



A Satyr's Tale: Zaza and Sylus

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Warning

This book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language. It may be considered offensive to some readers.

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DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is dedicated to all the little girls like me who waited
in silence for their hero to come and for every woman that need
their own personal *Satyr*.

Other books by Shiree McCarver

A SATYR'S TALE: SELBY AND DARIUS

FOREVER MOONLIGHT

THE LORD AND THE SCORPION

CHAPTER ONE

Zaza Draper stood in the bathroom doorway casting a frustrated glance at the naked woman still sleeping in her bed. She finished towel drying her boy-short hair and pitched the bath towel into the trendy, chic clothes hamper.

She was trying to resist the impulse to wake her up and tell her to get out. Za tried not to be rude with Megan, because she has been her lover on and off since she elected to openly live a lesbian lifestyle three years ago. Long enough for Megan to adequately get that she didn't allow women to remain all night, or move any of their shit into her house. Not even a toothbrush. That is, unless you were her close friend, Selby Maison.

Selby was the only individual, be it male or female, who understood virtually everything there was to comprehend about Za. They became immediate best friends while residing in the county orphanage awaiting foster homes.

She glanced at the bed again and swept her fingers through her fuzzy hair as she made her way over to the off-white vanity. She sat upon the red velvet upholstered bench and looked at her image in the mirror.

Za removed a tube of hair gel from a side drawer, squirted a line in her hand, and spread the gel between both palms. Deftly, she swept her hands through her mane and fingered it into style, sculpting spiked bangs to feather across the forehead.

Her eyes drifted over Megan's prone figure wrapped in the cream-colored satin sheets, one pale slender thigh and calf exposed as if she were erotically posing for one of her magazine photo shoots, and questioned for the second time that evening, what the fuck had she been thinking? Allowing Megan back into her private life and her bed again, after the episode she pulled the last time they were together, this was probably a foolish mistake.

Za appreciated that Megan was convinced she was the love of her life and, at the beginning, it felt wonderful. It even made the sex better. Now, Megan was like the other women she'd slept with after her ex-fiancé Peter Worth. They all wanted long-term assurances.

She wondered why folks spoiled good sex by thinking about the future. Why not just live for the moment, and appreciate the fundamental fact that sex is an essential need. Besides, it was too easy to retract verbal statements of love and promises so why bother expressing it at all.

Za smiled briefly as she saw Megan's reflection as she sat up. Her long, model-thin arms stretched above her head, causing her small, big-nippled breasts to thrust forward with the elegant arch of her back.

Za considered Megan a natural beauty. An authentic redhead with luscious full lips, slanted green eyes, she stood six feet tall in two-inch heels. She was the cover girl for numerous ads and billboards nationwide. She even had her own personal line of cosmetics. Megan was every man's wet dream and she could graze pussy like there would be no tomorrow. Hence, the fundamental basis she'd found her way back into Za's bed.

"Hey, baby, why are you up, it's after midnight? Come back to bed."

Za reached for the lotion bottle and automatically started carefully applying it to her arms and legs. "Time for you to go, Megan," she stated without turning around to view the dissatisfaction she expected to find on the other woman's face.

She noted the loud sighs of displeasure in the quietness of the room and noted the shifting of bed covers out of the corner of her eye as she applied lotion on the other leg.

Za looked up from her task as the graceful naked figure stepped down from the built-in dais steps leading up to the bed.

Megan came closer, looking down at her intently. Za sat up, inwardly releasing a quiet curse as she waited for the theatrics to come.

A livid light smoldered in Megan's green eyes as they seized Za's full golden-brown stare.

"Baby, don't give me that rude look, I understand where I fit in with you. I'm not going to cry and implore you to love me, or mention that we move in together, or anything else that will supply you with a reason to push me out of your life." She pouted prettily as she eased closer, reaching out a hand to run her fingers down Za's arm. "I learned my lesson after the last time."

Za couldn't help but sigh with relief. Finally, Megan seemed to comprehend how things were between them. "It means a lot to me that you're not giving me attitude. Megan," she admitted. "I was concerned this evening might have been a mistake."

Megan went down on her knees before her. Za shook with pending desire as the other woman began to touch her outer thighs with long manicured fingers.

"I'm not sure how I should acknowledge that." Megan's eyes dropped to where her pale hands rested on Za's upper thigh. "It's not flattering to be perceived as potential drama."

Za swallowed and licked her lips, trying hard to ignore the palpable sensations of Megan's fingers against her skin and was doing a lousy job of it. "Shouldn't you be getting dressed now?"

Megan closed the last few inches between them; her lips brushed against hers. When their lips made contact a second time, the kiss became deep and seductive as Megan brought her hands behind Za's head and drew her down on top of her as she relaxed back on the richly soft and plush gold-tinted carpet.

