Dennis felt a ripple of heat shiver through his balls.

Oh, man, Thiago was good at this.

Thiago released Dennis' cock and stood, kissing him. His own cock was rigid in his silver jockstrap.

Dennis drew the robe off his lover's coffee-and-cream-colored shoulders. It fell to the floor with a soft thud.

He reached down, shoving the triangle of fabric aside. Thiago's cock punched at him and Dennis bent down to touch it.

"Get me ready for you," Thiago said, pushing his head down farther.

Dennis sucked Thiago quickly, then straightened. "Sit on the bench."

Room twelve was their favorite, because it had a long, leather-topped bench and they could lie or sit on it at will. Thiago lay back, watching Dennis tongue his cock.

"You have the most talented mouth," Thiago said, reaching down to trace Dennis' lips with his cock.

Dennis wanted Thiago in him.

"Come and mount me," Thiago said and Dennis turned, his hot ass ready for his lover's cock to strike. Thiago held Dennis' hips and pushed his ass down over his thick, hard cock. Dennis instantly felt better just having Thiago in him. Thiago licked his fingertips and circled them around Dennis' nipples.

“Bear down on me, whore,” Thiago said and Dennis began the frenzied ass dance on Thiago, puffing and panting as Thiago squeezed his nipples now. He felt Thiago’s cock hitting him harder and harder. He heard Thiago’s impatient sigh and could have predicted Thiago would stand, launch Dennis’ ass up, so his head dropped down. Dennis’ fingers touched the ground in front of him as Thiago fucked him relentlessly. He braced his feet a little farther apart and felt his lover’s heavy balls nestling against his ass.

*Oh, he’s all the way in.* Thiago fucked him until he came. He pinched the base of Dennis’ cock to stop his from full release.

“Why?” he gasped, feeling Thiago’s hot seed spreading through him.

“Because,” Thiago said, pulling out of him and kissing the small of his back, “You will come so hard later...if I make you wait.”

Thiago straightened his jockstrap and as Dennis straightened, he said, “You know, I’ve been thinking. That new guy, Paul...I think he likes Rory. Let’s see if we can’t get them together.”

Dennis let out a breath. “You think he’ll go for it?”

Thiago pushed Dennis gently off his lap. “Only one way to find out.”

\* \* \* \*

*Fire.* Fire and light. The images flashed in his brain, going round and round and then he couldn't breathe.

"William?"

He opened his eyes to see Derek looking down at him. He smiled. "Hi," he said.

"Hi, gorgeous. What's wrong? You're having that dream again?"

"Um."

Derek reached under him and pulled him into his arms. "It's normal, after what you went through. It will pass."

William ran his hand down over Derek's chest, squeezed his cock in his fist. He began to kiss his mouth aggressively, pushing him back to the mattress. "Fuck me, Derek, make me feel alive." He crawled onto his hips and straddled Derek's cock, guiding it up inside of him. "Make it hurt, make me feel it," he moaned. *Because dammit, most of the time I can't feel anything at all.*

\* \* \* \*

Paul moved in on Rory quickly. Too quickly, right on his first break. He came into his office and perched on his desk, trying to lure him out to the dance floor with a cocktail.

"They tell me you like buttery nipples." He held out a martini glass to Rory.

"No thanks, I like my nipples straight up."

*With a cock chaser. Carden's cock. Does that come in a glass?* He testily shuffled papers, but in truth, he adored butterscotch schnapps and the scent started to make his mouth water. Since arriving in San Francisco, he hadn't even had a beer. He'd been hanging out with Thiago and Dennis too much. They only wanted blood...each other's blood.

"Thanks," he said, finally, feeling annoyed that he...he hunted around for the exact emotion he felt. He felt like a bear hibernating but being poked with twigs by an irritating kid.

"How long has the club been going?" Paul asked, sipping on his own drink.

"Five months now. No...six." It's getting harder...not easier. *Time is hurting me more and more.*

"Where were you when the war started?"

"Los Angeles."

Paul seemed surprised. "I thought everyone down there died."

"We'd taken a road trip to Las Vegas."

*Please don't ask me about Carden. I'll walk right out of here and never come back.*

Paul nodded. "Your roommates are vampires. How's that working out for you?"



"Fine. Why?"

Paul shrugged. "I kinda keep my distance."

"I have no prejudice. Dennis is my best friend and they are a fantastic couple."

"Seems that way." Paul's cell phone beeped. "My turn for the dance pole."

"Have fun," Rory said. He put his drink on the desk and as soon as Paul was gone, he locked the office door with his remote. He pulled out the letter he'd received from the Red Cross. His fingers shook a little as he re-read the short note.

*Dear Mr. Jacobs, Your parents, Wanda and Eugene Jacobs, have contacted us via the Federal Family Recovery Agency. They saw your name on a list of survivors and contacted us through the Blood Bank Registry. As an active donor, we are in a position to fly your parents to visit you. The next available cargo flight is on January twenty-sixth. All flights leave promptly at six AM. Please reserve your parents' seat by midnight on the twenty-third. Very truly yours, Tyler Montgomery.*

Three days from now. *Should I agree to have them come? Should I just tear up the note?* He hadn't seen his family for a very long time. He always thought they'd have tomorrow...he picked up his desk phone when a voice whispered inside him, *Yes.*

His parents arrived at the heliport in San Francisco Harbor. He watched them walk down

the portable stairs set up on the runway. He heard the *baaa* of sheep.

One look at his mother's face and he knew he'd made the right decision. His father's lined face broke into a grin and he ran into their outspread arms.

"You smell terrible," he said finally, breaking away from them.

"It's the sheep," his father said. Behind them, a young man wheeled a stack of suitcases.

"Are all of those yours?" Rory asked.

His mother nodded.

"How long are you staying?"

"For good." Eugene clapped him on the shoulder. "I just got a job with a new company, Landon Construction. I'm doing some architectural stuff for them."

Rory was stunned to hear this. His dad had found work impossible to get before the war.

His father seemed to read his thoughts. "Now the war is over, there's a need for people like me. I feel alive again, son." His gaze flickered to his wife.

"Our son looks good, doesn't he?"

Wanda Jacobs looked fit to burst. "He's too thin," she said, throwing herself into her son's arms. Rory held his mother for a long, long time, his father stroking his back long after the last sheep was offloaded from the cargo plane. He

watched the plane as it taxied into a hangar for refueling.

*I wish Carden were here.*

His father dropped a sheaf of papers and Rory bent to pick them up. He almost howled in anguish.

“Oh, this was a place I helped work on in Washington DC,” his father said, pointing out the photos.

Rory’s gaze remained on the statue in the center of all the new construction.

It was a statue...he was certain...a statue of Carden.

“Who’s this?” he asked.

But he knew. He just knew it was Carden.

His father had a jumbled story about a vampire king who’d saved them all and how he’d become an almost Messianic but absent figure. “Every generation needs its own hero, right?” his father asked.

The three of them walked away from the heliport and Rory reflected on his father’s remark. He was Christ-like, his Carden. It helped, not much, but just a little to know he loved such a selfless, wonderful man.

Paul made him laugh. Paul was also a great chess player, which his father liked and a great card player, which Thiago and Dennis liked. He

was probably a very good lover, but Rory resisted and Paul understood. After introducing him to his parents, Rory felt, for the first time, that his parents didn't feel so bad about having a gay son. They seemed to have no idea that Dennis was now a vampire, or if they did, they didn't seem to care.

It seemed to bother Paul, but the more time he spent with Dennis and Thiago, the more he realized they weren't blood-crazed monsters.

"They're cool guys," he said one night as they walked along Fisherman's Wharf away from the club after closing. It had become their custom. They stopped at the ice cream stand at the top of the pier. Lovers huddled in darkened doorways of the little stores that had sprung up, thanks to Eclipse's thriving business.

Rory chose a blood orange sorbet in a cup and Paul chose hazelnut.

"Your lover...the one you lost, I hear he was a vampire?" Paul asked as they leaned against the wooden fence looking over the ocean.

*Oh no, not this again. He's so stuck on the vampire thing.* He smiled to himself. Not so long ago, he was, too. He remembered how it all began with Dennis wanting to celebrate his birthday at the original Eclipse Club.

"Yes, he was."

"You still miss him."

"Very much."

"What was his name?"

"They didn't tell you?"

"Boy, you *are* still grieving."

"Aren't you?" Rory shot back.

"Yes." Paul glanced away from him. "I lost my husband. I thought we'd be together forever. Our car crashed. We were hit head-on by a tank as we tried to leave Las Vegas when the war started. I have no idea of how...or why I survived."

Rory was horrified. He put his hand on Paul's arm.

"I'm so sorry, Paul."

"I miss him every day...some days are worse than others."

*Yep, I know all about that one.*

"The thing is, Rory, I'd like to think there's a reason I stayed here. A reason God didn't take me, too. I can't live without love...without hope. I don't think you can either."

"I can't promise you love," Rory said.

Paul shrugged. "I can live with your liking me a lot."

Rory grinned. "I already do."

They drove home in Paul's state-issued pickup truck. They held hands, Rory staring out of the window at the moonlight.

Neither man said a word as they arced back over the Bay bridge. He looked at all the lights of the houses. How quickly humans forget and

recover. Months ago, nobody wanted to turn on their lights. Now they were all lit up like Christmas trees.