Their bodies strained against each other, their nipples hardened. Za felt a moisture pool between her thighs and, based on Megan's familiar reaction as she prompted Za over onto her back, she was feeling the intense warmth too.

Megan ran her hand along Za's leg, massaging the heated smooth skin. Her other hand successfully acquired hold of hers, lifting it to her small breast, inviting Za to appreciate its softness.

Za twirled her thumbs across the pliant flesh, teasing the thick nipples, squeezing until Megan eventually unleashed a loud moan.

Opening her mouth to Megan's kiss, Za spread her thighs wide as Megan glided her hand down between her shaky legs and roughly stroked her. Eagerly, their tongues slipped against each other and moans filtered through the room. After a couple of minutes of rubbing and kissing, Za adjusted her frame; she exchanged her palm on Megan's breast for her mouth. She wasted no time closing her lips around the rosy areola and swept the flat of her tongue against her nipple.

"Mmm," Megan hummed, arching into Za's suckling mouth. "That feels so good."

Za desired Megan. Undeniably, lust was a good reason to presume you could create a long-term bond. That is, if someone wanted a committed relationship. The reality stood, she didn't. Her physical attraction to Megan didn't leave her witless as to what she was trying to do.

Megan was seducing her. If she allowed it, the woman would continue doing so until the morning sun appeared. Megan was attempting to ultimately fulfill her goal of remaining the night and, as Za laid there a quivering mass of flesh, Megan was winning this ongoing battle.

Having a woman that really enjoyed making love to women was gratifying in ways that only women could ever understand. It was as satisfactory as masturbating your own body. There was no rush to begin and no erection placing your orgasm on a crucial time clock. You could come as many times as you needed, and enjoy penetration only if you were in the mood to offer the toys. Megan was the right partner in bed; however, out of bed, she could be selfish, demanding, clingy, and most of all, insecure.

Za allowed herself to float on the relieving waves of delight that Megan was sending through her flesh as she continued a tour down the span of her body.

Za pressed the heel of her foot into the small of Megan's back and humped against her active fingers, pushing first one, then two digits deep inside her vagina simulating a ramming cock. Her lips, teeth and tongue, kissed, nibbled, and teased.

"Oh, God," Za gasped for air. Her head bobbed from side to side as she bit her bottom lip. There was an intensive perception of a deep need inside her to surrender to Megan's crooning words of affections and love, strongly pressing her into conceding the same. Za mentally acknowledged she

understood why Megan would want her love so desperately, but it would be a lie if she said she loved her in return. She steadfastly stayed quiet, deciding lust was a long way from being in love.

"Let me love you, Zaza...please, let me love you." Megan balanced her body so that she was lying atop of Za. She mastered and sucked on her lips in a breath-stealing kiss. Her fingers joined with Megan's as she grunted and rotated her pubic bone against the other woman's clitoris.

Passions flamed hot as Za rocked back and forth against her womanly curves. Musky sweat emerged in thin layers over their flesh. Megan was the first to have a dramatic release. The vocals from her pleasure provided Za with a final push. Her flushed body stiffened as she cried her orgasm into Megan's mouth. Sweet ripples of satisfaction forcefully produced a seductive bewilderment to her quivering form and she shut her eyes.

"I will never love anyone else...ever."

"Megan," Zaza warned.

"You are everything I could ever want in a woman, Za. I love everything about you. I even love watching you come," Megan continued as she smeared the sheen of sweat from Za's brow. "I know you loathe to hear this, but I can't help it. I genuinely believe I would die without you."

"Don't say stuff like that." Za sat up, drawing her knees up beneath her chin, then wrapped her arms about her legs and rested her chin on her knees.

"You must admit you like the way I touch you," Megan said in a tense, clipped voice that forbade any denials.

"Yes, you are the best, Megan," Za softly agreed.

"So?" Megan asked, smiling at the look of bliss that lingered on her lover's face.

"So...what, Megan?" Za looked up into Megan's searching eyes. She saw the expectation and longing for everything, Za couldn't give to her.

"Tell me that we can be exclusive. Tell me that after a few months we can hopefully take it to the next level and move in together."

Za visibly tensed.

"Look, if you can't offer me what I desire then fuck you, Zaza! I have women and men knocking down my door." She flung her hair over her shoulders in a gesture of defiance. "There is no reason for me to continue kissing your ass, but I do it because I recognize you love me. You're just too stubborn to acknowledge you need someone in your life."

"I got someone, it's just not you." Za responded clearly, abandoning all pretenses. "I got Selby and she appreciates me as I am."

Megan face became enraged. “Fuck Selby! She doesn't want you the way I do. She is more of a pal with whom you get off with occasionally. She's blissfully marrying a man, for God's sake. Then where will that leave you, when she no longer has time for you?”