*I still feel safest in the dark. Carden, will you come and save me?*

Allowing himself to make love again was not as hard as he thought it would be. Paul was passionate and fun. They kissed a lot in the privacy of his bedroom. Paul did things his own way and Rory didn't fight it, in fact, being in bed with Paul was a lot more fun than being alone. Paul had a nice big cock and seemed to thrive on driving Rory wild with it.

It had been so long since he'd had sex, Rory felt the familiar tingle of pleasure as Paul stroked his cock and almost came when Paul's fingers reached for his ass hole.

Paul, sensing this, dipped his face to Rory's hole and licked furiously, keeping a strong grip on Rory's cock. Rory humped his face and came hard.

He saw the smile of victory as Paul raised his face again, smiling.

Rory reached for Paul's cock.

"Oh no, I'm not done with you yet."

Rory almost screamed his need.

Paul watched his face for a moment. Rory felt the heat of Paul's gaze and turned to look at him. *Why does Paul keep doing this? Keep checking in with*

*me? If he makes me keep second-guessing myself, I won't be able to go through with it.*

"You like what I'm doing?"

"Yes," Rory said, hearing the desire in his own voice. Paul's fingers stroked his ass. "Are you going to fuck me?" he finally asked.

"I'll fuck you," Paul said and when he moved between Rory's parted thighs, he felt the wetness of Paul's cock. Their gazes held as his cock pushed at Rory's waiting ass. Rory clutched Paul's ass cheeks and held him closer, tilting his hips upward.

"Fuck me, man," he said.

And still, Paul hesitated. He entered Rory with a sigh. Rory moved his hands between their hard-slamming bodies and he jerked on his cock.

He shut out the thoughts of Carden, of his laugh, his tongue...the taste of his skin. Paul kissed him and Rory closed his eyes.

*Carden*, he screamed in his brain as he came all over his hand.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

“ . . . And he says *we* make too much noise,”  
 . . . **A**Dennis said, laughing the next morning  
with Rory’s parents.

Rory thought he’d pass out. He never discussed sex with his parents. His whole life he’d gotten through never mentioning once that he knew they had sex every Saturday night when he was growing up, because that was the night their bedroom door actually closed and his father made strange sounds.

“I never took you for a screamer,” Wanda told Rory.

“Oh, my God.”

He picked up a blueberry muffin out of the basket on the kitchen table. It was hot and fresh. It was delicious. It had been so long since anyone had cooked in the house...in fact, nobody *ever* cooked in the house. He stared at the basket of baked goods in amazement.



"I had no idea the oven even worked."

"It doesn't," his mom said. "Paul made them at his place and brought them over."

His gaze traveled to Paul's face.

Paul shrugged.

"You were sleeping and I had blueberries...and I was hungry. I checked in your fridge. I think you've got some interesting science experiments going on in there."

"There's milk," Rory said.

Paul cocked a brow.

"It's fresh." Rory felt defensive.

"Six weeks old," Paul said. "But don't you worry, I chucked it out and the vile smell should be gone in a week or so."

Rory opened, closed and reopened his mouth. He picked up another muffin. Better to shut it with something tasty, before he said something he'd regret.

He caught Dennis looking at him longingly.

"Do you miss eating food?" he asked.

"No, not at all. I miss...being hungry though. Does that make sense?"

"I feel the same way," Rory's father said and for the first time, Rory realized his parents had turned. How? When? He came back into his body, out of the realm of spirits for the first time since they'd landed on dry land.

*How could I not have noticed my parents were different?*

His mother smiled at him and said, "I miss food. I miss chocolate the most."

Rory nodded, not knowing how to respond to that.

His parents said they chose to turn long before the war as a way to stave off illness. "We have no more aches and pains," his mom said, as she gave Rory's office a spring cleaning.

"We couldn't afford insurance and our healthcare provider suggested we become vampires. You know, your father's libido is now in the stratosphere."

"Oh, God...thanks for sharing," Rory said, clapping his hands over his ears.

"You should get some flowers in here," she said. "A few plants. It's so...businesslike in here."

"It's an office," he reminded her.

"No need for it to look so sterile," she insisted.

"Whatever," Rory said. "Please don't put fluffy pillows or stuffed toys in here," he said.

"Just plants, darling."

"I know you, Mom."

He noticed her gaze straying to his barren sofa and he buried himself in paperwork. Plants and flowers were the least of his problems. His big problem was Paul wanting to spend every night with him. It was nice. Too nice.

"I like him," his mom said. "He's all right for a human."

She enjoyed her own little joke and Rory felt everybody was having a party...a game of musical chairs. Every time the music stopped, he was the only one without a chair.

Late one night, he and Paul made love and as they lay in each other's arms, Paul started tickling him. Rory's laughing prompted Dennis and Thiago to bang on the wall.

"Knock it off," they both shouted good-naturedly.

"Don't you know vamps have to sleep? That means you, Paul," Thiago added with a growl.

"How can I sleep when I'm in love?" he hollered back.

"Love?" Rory blinked, looking at him. "Are you?"

He smiled. "Of course. Rory, we've been sleeping together every damn night for months. What do you think I'm doing here?"

Rory wrapped his arms around his neck and held tight.

"What is it? You're shaking."

"Nothing."

"Is it Carden?"

Rory let him go. It was rare anyone mentioned his name. People still left cards and notes by his

statue, but Carden was gone. He'd become an urban myth. Rory sometimes felt his life with Carden was a dream.

"No, it's..."

"I know you still feel pain. I'm not trying to replace him. But I can't compete with a dead man...or a vampire, let's say, who doesn't exist anymore."

"We don't know that."

"Rory, he's been gone over a year. He's not coming back. He gave his life to save this world. He's a hero but heroes die."

Rory swallowed. "I know I have to go on. I do care about you, Paul, I..."

"But you don't love me? You don't allow yourself to love me because you hang on to a dead man."

"I'm sorry, you're right." Rory pulled Paul closer. "No more Carden. I'm going to put him behind me. He's gone."

\* \* \* \*

Derek watched William with amazement. "Did you just carry that trunk in here by yourself?"

"Yep," he grinned.

"Damn, you're strong."

He shrugged, pulling up his sleeve with a flirtatious grin. "All in the biceps."

“You have great muscles,” Derek groaned, “especially the one between your legs. Oh, Will, let’s leave the rest of the stuff on the truck. Come upstairs and fuck me.”

William laughed. “You’re renting it by the hour. And I got to get to work, remember?”

“Shorter commute now that we’ve moved to San Jose,” he suggested. “Come on, baby, I need that cock.”

William shook his head. “I’ll lock it up. Go upstairs and get naked. I got exactly an hour before I have to be at the site.”

“You’re going to be supervisor soon.”

“Don’t count on it,” he said, “boss hates me.”

“He’s an idiot.”

William walked outside and locked up the truck. He glanced up at the grey sky and sighed. He was going to work. He doubted they’d get much work done today. He walked back into the new house Derek had bought and studied the room off the entrance. He’d promised to make that into Derek’s office. It was going to be a job. He climbed the stairs two at a time and smiled as he spotted Derek lying on the floor on the mattress. “You might want to put a blanket over that,” he laughed, undoing his pants.

“Why? Are you going to come all over it?” Derek flashed him a smile, glancing back at him.

"No, but you are," he said, stripping off his clothes and crawling down on top of him. He dragged him up on all fours and began to run his hands over him. Derek bucked his hips against his erection. A finger up inside of him caused him to move his hips quite frantically.

"I'm ready, God, fuck me, William."

William dug in his cock, burying it inside Derek's ass. He began to pump and pump, his eyes closed. *Carden...oh Carden...yeah...yeah.*

His eyes flew open as Derek gasped out his orgasm. "Who in the hell..." He fell backward, laughing a little.

"What?" Derek asked, breathing hard.

"Who or what is a Carden?"

"Who?"

"Nothing. I swear I hear voices sometimes, at weird times." He stood up, began to dress. "Got to go. Foreman will kill me."

"Quit that job, sweetie. Work on my office. I'll pay you."

"You do enough. I want to earn my own money. I'll work on it when I get back." He did up his shirt. As he walked outside, it started to rain.

\* \* \* \*

Rory's dad came up with a solution for the late-night noise. He suggested he build a special house

for Thiago and Dennis. Thiago instantly had grand plans for a big property. He wanted a luxurious house, with handsome park grounds they'd open to local children.

Dennis threw himself behind the project and Rory encouraged them, but secretly, Rory felt life was moving faster than he would have liked. He knew Paul wanted them to have a home of their own.

"I'm willing to stay here by the Bay," he said, "even though most refugees are moving into their own places."

"But I like it here," Rory said.

Thiago wanted Rory's advice and asked him to come to the new property Eugene had found him. He bumbled with excitement as they drove to the site. He was in ecstasy as he explained his plans to the foreman of Landon Construction.

Rory caught the glimmer of the back of one of the construction worker's asses and his heart gave a leap. God, he looked liked Carden.

The guy disappeared and he tuned back into Thiago's excited babble.

"I want there to be an indoor swimming pool here and put the sauna rooms there. One communal shower will do right here," he continued as Sterling Landon followed along behind, taking notes.

"Okay," he said, "I'll get the permit. You got a nice spot for this out here near Balsam Cove, nice and secluded. No zoning problems."

"None whatsoever," Thiago said.

Landon took his hand. "Fair enough. I'll get a crew out here today if you like. Can't do any outside work."

"Fair enough."

"I'll draw up the contract."

"Are we on?" Rory asked Thiago as he arrived just in time to see the truck drive away."

"Yep and at a good price. A crew will be here this afternoon."

"That fast?"

"It will take a week, no more."

"Perfect. Where's Dennis?"

"He's shopping with your mother." His voice dropped. "You know, sometimes I think Dennis is just a little bit gay."

Rory laughed. "That's a shock."

"What about Paul?"

"Sleeping."

"So," Thiago teased, "wanna fuck?"

Rory laughed. "Dennis would drive a stake through your heart and eat me."

"On second thought," he winked. "So," he put an arm around him and they walked back into the main part of the club, "how's it going?"

"Paul says he loves me."



“And?”

Rory grinned. “I think I love him back.”

“Perfect. So now you can stop making so much noise?”

“Don’t count on it.”

\* \* \* \*

“Where?” William asked him.

“Balsam Cove. You’ll be on-site supervisor, because I can’t get away right now. Use your GPS.”

“I’ve got to order the supplies.”

“Here they are,” Landon said, “I’ve made a list. Take the A crew. I guess I should warn you. The owners are vamps.”

“I’ll be sure to bring some holy water,” he muttered.

“William?”

“Um?” he asked, standing in the boss’s office.

“It’s not that I don’t like you. It’s just I find you’re weird, but I wouldn’t mind...” He suddenly placed a hand on William’s forearm. “Anytime.”

*Jesus Christ.* “Yeah, well, I’ll round up the crew. I’m sure someone knows where this place is.”

Landon smiled. “This is a great opportunity for you, William. One night you might consider paying me back.”

William raised an eyebrow and left the office.

\* \* \* \*

Rory wasn't thrilled about having the place invaded by construction people, but Thiago wanted to expand. He had great plans and who was he to piss on them. He buried himself in the office under some much-neglected paperwork. It was one of the dancers, a vamp named Carmine, who interrupted his serenity.

"Boss?"

"Carmine, I told you to call me Rory." With his door now open, he could hear some loud talking, some hooting and whistling. "What's that?"

"Just Jessie and Carl. They saw him, too."

"Saw who?"

"This hot guy, man he's a walking hard on. Think he's the boss or something, was walking around measuring things."

"You didn't make idiots out of yourselves, did you, over some construction guy?" Rory laughed.

"No, we just came in our pants and then stuck our fists in our mouths." He laughed. "We just didn't want to keep him all to ourselves."

"Thanks."

"Come take a peek at him."

“No thanks. I got work. Try to keep it in your pants, okay and carry around extra underwear.” Rory grinned, shook his head.

“Kay, boss.” Carmine sniggered and was gone. Rory shook his head.

Thiago walked out into the club with Dennis, wondering what all the fuss was about. “You guys should be setting up for tonight instead of standing around,” he said. “What are you doing exactly?”

Jessie groaned. “Hot guy in construction hat and jeans. Drop-dead, and I mean, drop-dead gorgeous.”

“Get moving,” Dennis said, laughing. He looked at Thiago. “I didn’t know they were here.”

“That’s because you were too busy riding my cock. I should go and see what they’re up to. They may have questions. Stay here and make sure these clowns get organized.”

“You just want to check out this hot guy,” Dennis accused, then gave him a kiss.

Thiago made his way outside and to the other side of the building where the extension was going to be built. He saw the back of the guy in the hat that was walking around with his clipboard. *Must be the hottie*, he thought, *because he has a great ass*. But when the man turned around, Thiago just about hit the floor. “Carden?” The name automatically passed his lips.

The man froze, looked at him blankly. "Why did you call me that?"

Thiago shook his head. "It can't be. I'm sorry. You're...you're not a vampire."

The man lifted an eyebrow. "No. Last time I checked, I had a pulse. You plan on making me into one?"

"No." Thiago grinned. "No worries. It's just that...who are you?"

The man held out his hand. "William. My name is William." They'd never gotten around to giving him a second name. Derek was trying to talk him into taking his name...something about marriage. He wasn't sure about that one.

Thiago took his hand, met his eyes. "It's uncanny. You look just like Carden."

"Carden?" he sighed. "Who is this guy?"

"You don't know? I mean, he's an international hero. He saved us all. Where have you been, on Mars?"

"Ah, I've been out of it for awhile. Look, everything is going as planned here. This shouldn't take long. We'll do some preliminary checks for things today and get started early tomorrow morning. We'll have to leave you without water for a bit tomorrow morning but shouldn't be off long. If we have to shut the power, we'll give you some warning."

Thiago nodded, trying his hardest not to stare. "Okay."

He debated whether he should tell Rory or not. It seemed as if he'd just started to put Carden behind him, get into Paul. But sooner or later, Rory was going to see this guy and it was going to be a shock. He should prepare him. "Ah, can you wait here?"

"Sure," the man replied, "I'm not going anywhere just yet. We'll be out before you open tonight though."

"Thanks. Don't go anywhere."

\* \* \* \*

Rory stood in the middle of the club joking with Jessie about his proposed new outfit. "The dance of the seven veils? That should go over big."

"Rory?" Thiago interrupted, his expression strained. "I think you should come with me."

"Why? What's wrong now?"

"Nothing, just come with me. Now," he placed a hand on his shoulder, "try to keep an open mind and don't be too shocked."

"About?"

Thiago was practically pushing him around the building.

Rory let out a gasp when he saw him, even from a distance. He froze, standing in one spot, his mouth open. "What...oh my God, it's Carden."

"No, it's not, it's not Carden." Thiago held him back. "He's mortal. He's the foreman for the construction crew."

"It is Carden. I'd know him anywhere," Rory cried.

"Rory, don't." Thiago held on. "He says his name is William. It's possible that Carden has a double. We all do."

"Impossible. There was only Carden." Rory disengaged himself from Thiago and walked toward the man, feeling as if he couldn't breathe. "Carden," he croaked, "baby."

The man turned, started at him. "Pardon me?"

"Carden?" Rory threw his arms around him, hugging him tight.

The man dropped his clipboard, held his arms in the air.

Thiago pulled Rory away from him.

"What is all this about?" the man demanded. He was staring at Rory as if he'd lost his mind.

"You're Carden," Rory told him, tears streaming down his face.

"I'm William. And I think you need a...time out or something."

"It's not possible," Rory shook his head. "You look...so human."

He took a step back. "I am human." He looked at Thiago. "I think we'll call it a day, okay?"

Rory turned his face into Thiago's chest and sobbed.

Thiago put his arms around him and looked at the man apologetically. "I'm sorry, William," he said softly. "You look so much like his former lover."

"It appears so," he muttered. "Ah, well, see you tomorrow." He looked at the group of men who were standing around, confused as to what in hell was going on. "Come on, guys. Let's go."

Thiago clutched onto Rory until the trucks drove away, then released him. "You have to get a grip."

"You know who that was," Rory pointed at him. "You won't tell me different. I know Carden. When I hugged him, God, it's the same body, same torso, same muscles. I'll never forget what it felt like to hold him."

"He's not even a vampire, Rory."

"I don't care. It's him. I feel it. How is it possible?"

Thiago shook his head. "It's not and even if it was, he doesn't remember you, Rory. Let it go."

"I can't. I can't let go."

\* \* \* \*

“So what was all that about?” one of the guys in his crew asked him on the way home.

“I don’t know,” William shook his head. “It was the weirdest thing. That guy just went all psycho on me.” *Fuck. He called me Carden. Carden? Why do I keep hearing that name everywhere?*

“He was cute though. You should have gone for it.”

“The guy is a mess. And what, pretend to be his ex-lover for a fuck? Not my style. A little low, don’t you think?”

“A fuck is a fuck and he seemed really into you,” he laughed. “And you know that the boss wants your ass, don’t you? If you’re smart and you want to move up, you’ll fuck him. He’ll make you permanent supervisor.”

“I don’t want to move up that badly,” William scoffed. “I just want to go home.”

\* \* \* \*

Dennis shook his head as Rory explained what happened. “You loved Carden so much that maybe since things are going well now with Paul, you—”

“No, it’s not that. It was him, except he was mortal and—”



“Rory, think about what you’re saying. Carden is gone. And he could never be mortal. Accept it and move on.”

“You’ll see tomorrow.”

\* \* \* \*

Derek greeted William at the door with a big smile.

William narrowed his eyes. “What?”

“The lawyer called. She told me even if you didn’t have your papers, we could get married. You can take my name. Murdock, William Murdock. What do you say?”

He sighed. “I kind of like the idea of keeping my name.”

“But you don’t have one.”

“Maybe I’ll remember it eventually.”

“And what about getting married?”

“Sounds good, Derek, but can we give it a bit more time?”

Derek nodded. “Come to bed and fuck me, okay?” He pulled William inside and began to take off his clothes.

*Fuck me, Carden. Fuck me.* “Damn it,” he pushed away from him.

“What is it?”

William started to put his clothes back on. “He knows me.”

"Who knows you?"

"That psycho guy at the vamp club who was all over me today. He called me Carden. I hear that name, Derek, in my mind. It must be my name."

"Some guy was all over you today?"