“I've informed you time and time again to lay off, Megan and since you can't take a hint...it's over! This time I mean it,” Za declared as she moved onto her feet. “Now get dressed and make sure you turn the latch when you get the fuck out of my house.”

Without a backward glance, Zaza walked into the bathroom slamming the door behind her.

CHAPTER TWO

Zaza was tired and felt in the desperate need of a nip of something more calming than six cups of the espresso she had throughout the day. It had been twenty-two hours since she managed a quick power nap on the office sofa; it was just enough to get her through the three a.m. conference call from Berlin. At least this was her last stop before she could go home and crash.

Life was running her ragged. She had an executive palm pilot full of commitments just waiting for her to manage. Her capable assistant took care of her share of it but the majority required her special expertise in the area of ass kissing. Mainly, the production promoters were her entrepreneurial beast of burden. She personally spent most of the morning rearranging her friend and invaluable client, Selby Mason's, future sold-out concert dates around her upcoming nuptials.

Once you stir in the labors of being the maid of honor for said wedding and heighten it with the repeated calls from a possessive ex-lover, you have the makings of hysteria.

Za's motive for having her drink at this exact location wasn't spur-of-the-moment. She never took a step without a principal purpose. She continued dropping by here in hopes of conferring with the seemingly reclusive owner. No one she questioned even knew his name. They widely identified him only by his initials and that he dropped in from time to time to perform with the house band. Otherwise, there was not much else to tell.

Well, she decided this would be the last effort on her part. The man didn't even have the courtesy to acknowledge any of the messages or free show passes she'd left here for him. At this point, Za wasn't sure she still wanted to book her clients in this place. She sighed heavily. All in all, this had been a fucked-up week.

Now, what was she going to do about Selby? Za was still having a hard time accepting her friend was marrying a man she met and made out with in a local hotel lobby men's room.

That had to be one of the most buck-wild crazy moves anyone could make. Especially someone as well known as Selby was in the entertainment field. Her friend used to be one of the most levelheaded women she knew, but lately, since Selby had met Darius it was as if she was dealing with a completely unknown person. Za couldn't say it was a bad thing because she'd never seen her happier, she was absolutely glowing. Admittedly, in a way, Za envied her finding that kind of love.

Of course, on the down low, Za ensured to the best of her abilities that Selby wasn't being deluded again, as her first husband had managed. That lying bastard had the nerve to sue Selby for a half of everything she possessed. It was as if breaking her heart hadn't been enough.

Zaza independently took it upon herself to find out all that she could about Selby's new fiancée, Darius Andros, before they exchanged their vows. This time she would be a true friend and do a better job of looking after Selby's interests.

It surprised her when Darius hadn't wanted a prenuptial agreement of his own. After all, he was the first-born son of a wealthy and well-known Greek family who founded the Satyrs' Wine Empire. His portfolio was impressive, but monies didn't say much for his character; that was something that only time would report.

She couldn't help wondering about a man that proposed to a woman he only knew from a one-night escapade in a public bathroom. Something else was going on here and she just couldn't fathom what he was after. It could be just basic natural love, she surmised—at least for some individuals.

In particular, Za pondered about Darius's platinum-blond sidekick, Sylus. He appeared to be more than a close friend to Darius. She also noticed he was always hanging around the happy couple. Selby seemed to be fond of him, but Za didn't care for his pompous attitude.

Za felt relieved when she saw the couple at her favorite table in the back of the cocktail bar get up and leave. It was always the best place to sit and people watch undisturbed.

Diamond Blue was the hottest blues bar in Vegas. It was far enough off the beaten path of the busy strip that tourists didn't bombard it. It was more of a secret watering hole for the locals and a retreat where entertainers could frequent and not be disturbed by the press. There was a metal detector and guards at the door.

If you couldn't leave your phones at the coat desk in the decorative hall of the club you didn't get in. This is the place to chill in the midst of a bustling town and not worry about someone's camera phone recording you during your most private moments.

Za sighed aloud, smiling at the bartender who motioned he was on his way. Her thoughts returned to Selby's reckless behavior and constant need for wine. She didn't know if this was a good thing or not. It didn't seem to influence her performance in any way. In fact, her new stuff was better than anything she'd creatively written in the past. It was different from her original style, but these days' entertainers needed different and bold material just to continue in the mainstream.

Slowly, she leaned back, resting her head against the back cushion of the booth. Her eyes took in the surroundings for lack of anything else to do; she wasn't used to being without her electronic toys and she felt uncomfortable sitting there alone.