"Don't freak out. He lost his lover or something. I've got to talk to him."

"I'll come with you."

William hesitated for a minute, then nodded.

\* \* \* \*

The club was in full swing. The ebb and tide of activity didn't allow Rory too much time to dwell, but the image of that construction worker played in his mind. Then a knock sounded on his door and he came face to face with his torment. He almost broke down and cried again.

"Don't," the man said, holding up a hand. "Don't fall apart okay?"

Rory almost laughed. That was so like Carden to say something like that when he was uncomfortable.

He wasn't alone. The man with him had a possessive hand on Carden's forearm. "I'm Derek Murdock. And this is my partner, William Murdock."

Rory swallowed. His gaze remained on Carden. "Carden," he mouthed.

“Why do you keep calling me that?” William moved past the other man and stood closer to Rory. “Why were you hugging me today?”

“I don’t appreciate that,” Derek protested.

William held up his hand. “Derek, quiet.” He looked at Rory. “Who is Carden?”

“He’s the one I love, the only one I’ll ever love. He’s you.”

“I’m not your love,” he said, shaking his head. “I’ve never seen you before.”

“He’s mine,” the other man elbowed past William. “We’re going to get married.”

Rory sucked in some breath.

“Derek, leave us now,” William told him.

“William, I—”

“Please,” he said, squeezing his hand. “I won’t be long. Wait for me outside.”

The man left reluctantly.

“Tell me about this Carden,” William urged. His expression was unreadable.

“He was a vampire. He saved us from destruction. He saved the entire world only the government has given him a far lesser role than he actually played. We were in love. He disappeared after everything returned to normal and...you look just like him.”

“I hear his name in my head sometimes. How could I be this Carden? I’m a mortal man.”

“You’re name is William?”

"I don't know. I have no memory of my past, no memory of what my name is. That's why I'm asking you why you keep calling me Carden. But what you're proposing is impossible, isn't it?" He shook his head. "Vampires don't become mortal."

"No, I believe it's the other way around."

"I'm sorry for your loss. I really am."

Tears rolled down Rory's face. "I won't bother you anymore with this. It's just hard to see you."

He nodded, speechless.

"God, but you have the same voice, the same hands." Rory's eyes moved down over him. "When I held you, you felt the same, the muscles in your chest, your torso. Can I see it?"

"What?" he blinked.

"Your cock. I know it's an unusual request, but I know Carden's cock and —"

"No," he replied, "you can't."

"It's just if I saw it —"

"I'm not your Carden," he snapped.

"And you wouldn't like to be my Carden?"

He smiled faintly. "I didn't say that. I said I'm not your Carden. Besides, I'm involved so..."

Rory swallowed. "I have to move on. Look, this wasn't a cheap attempt to pick you up, asking you to show me you're...I'm involved, too."

"Okay then," he looked as if he wanted to go.

Their gazes met for a second. "God, I want to kiss you," Rory whispered, "would you mind if I kissed you?"

"Does this involve showing you my cock as well?" He was making light of it, but there was something thick hanging in the air between them.

"I've given up on that dream," Rory grinned.

He seemed to relax. He laughed.

Rory moved closer, put a hand on his chest. He reached the other hand up and touched his silky dark hair. "Beautiful," he whispered. "God, you're so beautiful, it makes my cock ache."

The door opened suddenly and Rory stepped back.

"William?" It was Derek. "I think we should be going."

William's gaze was locked with Rory's. "Yeah," he said, "you're right." He turned around and looked at Derek. "I hope you find him," William mumbled, without looking back. "He's a lucky guy."

Rory felt himself blush.

"Come on, Will," Derek urged and they were gone.

Rory felt as if he was having problems breathing. *What in hell was wrong with me, asking a stranger to show me his cock? Have I lost my mind?* He shook himself and told himself to get back to work.

\* \* \* \*

William drove slowly on the way home. There was no good in getting involved with that club owner. He was with Derek now and Derek had done so much for him. But even if he was a little deranged, he was cute. He smiled.

“So, do we set a date or what?” Derek asked him, placing a hand on his thigh. “I’m anxious to make you mine.”

He leaned over to kiss his mouth, “Soon.”

\* \* \* \*

Rory moaned. “Show me your cock.”

Carden pulled the zipper down on his jeans, smiled at him. “This what you want, Rory?”

“Oh, yes,” he breathed, “it’s all I want.” *My Carden. Beautiful, so male, so feral, so sexy.*

He took him in his arms, pushed him down over his desk, kissed every inch of him. “Rory, I’m back. I’m yours, baby.”

*Carden, Carden, Jesus...I’ve waited so long...um...* Carden was inside him, pumping into him, his face close to his. He could see his magnificent eyes, touch his silky hair, dig his fingers into the flesh of those broad shoulders. “I love you so much.”

"I love you, too," a voice replied. "Did you come?"

Rory opened his eyes to see Paul's blue ones staring into his. "Yeah," he said, trying not to show his disappointment.

"Man, that was wild. You're wild tonight, baby."

Rory pulled him close, hiding his tears in Paul's chest. "Yeah, wild. Sleep, okay? Just sleep."

## CHAPTER NINE

William sat transfixed as the news broadcast showed a clip of the statue, which had been erected outside the government headquarters in Washington.

“Carden Adair,” the voice said, “has stirred much controversy since the likeness of him was created by artist Martin Dewalt, over a year ago. Some groups are claiming that humans should not have a vampire idol outside of their government building and that the story about how Carden Adair aided government forces to save the planet is the result of a plot by vampires to eventually be given total equality with the human population.

“Opponents say that Carden Adair was not just a factor in the rescue of this planet but that he single handedly, by grace of some divine power, saved earth and all mortal and immortal creatures that inhabit it. But how? Here to give us some more insight into this debate are Damien Phillips,



biochemist at the Integrated University of Utah, and Reverend Harold Kale of the Church of the Divine Right of Human Dominion.”

Derek suddenly wrapped his arms around William’s neck and kissed him. William brushed him away. “Listen, they’re talking about that vampire, Carden Adair.”

“That’s all nonsense,” Derek said.

“Shush,” he said, reaching for the remote and turning up the volume.

“Carden Adair is what was known as a pure blood vampire, born not made. We know that they existed, but were hunted by the turned vampires a few centuries ago and destroyed.”

“Why?” the announcer asked.

“They were akin to gods and as turned vampires grew in number, they feared being dominated by these creatures. We believe that Carden Adair was in battle with another of his kind who sought to take over the human species and make them slaves.”

Kale interjected. “Our point exactly. Only God’s creatures deserve domination over the earth. Vampires are the undead, once turned, they are no longer God’s creatures and —”

“But,” the scientist said, “Adair was not turned. He was born, which tells us that if we do believe in a higher power, the genotype for these individuals were designated by a higher power as

well. This has profound ramifications for integration.”

“What are you saying?” the announcer said. “Are you saying that Carden Adair was akin to Jesus Christ on earth?”

“I protest this,” Kale thumped his fist.

“I’m saying that Carden Adair was a power we cannot begin to understand, that it is possible that in some way, he was divine, destined to exist until the time came to fight this terrible threat. That in a way, we have gone through an evolutionary stage, eliminating these beings once and for all.”

“Do you think there are any more pure bloods out there?” the announcer asked.

Even the reverend waited for the answer.

The scientist sighed. “Unfortunately, no. We believe that Carden Adair was the last of his kind, too good for this world, holding the key to disease and suffering, a healer and a savior. I believe that Carden Adair saved this world and gave his immortality to do it. If we learn from this, we will live together in harmony. If we don’t, Carden will have given his life in vain.”

The camera went back to the announcer. “Even now, cult members gather around the statue, bringing blood sacrifices to a savior, who may or may not have been divine. This is Sam Frost, with the early morning news, bidding you a good day.”

Derek was laughing. "Ridiculous," he said, handing William a cup of coffee.

William swallowed. "That's my name," he said softly.

"What?"

"My name is Carden Adair."

\* \* \* \*

Thiago stirred from his strange dream, aware of Dennis' soft sobs. Dennis, who always slept wrapped tightly in his arms, sat up in bed, staring into the corner.

"What is it?" Thiago asked, reaching out to him.

Dennis looked at him, stricken. "I see my mother," he said.

Thiago pulled the sheet up to his chin. "But I'm naked, babe." He glanced around the darkened room. "Where is she?"

Dennis pointed to the corner. His tears started all over again.

"What is it?" Thiago asked again.

"My sister...she's with her. They're so beautiful."

Dennis' head dropped. "I'm a vampire and they still love me. I had to wait to die to see them again. I...I never honestly thought that would happen."

Thiago sat up now and hugged him.

"For you to see your family, they must really want to see *you*. That's how it works, you know."

Dennis shook his head. "I had no idea. You mean...they'll always be with us?"

"Well," Thiago said, "hopefully, not when we're, you know...fucking."

"Don't you see your family?" Dennis asked.

"No, never."

"Do you want to?"

Thiago was aware of movement...shadows. He saw a violet aura. "I never wanted to. Oh... Dennis. I think I see your sister. She's so pretty. I want to see your family."

"You mean you can't see them?"

Thiago kept trying but the aura vanished. "No. You only get to see your loved ones. Your ancestors."

"But I want to share my family with you, you're my life." He frowned. "My afterlife...death... whatever...partner. I love you," Dennis said.

Thiago looked at him. "You think you can let them know I'd love a family reunion but that right now, I'd like some private time with you."

Dennis laughed. "She said she won't look."

Thiago found himself grinning. "She's got a great sense of humor, doesn't she?"

Dennis stared off into the corner again, nodding.

"She's gorgeous," he whispered.

Thiago stroked his head. He heard a chuckle.

"My mom just said it's cute how you can't keep your hands off me."

Thiago grinned. "Tell her thank you."

"Thank you? For what?"

"For making you just perfect for me."

\* \* \* \*

All the way to the construction company, William cursed himself as he drove. It would have been better to say nothing. Derek was sure he'd lost his mind. He kept saying in his psychologist voice, "We need to talk."

He wasn't crazy. It was just that everything in that report seemed to be old news to him. He knew it all and he didn't know how and that name, Carden Adair, it slide off his tongue so easily. He knew it was his name.

*So you believe that you're some kind of pure-blood hero reincarnated? Carden, you're nuts! That coma made you into a madman and you've never recovered. How in the hell can you be Carden Adair?*

His boss was sitting with his feet up on the desk when William walked in. He grinned at him. "Hey. How'd it go yesterday?"

"Okay, it's pretty straightforward. I didn't see any hitches."

"Good." He put down his feet. "Come here."

“What for?”

“Guys won’t be in for at least a half hour.”

“Landon, I’m not fucking you.”

He laughed. “I didn’t ask that.”

“You can make me fucking president of the company and I’m not fucking you.”

“You’re angry, William.”

“My name isn’t William, it’s Carden. Carden Adair.”

Landon blinked. “You’ve lost it. I saw the report this morning, too.”

“I didn’t say I was him. I said that’s my name.”

“You can call yourself anything you like, baby.”

He came over and reached out for the first button on his shirt. “You kind of look like him, too.”

“Kind of?” He laughed, pushing his hand away.

Landon suddenly pushed him hard against the wall. “Listen to me, baby, you know the trade, but you’re not the only one. I give you this chance—you give me your cock.”

Carden looked directly into Landon’s eyes. *Back off.*

Landon blinked and released him. “What was that?”

“That was you apologizing,” he said. “Now, I got to get my stuff together.”

As Carden placed his tools in his box, he wondered what that was himself. There was this

power deep inside him he didn't know he had and suddenly he was afraid. *What in the fuck am I?*

He tried to push it away on the way to the club. Two men rode with him and were talking all the way about the news report. "I think he was a hunk," one of them said.

"That's cause you like cock," the other joked. "He was just some vampire caught up in it all. Maybe he wanted out and decided to go out with a bang."

*What am I?*

"William?" one of them said. "You okay?"

"Carden. My name is Carden," he said, pulling the truck to a stop outside the club.

The two men stared at him, but didn't say anything.

Carden got out, glancing at the other truck, which pulled up behind him. He spoke to the men briefly, giving them their instructions and then followed them inside.

\* \* \* \*

Rory couldn't wait to see Carden or at least look at the man who resembled him so much. He spotted the trucks outside as he drove up and prayed that he hadn't scared him off. *Please be here.*

*I'm here.*

Rory froze. "What in the hell was that?" *Did you just talk to me in my head?*

Nothing.

Rory shook himself. "Damn." He got out of the truck and went inside. He forced himself to make some coffee, figuring he could bring a thermos to the men. At least it was an excuse. Halfway through the brew cycle, he left and went around to the other side.

It was almost as if he was waiting for him. He actually came halfway across the yard to meet him. "Hello, Rory," he said.

Rory met his eyes. "I thought you spoke to me in my mind."

"I think I did."

"You look frightened. Are you all right?"

He shook his head. "I think I'm losing my mind."

"Why?"

"This morning, I saw that news report on Carden Adair. Did you see it?"

"Yeah."

"You know the truth, don't you?"

"I do."

"I told my boyfriend and my boss my name was Carden Adair."

"My God."

"They think I'm mad. And there's something else."



Rory could hardly breathe. "What?"

"My boss tried to...well...he came on pretty hard and I told him to back off...I mean...I just thought it and it was like he...he obeyed me."

Rory reached for him. He hugged him for a moment. "Carden, baby. You've come home, somehow."

Carden disengaged himself. "I'm confused."

"Where were you all this time?" Rory tried to hold himself back. He wanted to strip off his clothes and make love to him there and then.

*You can't do that here. I'm working.*

Rory gasped. "I heard you."

He laughed a little, embarrassed. "Sorry."

"It's okay. Do you remember what happened at all?"

"No. I woke up out of a coma. Something fell on me apparently. I didn't know anything, anyone. Derek was my psychologist and..."

"So much for ethics," Rory scoffed.

"You're jealous," he smiled.

"You bet your sweet ass," he replied. "Carden, we were in love, really in love. And I love you still." His voice faltered.

"I know. I feel that."

"You feel what?"

"How much you...your attachment to me...and I feel drawn to you as well."

"But not love."

"I'm so confused, Rory. I don't know what I feel. It doesn't make sense that I could be this vampire, but I feel like I am. I know my name is Carden Adair. It's possible that I'm another Carden Adair."

Rory sucked in some air.

"William?" someone called out.

"I've got to get back to work. Can we talk later?"

"Yes. Later," Rory replied.

\* \* \* \*

Derek sat chewing his thumbnail. "Do you think he's figuring it out?"

The man stood in the shadows, waiting for a response. "We entrusted you with this, Derek. We won't be pleased if you fail. You are administering the serum on a regular basis?"

"Yes, and I kept him in that coma for as long as I could. I was sure the transformation was complete. Then he met Rory."

"If Rory is the problem, eliminate him. Carden must never fully recover his memory or his powers."

"You won't destroy him, will you? You promised I could have him."

"We won't destroy him because we can't. You know that. His powers are contained within that statue."

"There has to be some way," Derek said. "Burn the damn statue."

"His powers are indestructible and would come right back to Carden. Do you know what powers we had to call on to separate Carden from his essence? We want him kept away from that mortal. They share a connection powerful enough to ruin everything."

Derek stood. "I'll take care of it. I promise."

"You better."

\* \* \* \*

Voices whispered in his brain. And suddenly he heard the thoughts of all the men working around him. *Fucking screw won't go in.*

*God, William is a stud. Too bad he's a mental case.*

*My wife is going to pay for telling her mother about my addiction to porn. Wait for tonight, bitch.*

*Landon is fucking that prick. That should be my job. I've been here longer than him.*

"Stop!" Carden shouted, placing his hands over his ears. "I can't hear myself think."

The crew was staring at him strangely.

*The statue, Carden. Go to the statue. Come.*

Carden threw down his hammer and walked outside. He needed air. A few seconds later, he spotted Derek's car coming toward him. He slowed down and came to a stop in front of him.

"Hey, baby," he called out the window.

"What are you doing here?" *Threat.* He stiffened. "It's the middle of the day."

"Lunch?"

"I brown bagged today."

"We eat together always, Carden. Here, at least let me give you this," he handed over an apple.

Carden pushed this away. "I don't want it. I have enough food."

"But it's beautiful and shiny..."

*Don't eat it.*

"No."

"We need to talk. It's about Rory."

"Rory? What about him?" He came over to the window.

"I think you should stay away from him. I found out some stuff and..."

"What stuff?"

"I'll tell you over lunch and also I have some bad news, about this job. Your boss called me and—"

Suddenly that vampire he saw yesterday appeared. "Hello, William."

"Carden," he said. "My name is Carden." Thiago? He turned away from Derek, looked at the vampire. "Thiago, right?"

"Yes. That's me. Calling yourself Carden now?"

Derek got out of the car. "Since he saw that program." He laughed, placing an arm around his shoulders. "Thinks he's Carden, the guy in the statue. Don't forget your apple, honey." He pressed it into his hand.

*I am Carden.* He shrugged away from Derek, letting the apple fall to the ground. "Don't," he said. "I'm going back to work." He walked inside.

\* \* \* \*

Thiago looked at Derek Murdock. "What was that all about?"

"I don't know really. William's been sick, depression and..." he lowered his voice, "history of madness in his family. He's on medication and sometimes he's delusional."

Thiago nodded. "I see. Should he be working with power tools?"

"That's just it. I came to tell him that he's been let go. Apparently his boss has found out about his history and...since you're the client, can you deal with it?"

Thiago sighed. "I suppose so."

“Don’t worry about the project, Joe is inside. He’ll take over. I have to go back to the office.”

Thiago threw up his hands. “What am I supposed to say?”

Rory appeared suddenly. “What’s going on?”

“That guy inside, William, his boyfriend just showed up. Apparently, he has some mental problems. He’s flipped, thinks he’s Carden Adair. Construction company let him go. Murdock wants me to tell him now. Shit. I think Murdock is afraid of him.”

Rory shook his head. “Something is not right here.”

“Yeah, that foreman is not right in the head.”

“No. Let me talk to him.”

“He’s not stable, Rory, I’m stronger and if he...”

“I’m not going to hurt anyone,” a voice announced. “And you couldn’t stop me if you wanted to.”

Both Rory and Thiago turned to look at the subject of their discussion.

“I need to go to Washington,” he said. “Now, before it’s too late.”

“Washington,” Thiago echoed. “Look, buddy, maybe you should take a pill and...”