Her honey-brown eyes took in the mellow romantic atmosphere. The decor was masculine with key shades of navy and cream surrounded by redwood tables and paneling. There were no TVs

to take away from people tuning into each other instead. A medium-size stage was awaiting the live entertainment that was to come: usually solo individuals or an occasional quartet.

This place caused some of the finest careers in the music business and it has been around so long no one was sure when it originated. She tried for years to get Selby a sit-in with the tiny house band but they had always been engaged years in advance. Even her influence wasn't good enough to get a scheduled meeting with the reclusive owner of the establishment.

He even had the nerve to leave a note with the bartender that if she wished to meet with him, she would have to be around on the nights he chose to stop in and perform. When she asked the bartender when that would be, he politely told her, "S.D. said you would probably ask that and he informed me to tell you, to have faith." What a screwy nonsense way to run negotiations?

Za learned early in her business pursuits that if you wanted to get on the top and stay on top you had to be structured. She would warrant this man never wanted for anything. If he had to struggle half as hard as a black woman did trying to make it in an industry that catered to men, he wouldn't be making a simple meeting request so difficult.

In the initial days of getting Selby's career off the ground, Za scratched and worked her way to make the right connections to get Selby gigs that weren't typically offered to newcomers. Before she knew it, she had established her own business and now she was a recognized conglomerate with several other entertainment agents working for her.

Draper's Entertainment Incorporated was her baby, but Selby's career was the only one she continued to regularly maintain personally. Selby had held her promise and placed her career in Za's hands, and she made Selby a household name, locking in seven-figure music deals.

As soft instrumental jazz filtered through the surround-sound speakers, Zaza Draper, businesswoman extraordinaire, stayed centrally targeted on the issue at hand quite blind to the many interested glances at her petite figure.

Still, they weren't foolish enough to approach any woman while in Diamond Blue unless she approached first. This was a "ladies' choice" bar and many men lost their membership by not following the rules. It was one of the reasons she came here with some of her female dates when she wanted to go out for dinner and dancing.

"If it isn't the too fine for sunshine Zaza Draper. I can die now, for all is right in the competitive world. It's good to see you again. It's been awhile." Bartender Ed smiled and kissed her proffered cheek as he placed her regular apple martini in front of her.

"Hello, Eddie. I see you're busy tonight; it generally don't take me twenty minutes to get my much-needed martini," she teased.

“Yah, well, word’s out on the streets that the boss is performing tonight and the horny babes been creeping up in here like bees on a hive.” He beamed a smile that was flawless against his dark handsome face. “I take it that’s why you picked tonight to stop in, too.”

“No, I absolutely needed this drink before I went home.” She took a sip and released a deep sigh. She crossed her shapely legs. The black skirt didn't do anything to hide her lean, naked thighs. “Yet, if I happened to encounter the man himself while I was here, all the better.”

Za didn’t miss the appreciation in Ed’s eyes, nor did she care.

“I don’t understand why S.D. has been making it so hard on you. I told him how fine you were.”

“Mmm, did you happen to tell him I was a lesbian too?” She arched an eyebrow at him.

He must have realized she had his number. “Huh...I don’t think so, but I don’t know a red-blooded male that wouldn’t see a lesbian as a challenge or a possible two for one.”

“I hear ya.” Za put on her best come-hither smile and crossed her arms beneath her breasts until they peaked into a prominent cleavage. Her white georgette beaded button-front blouse opened wider as she leaned forward. “So Eddie, tell me, did you do that little favor I asked of you? Did you check upstairs in his office to see if he had anything with his full name on it?”

Ed's eyes drifted to the cleavage and once again he moistened his full lips, “Yeah, and you owe me big. His name is--“

“Ed, I need you at the counter right now,” a frantic waitress interrupted. “That asshole is trying to say he gave me a fifty and it was a twenty!”

“Damn, not another idiot.” The bartender's irritation was plain on his wry face; he glanced at Za's breasts once more and cursed. “Za, baby, I will check back on ya in a piece. I must get this handled. I can't have any shit going down tonight, with the owner comin'.”

“Wait, Eddie! What--“ she sighed and cursed softly.

Za turned her attention to her martini, taking a couple of more tiny sips. On crowded nights like this, Za learned to consume slowly, because her limit was one drink per outing.

She looked around with curious eyes; there were plenty of physically attractive women up in here. If she decided she desired to get rid of some of this stress with some sexual therapy, she saw she wouldn't have any difficulties getting action tonight.

Was she honestly in the mood for company? With her luck, she'd probably find someone who wished to snuggle, talk, and draw out the night afterwards. Za definitely wasn't in the state of mind for anyone's emotional baggage. She had overstuffed luggage of her own to deal with. A shadow of sadness came across her face and she shrugged it off. Tonight she wanted to not talk or

think any more for at least four hours.