“I’m not your buddy,” he said, “I never was really. We were something, but not buddies.”

Thiago looked at Rory. “He’s out of it.”

“Why, Washington?” Rory asked him, walking over to him. “Is it because of the statue?”

“I think so.”

“I’ll go with you,” Rory said.

“No,” Thiago told him just as Dennis appeared. “Dennis, talk some sense into his head.”

Dennis looked at his friend. “Rory, think about what you’re doing.”

Carden was already heading to his truck.

Rory ran after him. Before anyone could react, including Carden, Rory was sitting beside him in the truck. “Let’s go.”

Carden started the engine and roared away from the curb. “You don’t have to do this. I don’t want you involved.”

“But I am involved. I love you.”

## CHAPTER TEN

Derek Murdock knew he wasn't alone in his office. There was something in the walls, surrounding him, cutting off his air. "You failed us."

"No, I..."

"He's on his way to Washington now."

"I'll stop him."

He was finally able to breathe again.

*Death!*

\* \* \* \*

They drove in silence. Rory's gaze stayed on Carden, his hands resting on the steering wheel, his thighs hugged by his tight black jeans. His dark hair had been tied back at the neck and was now halfway out of the elastic that held it. Rory reached up and freed it.



Carden glanced at him, then back at the road. "I could be a madman, just a madman."

"You could be. But it's not a coincidence, you showing up in this town. Something brought you to me. Tell me, baby," he said softly, caressing his hair. "What do you feel?"

"I feel too much," he swallowed. "I feel the pain of the world. I hear everything around me and I'm afraid that if I don't get to Washington, something bad is going to happen. It's like something has been blocking me, holding me back from something. I'm not supposed to go there, yet I am. Do you understand what I'm saying?" He looked at him, his eyes pleading.

"I think so. I'm trying to. And Derek, he has something to do with this, doesn't he?"

"He was there when I opened my eyes, there from the beginning."

"Your hand is trembling."

"I feel strange. I think Derek may have been poisoning me somehow."

"Oh my God."

Suddenly, Carden growled angrily. "Shit. They're following us."

"Who?" Rory looked behind him.

"Them. Hold on."

\* \* \* \*

"Where in the hell did he go?" Paul demanded.

Dennis actually winced.

Thiago sighed. "He went to Washington with Carden...ah, William."

"He got into a vehicle with a strange construction worker he barely knows, who thinks he's who?"

"Carden Adair," Dennis supplied.

"We should call the police. Rory's in danger."

"No," Dennis said, "he isn't. I don't think that guy would hurt him."

"But you said this guy's boyfriend claimed he was insane, on meds."

"He was lying," Thiago said suddenly.

Dennis looked at him. "How do you know that? Before you believed him."

"I don't know. I just have this feeling, it's so strong, it's telling me to leave it alone."

"I'm not going to let Rory get killed by some serial killer," Paul cried.

Thiago placed a hand on Paul's chest. "You can't compete with Carden. Don't try."

"But that guy is not Carden. He's not a vampire."

\* \* \* \*

"Carden, are you all right?"

"We've lost them for now," he said.

"Your forehead is all wet and you're shaking all over." Rory found some tissues in the glove compartment. He pressed one to Carden's forehead. "My God," he gasped, staring at it.

"What? What is it?" he demanded, his eyes on the road.

"It's...it's red."

Carden glanced at the tissue. "Shit. Am I bleeding?"

"I...no, it's your...it's your sweat. It's like blood."

\* \* \* \*

Hands wound around his throat like snakes. "Stop it. I can't drive like this," Derek cried out.

*You've lost him. You have no idea where he is.*

"Don't hurt me."

*Sniveling coward. You sold your soul to have him. Deal with it. And now, he's becoming. He's hasn't been taking the serum.*

"Only today. He took his own lunch. He refused..."

Hands tightened around his windpipe.

*He doesn't trust you anymore. You're useless. We'll have to handle this ourselves.*

Derek tried in vain to control the car. He was swerving all over the road. When he saw the lights of the oncoming truck, he screamed. His last

thoughts were of Carden. *My love. Reach the statue and kill the bastards. Kill them...allllllllll.*

\* \* \* \*

"You should pull over," Rory told him. "Carden, you're not well."

"I can't. We can't stop. We have to get there."

"I'll drive."

"No," he said. Voices in his head again, the scent of something sweet and warm. *Blood.* He licked his lips. It was intoxicating. "Rory," he moaned, "I'm so hungry."

"Carden? Do you need...you need blood, don't you?"

"I think so. My stomach. I feel as if I'm going to throw up. I have to stop." He turned the car to the right and pulled over to the curb. He got out, went around the car and walked into the field. It was dark and the only sound was the sound of Carden heaving.

Rory was scared. He had no idea what was going on. He thought this was over. He got out of the car.

"No, Rory," Carden yelled, "get in. Get in now."

When Rory didn't move, he felt himself tackled by something and shoved into the back seat of the car. Carden lay on top of him, looking down into

his eyes, his chest heaving. He placed a finger to his lips.

Rory's chest was heaving. It wasn't only fear. It was the nearness of Carden, his breath on his face, his hard body laying on his.

*If you're quiet, they won't notice.*

*Who won't notice? And oh God, Carden, I want you so much.*

A hand moved over his hair and cupped the side of his face. He lifted Rory's head and kissed him passionately, another hand moving to unzip Rory's pants.

Rory held back a moan.

Carden's hand reached in and fondled Rory's cock. His mouth captured even more of his, his smooth tongue mingling with his.

Rory held on tight, the moan now escaping his lips.

Carden released him. "It's all right. They've gone now." He sat up, attempted to get out.

"What do you mean *it's all right*?" Rory demanded, scrambling after him. "You intending on leaving me hard like this?"

"We need to leave. We have at least a two-day drive still ahead of us if I drive straight."

"You need to sleep," Rory grumbled, not happy.

"No," he said, getting behind the wheel, "I don't."

Rory closed the passenger door and did up his seatbelt. "What in the hell do you mean, you don't?"

"That was one thing...when I came out of the coma, I couldn't sleep very much. I never told Derek. It was like I didn't need to sleep. If I got an hour here and there, it was enough." He drove away from the road. "And just now, I heaved, but didn't bring anything up. It's bizarre."

"What was that in the fucking back seat?" Rory persisted.

"It's just that they couldn't sense me. I merged our scents and yours they don't know."

"So fucking glad I could be of service."

Carden glanced at him, then laughed.

"You think it's funny. He thinks it's funny, me with a boner."

Carden reached for his hand. "No time for that now, Rory. But I remember."

"You do?"

"Um, I remembered fucking you when I was lying on you back then. I remember it being pretty good." He glanced at him.

"Pretty good?"

"I love you, Rory," he said, squeezing his hand. "But that will have to be on hold for now. I can't spare the time. If they find me, I'm not sure I have the strength yet to fight them off."

"So, you remember everything?" Rory held his breath.

"I remember it all."

\* \* \* \*

Dennis stared at Thiago. "Close the club? We'll lose money."

"We have to go," Thiago said. "Carden is calling us to be there."

"Carden? So, you are telling me that William is Carden?"

"He is," Thiago said. "He knows now and he's just sent me a message. He said, come."

Dennis smiled. "And in which sense?"

"You have a dirty mind."

"God yes, where you're concerned I do. Take off those pants, will you?"

"I'd love to play, honey," he reached for him and kissed him hard on the mouth, "but it will have to wait."

"Are we in danger again?"

"If he doesn't reach that statue, we are. Come on, sweetie."

"Can we fly?"

"I can levitate. You can't. We're driving and we have a lot of catching up to do. Carden and Rory are hours ahead. Come on."

\* \* \* \*

Carden didn't tell him in words. He showed him the entire thing in his mind. At the end, Rory was gripping the dashboard. "Who...or what are they?"

"Demons," he said.

"And they could do what again exactly?"

"Corrupt the vampires and force them to revolt. Draw enough power from them to dominate. It would be a different world."

"You were supposed to die. Oh my God," Rory put his face in his hands. "That's where I'm lost."

Carden kept his eyes on the road. "When I destroyed Declen and his followers, I knew it was the end for me. I did it willingly. Without my power, the demons wouldn't rise. It's complicated, all about the balance."

"Okay, I get that."

"To give them enough power to rise above, the demons separated me from my power. By doing that, they prevented my demise and allowed me to exist, but to be impotent. They imprisoned my powers in that statue. For a long time, I was comatose. I assume the severing of my power from my physical body created trauma. But the demons want me to continue to exist. If I die, my powers die and they will sink down under. You get it?"



Rory nodded.

"The last thing they want, however, is for me to be restored to my former self, because I can defeat them."

"And Derek was one of them?"

"Merely a mortal servant, assigned to guard me, feed me something which prevented me from having any vampire symptoms so to speak."

"They promised him something."

"Um, I assume it was me."

"Nice prize."

"Not really, not if you realize that now, I crave blood and I'm trying to keep it at bay, but soon I will have to eat."

"I'll feed you."

"No. I'd drain you Rory. My hunger is too great. I'll be all right as long as I don't start feeding. If I do, I'll eat through a dozen."

Rory sighed. "Can you hold out?"

"I'll have to. Thiago and Dennis are on the way."

\* \* \* \*

They looked like bats and they were coming straight at them, hitting the windshield and blinding them.

Rory was terrified. "God, there's blood everywhere."

“Good,” Carden announced, screeching to a halt, “just in time for dinner.”

Rory hid his eyes as Carden grabbed one after another of the bat-like creatures and bit into them. This was a nightmare. And he wasn’t sure if they’d make it out this time. *Carden needs blood, Rory. Feed him or he’ll die. Offer him your throat now.*

Rory moved as if in a trance. He opened his shirt. “Drink,” he said.

Carden looked up from where he stood, trying to bite into the neck of that strange demon bat. His teeth were that of an ordinary mortal, so the task wasn’t easy. Rory looked enticing as hell, standing there, his shirt undone, his hair lifting softly in the wind.

“Come on, baby, drink,” he whispered.

Human blood would drive him over the edge. He couldn’t. “What’s wrong with you? Rory, you’re in a trance.” It was them, tempting him and right now the blood from these creatures were not doing it for him.

He licked his lips.

Rory was too close. “Drink and then fuck me.”

*Fuck his dead corpse drained of blood, vampire.*

NO!

He pushed Rory back. “Get in the truck.”

“Don’t you want me?”

“Rory,” he grabbed his arm, shook him, “Wake up. Get in. Let’s go.”

Rory seemed to wake from a dream suddenly. They were moving. Carden's gaze were on the road and he was rolling ahead. "Are you all right? What happened?"

"The demons got to you. Don't listen to voices."

"I'm sorry. I'm tired. Did I sleep?"

"You've been asleep for hours. We're going to stop soon."

"No, we need to get there."

"We'll stop for a few hours in a hotel. I have something I must do and I can't do it on the road. It will be all right."

\* \* \* \*

Around midnight, government officials called an emergency meeting in Washington about midnight. They were concerned about the crowd that had gathered around the Carden Adair memorial. "Tonight," a woman announced on the news, "Carden will rise."

"Who is this woman?" one of the president's aides demanded.

"Her name is Willowmeena," the press secretary said. "She's a powerful psychic."

"She's a nut," the president replied. "We've called the riot squad. Why haven't they all been arrested?"

The press secretary looked pale. "They've tried. It's like some kind of a force field surrounding them. They've linked hands around the statue. No one can get near them."

"Then pull the damn statue down," the president bellowed. "Get the army and bomb the thing. It's...evil."

The reverend sat in the corner of the round room. Suddenly, he stood. "Do it soon. We don't have much time."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

“He’s waiting for us,” Thiago said suddenly as Dennis turned on the radio.

“Waiting where?”

“I don’t know yet, but we’ll be with them in about two hours.”

Dennis was trying to get some reception on the radio. Finally, he got something.

“...not to alarm the public, but army helicopters are flying overhead.”

Thiago looked at Dennis. “It’s begun.”

“What? Damn it, Thiago. This vampire thing is for the birds. Why don’t I know what you know?”

“Too young.”

“What’s happening?”

“Carden’s power is in that statue. The government is controlled by the religious right and they think that monument is somehow fueling the evil. If they try and release Carden’s power,

demons will move to stop them. There will be a blood bath in the street.”

“Shit.”

*Carden? They are ready to destroy the statue. Where in the hell are you?*

\* \* \* \*

Rory sat on the bed while Carden stood in the corner of the room, in front of the window. His eyes were closed and he stood perfectly still. He didn't speak for what seemed like forever. Then abruptly, he turned and looked at Rory. “She can hold them back for now, but as soon as Thiago and Dennis arrive, we have to leave.”

“She? You mean...”

He nodded. “They can't touch her. She's not flesh, but she's the only thing that stands between them and destruction.” Carden moved closer.

Rory shuddered.

“It's all right, Rory.”

“Hold me.”

Carden moved onto the bed. He pulled Rory up into his arms, held him tight.

“Will things go back to the way they were. You'll be like you were before?”

“I don't know.” He kissed Rory's neck.

“Are you hungry?”

“Um,” he nodded and then released him.

"I trust you. Carden, make love to me. There's time and it might be the last..."

"Don't say that. And, Rory, if I get excited, I'll..."

"Bite me? I'll take my chances. I love you. I love you so much. I knew that someday you'd come back to me. We can't be apart. I can't go on without you."

"Oh, Rory," he whispered. He kissed him deeply, scrambling up onto the bed. Hastily, they stripped off each other's clothes. Rory clung to Carden's hard body, running his hands over his flesh. It felt so familiar, so good. "I belong to you," Rory told him.

"I belong to you," Carden replied, moving his lips over his throat to his chest. He licked one nipple then moved down to his navel.

When Rory felt Carden's mouth capture his cock, he cried out and tore at Carden's dark hair.

Carden's mouth moved up and down his shaft, which his hand struggled to move up under him. A finger found his sensitive opening and began to tease it.

Rory moved his hips, gasping as Carden sucked him almost to climax and then pushed him over and up onto his knees. His cock impaled him deeply and thoroughly and there was no pain, only pleasure and then a rather jarring pain at the side of his throat.

Carden kept moving his hips in and out while the sounds of his sucking and swallowing filled the room. It went on, Rory swooning in pleasure, drifting, fading.

\* \* \* \*

*Carden, stop!*

Dennis cried out, jarring Thiago out of his trance. "What?"

"He's killing him."

"Who's killing who?"

"Carden, Jesus, he's draining Rory dry. Hurry up. How much further?"

"At least a half hour."

"Stop the car. Do your levitation thing and get me there, now!"

Thiago looked at him doubtfully. "You want me to carry you in the air?"

"Thiago, do it! Rory isn't going to last much longer."

When Dennis and Thiago burst into the room, Carden was sitting in the corner, his hands on his face.

Dennis ran over to the bed and lifted Rory in his arms. "No, no, no," he moaned, rocking him back and forth. "Carden, Fuck! What have you done? You've killed him. You killed him."

"Carden," Thiago snapped. "Turn him."



"I can't," Carden whispered, his voice sounding horrified. "I can't, Thiago. It's too late."

"You have fucking power, use it!" Dennis screamed. He was still holding Rory. "You love him, don't you?"

"Yes," he hissed.

"Save him."

"How?"

"I don't care how. Try!" Dennis bellowed.

\* \* \* \*

Carden got to his feet. He walked over to the bed and looked down at Rory, lying lifeless in Dennis' arms. Thiago came and stood beside Carden. He placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't you dare comfort him!" Dennis groaned. "He killed my Rory."

Carden looked at Thiago, full of misery. He hadn't meant it. He just couldn't stop.

Thiago gasped. "Your eyes are...red."

"Too much blood," he replied. Even his voice seemed drenched with it. He laid his hand on Rory's chest, closed his eyes. *Please, sister, I know it's a lot to ask. I need your power to merge with mine. Bring him back.* Tears fell from his eyes, blood red.

*My power is being used to hold back the destroyers. You're on your own. And if you deplete what power you have now, you'll be too weak to reclaim yourself.*

*I have to risk it. I love him.*

*Courage and concentration. You will weaken.*

Carden took a breath. He pressed his hand down over Rory's chest, bit into his own arm and let the blood flow out. "Open his mouth, Dennis," he commanded. "Do it now." He pressed harder, positioned his bleeding arm at Rory's mouth. "Awake," he called out. "Awake."

As Rory moaned and opened his eyes, Carden stumbled back, unprepared for how much it had taken out of him. "Thiago," he whispered, as Thiago caught him, "get me to the statue."

Dennis drove while keeping a watchful eye on Rory in the front seat. Thiago cradled Carden's head on his lap in the back.

"How much farther?" Thiago asked Dennis.

"We're outside the city now."

"Be careful," Carden cautioned. "They're all around us."

Rory turned to look at Carden. "Please be all right."

"He'll be fine. Carden," Thiago said, "let me feed you."

"No," he shook his head. "You need your strength. As soon as we get out of the vehicle, they'll attack us. I can't fight them. I'm too weak. You must hold them off—allow me to reach the statue."

"I'll do everything in my power."

“And Dennis,” he pleaded, “you take care of Rory.”

“I can take care of myself. I’m a vampire now.”

“No, you’re not,” all three said at the same time.

“Then how...”

“I gave you some of my blood,” Carden began, then couldn’t go on.

“It’s okay,” Thiago said, “save your strength. He didn’t give you enough to turn you, Rory, just to bring you back.”

\* \* \* \*

Rory laid his head back against the seat, tears stinging his eyes. What he’d given sacrificed his strength to save him. And now he might not make it to that statue.

*I’ll make it, Rory.*

*Sweetie, my baby, I love you so much. I would have died for you.*

*When I thought I’d killed you, I didn’t want to go on. I would have stayed there until I perished. I’m so sorry. I just couldn’t control myself.*

*It’s okay. I forgive you. My love, my sweet, beautiful love.*

*It will be all right. I promise. Now go with Dennis. He will keep you safe until it’s over.*

*No. I’m not leaving you.*

*Rory!*

*I said no.*

Luckily, there was no more said about the matter.