Za took another sip and enjoyed the smooth burning sensation in her chest as the liquid ease down. Suddenly the club lights grew dimmer into near darkness with the exception of the mini flashlights the servers used to maneuver their way between the tables.

A hush fell over the room. She felt her heart thump against her chest, a perception of foolish excitement flowed through her. *So, I'm about to finally see you.*

She was about to get her first glimpse of this S.D., character. For some reason she felt nervous and excited at the same time as she waited for the owner of Diamond Blue to make his grand entrance. She was more than curious to see and hear the enigma that caused all this excitement amongst the women. Maybe he could use an agent that is, if she liked what she heard.

Blood coursed through his body and he could feel each heartbeat fall into calm unison as his tall frame lowered onto the awaiting barstool. One long muscular leg rested upon the stage as the other braced against the footrest of the stool as he supported the feminine curve of the René Vaboam classical guitar on his leg. He adored this guitar; it was a gift from one of his former enthusiasts, made specifically for him in seventeenth-century Paris after a very delightful two-month stay.

The lighting crew knew to wait until the second intro before turning the spotlight on; they could appreciate the clear effect of his music and not focus solely on his appearance. His elder brother Quintan taught him that and so much more when it came to becoming one with the music and closing out his surroundings.

His ordinary hearing was acute, but humans had become desensitized by the noise and distractions that surrounded them. They ceased to appreciate how music was more than just a song they heard on the radio or TV for background noise. Music is like a remarkable work of cultural art, and as refine as expensive wine, or uninhibited sex. You just had to learn to listen.

His objectification was to heighten their senses with darkness before allowing them to see who composed the music that created emotional reflections.

He strummed the first note before music, melodious and haunting, filled the sizeable bar with a longing for all that was wonderful and glorious. His long, deft fingers played the guitar's strings with proficient care.

In the endless darkness, he could hear their breathing released in tiny puffs and sighs as if they were in the throes of passion. His nostrils flared as a particularly familiar scent of *her* state of arousal wafted his senses staggering him into tightening his hold on the guitar. His fingers stumbled over a few notes. A frown marred his smooth features; he was accustomed to being a distraction, not

being distracted.

Why was she here? Was it by chance or had she intentionally sought out his company? No, if she came to him it would never be for personal reasons.

His penis hardened and he shifted on the stool, shutting his eyes, concentrating on the music, not the woman that had possessed his thoughts since the moment he had seen her in his thoughts. Through his bond with Darius he watched this woman and her friend Selby make love. It had been more than a month but continued to haunt his dreams. How was this possible?

Syl found Zaza Draper an impossible shrew of a woman. Darius claimed the woman hadn't even been with a man for over three years and only slept with women. What good would she be to one such as he?

I do not need a man-hating woman in my life. She will be nothing but trouble, Sylus thought with growing agitation.

"Sylus, my friend, do you need me?"

"No Darius I am fine...go back to fucking your woman and leave me be!"

"I can hear the mistakes in your music, others won't know the difference so don't worry. But it's because Za is there isn't she?"

"Go away Darius, I can handle one simple minded human female!"

The masculine voice in his head chuckled and faded.

As the song vibrated through Za's body in the darkness, she ran her fingers over her bare thighs, pushing the black linen pleated miniskirt up as she went along.

Her fingers trembled and her pussy was already wet with growing desire. She itched to feel those wonderful fingers tickling at her clitoris the way he tickled over the strings of that guitar. At this moment Za didn't care what he looked like or what his name was as long as he didn't stop playing.

Slowly her sling-pumped feet slid apart, causing her thighs to spread wide; she scooted down in her seat. She was so horny she didn't even have to wet her fingers with the moistness of her mouth. Achingly, Za slid her wandering fingers through the lace-scalloped edging of her black Victoria's Secret underwear and felt the thick lips of her Brazilian-waxed pussy. With a deep need, she pushed two fingers between her labia, pushing until the flat of her palm pressed against her clitoris.

She enjoyed the consuming feelings of arousal. She felt the juices from her vaginal walls seeping between the cheeks of her ass and it turned her on even more. Za was thankful for the

convenient leather seating and her underwear for there was no turning back now. She had to come or die.

Za bit inside her bottom lip to keep from moaning aloud, even though she could swear mixed in the eroticism of the music she heard the sounds of people fucking. It was like she was flashed back into one big Greek orgy.

My God, who is this man? How is it possible for him to do this to me with music?

She rolled halfway on her side, lifting a shaky leg until it hit beneath the top of the wooden table, she started fucking herself to the rhythm of the guitar...faster...faster as if he were encouraging her to follow him. Her heart was violently pounding faster and she stiffened while quick little spasms rippled against her fingers.