\* \* \* \*

When they got within a mile of the monument, Carden struggled up to a sitting position. Thiago was still supporting his head and for a moment, he lowered his forehead and pressed it against his. *I love you, Carden.*

*It's all right, Thiago. It will be all right. Get me as close as you can, then stand with the others, take their hands and don't break the circle, no matter what happens. They won't be able to penetrate it. And please, protect Rory.*

*"You have my word."*

\* \* \* \*

Rory couldn't believe the crowd of people. They stood around the statue, hand in hand. The army helicopters threatened overhead. The car stopped right in front. Dark shadows loomed around the circle.

Thiago got out and opened the back door. Rory and Dennis followed.

“Damnation, evil creature of darkness!” a voice blasted on the loudspeaker as Carden was helped out of the vehicle by Thiago.

The people around the statue began to chant. “Carden, Carden, Carden.”

Carden fell to his knees and Thiago lifted him up on his shoulder.

“No,” Dennis said, holding Rory back, “don’t.”

“I have to get him to the circle. Go now. Take hands with the others. Go!”

Dennis grabbed Rory’s hand and they ran. The circle opened. Unseen hands grabbed and clawed at them, but Dennis managed to pull Rory inside to safety. They linked hands with the others.

Rory and Dennis watched Thiago and Carden anxiously, the distance seemed enormous although it was only a few feet.

“Demon spawn!” the voice preached. “All who follow this bloodsucking demon will perish. Destroy him. Destroy the pure blood.”

Black images fired around Thiago and Carden. Carden was on his feet, but shaky. Thiago supported him as they both tried to fight off the evil. A fine net, which looked as though it was made from worms and spiders, wrapped around their legs, dragging them down.

“Thiago,” Dennis cried out.

Rory gripped his hand harder. “Don’t break the circle. Carden will protect him.”

“He can hardly stand.”

Rory put his chin up. The chanting of his name intensified. “Don’t even underestimate him. Carden, Carden, Carden!”

“Devil spawn, not of God, will bring about...” the words were lost as the chanting got louder. They were drowning him out.

Carden’s head emerged suddenly from the net and he opened his arms, bursting free, dragging Thiago with him. They crawled, then stumbled to the circle and as they got closer, the circle expanded and swallowed them up.

Carden and Thiago found themselves in the middle of the circle.

The crowd was laughing and crying, the sounds filling the night.

Carden looked at Thiago. “Grab onto Dennis’ and Rory’s hands. Don’t let go, okay?”

Thiago nodded.

Carden raised his hands over his head. He felt the loving, protective force of the crowd. He faced his own likeness. “Open!”

A gasp rang through the crowd as the earth seemed the tremble beneath their feet. The circle broke, people turned and there was the statue, cracked in two, directly down the middle.

Rory was trying to get to the statue, but there were too many people scrambling to see what was happening.

“Carden!” he screamed. “Where are you?”

Thiago and Dennis were hugging one another.

There was an odd murmur in the crowd. The helicopter overhead was moving. “Disperse,” a voice demanded. “Move away, go home. There is nothing more to see. Go home or face arrest.”

People began to move.

“Where in the hell is Carden?” Rory tried to claw his way through the crowd, which was moving in the opposite direction.

Dennis reached out and grabbed Rory. “Thiago says he’s okay.”

“Okay how?” he sobbed.

“Like he was before all of this began,” a voice said. “I’m Damien Phillips, a professor from Integrated University of Utah. I’m very pleased to finally meet you all.”

Rory turned to see a stranger standing there.

“You know us?”

“I know of you,” he said. “I helped organize all this, brought together the faithful.”

“You make Carden sound like a god,” Thiago said.

Phillips nodded. “But he is. A human god.”

“He’s a vampire.” Dennis laughed. “You called him human.”

“He has a human heart. He is from God, whatever you believe that to be. He was restored

by divine intervention. His existence is essential to ours."

Rory swallowed. "Do you know where he is?"

He smiled. "Yes. He's standing right over there."

Rory gasped and turned around and sure enough, there was his Carden standing beside what was left of that statue.

Rory raced into his arms, almost knocking him over. He hugged onto him for a long time before he spoke. "Are you okay?"

"Never better. You?"

"Scared. And your statue, look at it."

"I never liked it. Made me look fat."

Rory's eyes opened, then he laughed. "A clown?"

He shrugged, picking Rory up in his arms. "I want to go somewhere and make love to you. Any objections?"

"You won't get any from me. Only, could you let me live this time?"

"Low blow," Carden shook his head. "I'll do my best."

Rory laughed. "There's one more thing."

Carden arched a brow.

"Can you find a guy for Paul? I don't want him to be alone."



Carden stared up at the sky. "I can do that. Question is do I want to? He got to fuck you all those months. I hate him."

"Please. He's a good man."

Carden shrugged. "Done deal, babe."

Phillips was still standing there as Carden approached, Rory in his arms. He lowered his eyes.

Carden smiled at him, then looked at Thiago and Dennis. "Coming or what?"

They followed as Carden put Rory in the car and Dennis and Thiago crawled into the backseat.

"So now what?" Rory asked Carden.

"Back to the club?"

"Is it over?"

"It's never over, but it's okay for now."

Rory took his hand. "Am I going to have any unusual reactions from your blood?"

"You might crave raw meat." He laughed.

"Not funny."

"You might want my cock all the time."

"Redundant. I wanted that before."

"That's right."

Rory laughed.

"You won't get a cold. You'll probably live longer."

"Thanks. Nice gift."

"Least I could do for killing you."

Rory smiled.

"I hope we get to stop before we get home," Dennis said from the back seat. "I really need to fuck and feed."

Everyone laughed.

"In that order?" Rory joked.

"Hey, you bet, I got a hot stud back here."

"I'm sleeping. Save it," Thiago protested.

"So, anyone up for it?" Dennis teased.

"Fucking or feeding?" Carden asked.

Rory hit him. "You are not fucking Dennis."

"Damn!" they both exclaimed at the same time and then howled with laughter.

Rory hit Carden again.

Carden pulled into a rather luxurious hotel a few hours later and they got rooms next to each other. Rory took a shower while Carden lay on the bed and turned on the television.

When Rory came out of the shower, the news was reporting the events in Washington. Both Rory and Carden watched, flabbergasted.

"Apparently, people who objected to making a vampire into a hero placed explosives around the statue and blew it up. Government officials were aware of the upcoming explosion and watched carefully from overhead as the bomb went off. Worshippers, most left-wing fanatics were said to have been trying to save the statue by chanting to some unseen entity.

“Luckily, there were no casualties. Officials say there are no plans to rebuild the statue at this time.”

Carden was laughing so hard, blood tears ran down his face. Rory was furious. “How dare they lie like that? This isn’t funny.”

Carden grabbed Rory and pulled him down into his arms. “It’s hilarious. Rory, the truth will never be told. That’s the way it is. My short-lived shot at fame.” He chuckled, tickling Rory.

“I don’t understand you.”

“You don’t have to. You just have to love me.”

“But you’re so...I mean, you’re almost a...”

“I’m Carden,” he said. “I’m a man inside the body of a vampire and I love you. I want to be loved. I don’t want to think about tomorrow, okay?”

Rory nodded and kissed him deeply. He crawled up on top of him and began to undo his shirt. He could live with that.

\* \* \* \*

Thiago was very tired, more tired than Dennis had ever seen him. He was a little worried.

“Don’t be,” he said, smiling. “Carden gave me something.”

“He did? What?”

Thiago pulled Dennis down into his arms. "Forgiveness and pride. He gave me a reason to go on day after day."

"I thought I was your reason."

"You are, my love, but this is something more. We connected somehow. We saved each other. I love him like a brother."

Dennis kissed him. "I'm proud of you."

Thiago smiled. He turned around and wagged a finger at the shimmering ghost of Dennis' mother.

"As for you, Mom, don't look. I'm about to do some rude things to your son."

\* \* \* \*

Carden moved in and out of Rory slowly, reverently. There was something even more powerful about him than before. He was completely in control and he seemed happy. "I am," he said, as Rory gasped with pleasure.

Carden kissed his throat and stroked Rory's cock as he moved in him at a quickening pace. "I'm complete," he groaned and they both came together, Rory gasping, Carden breathing evenly.

They lay together now, quietly, Rory absolutely happy.

"She is with me, inside me. She didn't leave me," he said, kissing Rory's forehead.

“I feel the difference.”

“She will temper me, help me to feel more. I want to make you happy.”

“Carden,” tears stung his eyes, “you do. How could you not?”

Suddenly, they both froze as they heard shouting coming from the next room. “Yeah, yeah, fuck...fuck me...God, yes...Thiago...god, Gawd...yesssssssss!”

They both laughed, rolling around on the bed. “Looks like Thiago makes Dennis happy as well,” Rory muttered.

Carden hugged him close. “Was there ever any doubt?”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A. J. Llewellyn lives in California, but dreams of living in Hawaii. Frequent trips to all the islands, bags of Kona coffee in his fridge and a healthy collection of Hawaiian records keep this writer refueled. A. J. loves male/male erotica, has a passion for all animals (especially the dog, the cat and the turtle). A. J. believes that love is a song best sung out loud.

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I write not only for my own pleasure, but for the pleasure of my readers. I can't remember a time in my life when I haven't written and told stories. When I'm not writing, I'm dreaming about writing, doing something wild and adventurous, or trying to make the world a better and more open minded place to live in. I adore beautiful men, and I know I'm not alone in this! Eroticism between consenting adults, in all its many forms is the icing on the cake of life!

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