The fragrance of her sex seemed to permeate her nostrils...but it didn't matter...nothing mattered but this guitar-playing fool. Her eyes were clenched tightly, she didn't even care if the lights had come on and everyone was watching...she was so close to sweet relief.

Her cheeks and upper body grew flushed. Beads of sweat appeared on her brow. Za's upper lip curled back off her teeth in a guttural swish as she pushed against one...two...three fingers.

As the surrounding area remained in the dark, a solo spotlight appeared on the musician sitting in a chair on the platform.

As if sensing a change in the room, Zaza opened her eyes. Gazing straight at her, as if he could see through the darkness, all the way to the rear of the room, was none other than the man she had been doing her best to avoid.

Za's release came upon her; she cried out his name.

"Nooo...Sylus...Sylus..." Spasm after spasm seized her in a sweet, glorious release that seemed to go on as long as he continued to play that guitar.

After what felt like a two-minute orgasm, Zaza finally felt freed from the magical sound as he concluded the melody. She cursed him for making her lose domination over her own body.

"Damn you, it's been you all along, Sylus de Gauls," Za murmured as she picked up her purse, dropped a twenty on the table and hurried from the club, praying it was only in her imagination that he had been watching her through the shadows of darkness.

She would have been even more mortified if she had known for certain Sylus could see and appreciated every second of watching the ecstasy of her release on her beautiful face. Of course she would undoubtedly deny she was even here. Still, she couldn't deny, for one defining moment, she had been extremely thrilled to see the mysterious S.D. was Darius's friend, Sylus de Gauls.

CHAPTER THREE

“Hell no, Selby!” Zaza paced back and forth in front of the gray marbled fireplace in her apartment. Her long slender fingers scratched at the tapered straightedge hairline of her short pixie-style hairdo.

Selby knew the signs when her best friend was vehemently opposed to something because her scalp would start to itch and she would worry her hair with her fingers. She surmised if she wore it longer she would be twirling it around her fingers too.

She also knew she wouldn't be ecstatic about this bit of news, but she assume she would at least pretend to go along with the program. Why did Zaza and Sylus de Gauls dislike each other so? Za was in a “date women only” phase, but she didn't seem to have a problem with dildos or a woman with a strap-on. So, if it wasn't an abhorrence of cocks in general, what was it?

“Za, I understand you don't care for Sylus. What I don't know is why because he is gorgeous and sexy as hell. He is, however, Darius's dearest friend and he's also is to be the best man at our wedding. Because of this, you two are going to have to get along.”

“That man is...is an insufferable, pompous, arrogant and presumptuous, idiot,” Za sputtered. “Tell me, why is he always hanging around? Did it every dawn on you that he and your man are more than close friends!”

Selby knew if she didn't keep firm on this matter, Za would get her way as usual. But she nearly lost it when she saw Za's lush heart-shaped mouth punch out in a pout that only could look sexy, on a face like hers. If she were to try to pull off that face she'd look like a giant blowfish.

“Of course they are, just like you and me, but I assure you they don't leave me out of the relationship, like you insist on doing with Darius.” Selby shrugged, reaching for the glass of wine Za had poured for her to keep her from drinking out of the bottle. “So talk to me, Za, what's really going on here?”

Za's mouth dropped wide; she couldn't believe this cycle of events or the pain she felt. She didn't know if she was more upset because Selby had traded her in for guys, or because her best friend was fucking the only man that's captured her attention in years.

Selby had invited her to share intimate moments with her and Darius, but because she wasn't into men anymore, she had turned her down. So why did the thought of Sylus being a part of the group cause her more interest?

Damn. “Selby, I don't know what I'm feeling. Everything seems to be happening so fast. I'm use to it being just the two of us against the world, now before I can get accustom to it being

three, you're telling me it's actually four!"

She stared accusingly at Selby.

"Don't look at me like that, Za. I can't help it that I fell in love. You were there. It wasn't like I was looking for it, but most of all you know you're welcome to join us, anytime."

"I can't seem to tolerate one man and now you're suggesting two?" She shook her head in disbelief.

"Damn, Zaza, It's not like it's an all-the-time thing. There is nothing like my being alone with Darius. He is the love of my life, but Sylus is a significant part of him, like you are a vital portion of me, and we wish to share how we feel with the both of you."

"*Well said, baby.*" Darius's deep sexy voice entered Selby's thoughts. Because they had a special wavelength, she was the only one who could hear him and for some reason he seemed to intrude her mind, at the most inopportune times.

"Darius, this is not a good time to be snooping around in my head."

"I'm always with you, agapi mou, my love. For all that I am is yours. Besides, I can't completely close you out just in case a threat arises. So, deal with it, sweetheart."

His laugh grated her nerve. So did he, when he got in these, "*I'm the boss*" moods of his.

"Baby, you can keep the mental communication line open." She hesitated before forging on. *"But, please, understand that this is a private conversation between me and Za. So stop being nosy, I will call you if I need you."*

Darius chuckled. "*Nope.*"

Selby sighed in growing frustration as she felt a growing dampness between her thick thighs. The feeling of his phantom fingers caressed her neck and shoulders. His unseen mouth whispered kisses of adoration along the length of her spine and she shivered in need.

"Darius," she mentally whined. *"Please don't do this now, I need to get Za to understand about Sy, then we need to discuss girly wedding stuff."*

"Are you going to talk about my wedding gift? Can I give you a hint of what I got you for a wedding gift, sweetness."

"No, I don't want you to buy that house on the Greek Isle. It's too big for just the two of us, not to mention how often can we live there as long as I'm touring in the States."

"If you say yes, it could be your gift to me," he pleaded. *"Sy's brothers have places near by. I..."*

"Za is giving me a very pissed look at this moment. I would swear she knows when you are speaking to me."

"Impossible. No human could ever hear us."

"I know, but she isn't stupid she probably assuming I'm just thinking about you since I'm sitting here grinning like an idiot."

"Because you love me?" He crooned.

"Darius!" She gave him a warning. Selby realized there was only one sure way to chase him out of her head.

She started thinking of nothing but her "to do" list for the wedding. She pictured picking out her flowers, the gifts for her bridesmaids, a tea luncheon to taste wedding cakes, picking up the invitations, and...

"Okay, Selby I get the message you can stop now," he groaned a protest. She could fill his agitation and smiled. *"Before I leave you in peace, one more thing; if you do convince Zaza to join us, you can reassure her that she will be safe with me. After what happened to her--"* His thoughts trailed off, but Selby knew what he was trying to say.

"I don't think she is interested, Darius; it would be too difficult for her. If and when the time comes, if she feels comfortable in joining us, I will lay her fears to rest."

"You understand these matters better than I, darling. I just wanted you to know I will go along with whatever you feel is best. I'll be home soon. I love you."

"Selby!"

"Shit, she's pissed. I'm out of here." Darius released a laugh before fading from her immediate thoughts.

"Chicken!"

She heard his laugh once more before all went silent. That is, with the rarity of Za, screaming at her. She gave her all of her attention. "I'm listening! Stop yelling at me."

"Selby, damn it!" Za cursed crossing her arms over her breast, the upper corner of her mouth twisted with exasperation. "I know my life isn't as exciting as yours has certainly become, but you could at least pretend to be concerned about what I have to say. I shouldn't have to become Sylus's date for all the wedding events, just because he's the best man and I'm the maid of honor. What if he were married?"

"He's not and you're not. So, stop adding concerns to the problems I already have." Selby said.

She got up from her seat on the black leather sofa and promptly went to encircle Zaza's slender waist she pulled her against her, their breasts touched and flattened as they held each other close.

Selby leaned in and pressed her lips to the other woman's and felt her give in.

Za quivered at the sweet tenderness of Selby's kiss, welcoming the way her friend drew her face to hers in a renewed embrace. Zaza didn't hesitate in returning her kiss, lingering, appreciating every moment of something that was safe and familiar.

Since Darius had come into their lives, he brought Sylus with him, and since Sylus had penetrated her life, she was starting to doubt everything she felt she wanted. After what took place years before, combined with being abandoned at the altar, she was so confident she wouldn't want a man, that white picket fence, or a family of her own.

Za genuinely assumed a successful career and an occasional female lover would be enough to keep her happy, yet allow her to be independent to live her resilient lifestyle. She had missed these special moments with her best friend, but it was her own fault. All she had to do was reach out and take the unconditional love that Selby and now Darius offered.

Selby was the first to break the kiss but kept her hands against Za's face, forcing her to look her in the eyes.

"I'm sorry that I have been so distracted lately. There is so much happening to me. Everything I have experienced to be accurate in my life has been turned upside down in ways that you can't invent."

Za was a bit confused, but she could understand why her friend would feel just as overwhelmed as she has, but somehow Selby seemed different.

"Selby, I suspect with the wedding and everything it's been wild, but I sense there is something else going on with you that I don't know about," she accused. "I...I just feel as if I don't know you any more," Za confessed on a heavy sigh as she flung out her hands in simple frustration.

"I know, sweetie. It's understandable because I have changed. Because of how moody you've been lately, I don't feel I can share all the stuff going on with me yet. Look how you reacted when I told you I shared my bed with both Darius and Sylus."

"Well, even you have to willingly admit that in the past you have never consider doing something like that before," Za reasoned.

"You're right. But I never thought I would be judged by the one person I've been able to share my personal life with." Selby dropped her hands to her side with a resigned sigh.

"I don't mean to Selby, but Sy--"

"See! That's another thing. Why are you so bitter over Sylus de Gauls? I know you are attracted to him and even though Sy tries to play it off like you do, he asks about you about you all the time."

The heavy lashes that shadowed Za's cheeks flew up. "He does? But why?"

Selby shrugged. "Only Sy can answer that question, Za. You could always ask him, if only you would spend some time with him. I know Sy is a complicated man, but he is also as beautiful on the inside as he is on the outside."

Za smirked in disbelief and started to protest until Selby held up her hand.

"Regardless," Selby gave her a hard stare and continued. "Sy is prideful and, yes, arrogant and protective. It just means you can trust him with *your* life as much as I do with Darius. Both of them will protect us with their lives, Za."

"I'm not saying Sylus isn't a good person. I just don't want to spend any personal time with him." Zaza said stubbornly.

Selby ran her fingers across Za's soft cheeks. "Why? Why is this so damned hard for you?"

Za felt it was a straightforward question. A simple enough question that she'd asked her self repeatedly since she had met him. Now that she saw Sylus in an entirely different element at the Diamond Blue she found him even more intriguing.

"Selby, I...I don't know; he just seems to get under my skin. He has this way of making me feel that things are out of my control."

"And GOD knows how you hate to not be in control of everything" Selby shook her head. "Darius has taught me that sometimes you just have to let someone else do all the worrying. That it's okay to allow yourself to fall when you know there are capable hands waiting to catch you."

Za leaned her head against Selby's, enjoying this rare time they had alone. "I just don't think it's possible for me to trust men like you do, Selby. Things were different for you when you went to a foster home. I bounced around from house to house until I was fourteen." She pulled away.

"Our being separated was the worse day of my life, Za but we were children. No one listened to what we wanted." Selby voiced.

"Well, unfortunately, the best part of my youth is the precious duration we were together in the orphanage, after that it was a nightmare." Za shivered from deep inside, rubbing at her arms from the chill of remembrance. She pushed the dark memories aside.

"I can never compare my experiences to yours, Za, but you know how my new life was with my foster family. They were so old they must have learned the Bible from Jesus himself...and they held the Good Book to a completely new level by using it on my ass. I couldn't accept phone calls from boys or date. Everything was a sin, including something as simple as putting a poster of John Travolta on my wall."

Za snorted aloud. "Yeah, your foster mom believed *Johnny Boy* projected too much

stimulation for your young hormones. Your “young desires would eventually cause you to physically *abuse* your body,” Za quoted, mimicking the preachy Good Book tone of Selby’s Bible-thumping foster mother.

Selby rolled her eyes upward, crossing her arms over her large breasts. “You don’t even want to take me there.”

“Selby, you know she did have a point. I know I humped my pillow many a night to John Travolta’s poster. I bet that was her problem. She feared how over stimulated John’s poster made *her* feel.” Za snorted on a laugh.

“Gag,” Selby cried out. “Can you imagine that old prune humping anything or anyone? No, her coochie dried up before Methuselah was born.”

“Coochie!” Za repeated. “I haven’t heard that term in years!”

Both of them bent over into a fit of girlish laughter. Za took a seat on the sofa as Selby dropped down beside her.

“Fine...Selby,” Za sighed, her laughter dying down. “I agree to put up with Sylus, the ass, for the extent of the wedding and planning. But does he have to be my date for *all* of the other events?”

Za already knew the answer as her honey-brown eyes took in Selby’s stubborn face. Honestly she felt happy her friend had found true love.

She could only surmised when a woman found the security of real love from her man, she also knew where his heart rested and whose bed he would be in at the end of the day. It must be a wonderful feeling to find the one man you could be completely in tune, in love, and utterly honest with. Yet, she didn’t think they made a man that *she* could trust so thoroughly.

Still, Za found it strange to regard Selby as being part of the sexual revolution. When had their roles reversed? When had she become the shrew and Selby the open-minded one? Had the relationship with her ex-fiancé Peter changed her that much?

Peter had called her “a controlling freak”. It was her wedding day and as he was yelling at her she wondered if the man she believed she loved ever knew her at all. Otherwise, why in the hell did he receive an epiphany the day of their formal wedding instead of months or weeks before?

She thought Peter was a weak bastard. It was one of the reasons she found him perfect to be married to, because he wouldn’t try to rule her. In reality he fooled her. He pretended to be everything she wanted him to be and then the monster appeared.

Za shook her head as tears threatened to spill. She had to keep it together for Selby; she trusted her to be her maid of honor and to help her make her very special day the most perfect day

possible.

If it had been anyone else, Za would not have been able to deal with all this drama or the dominating Sylus de Gauls; yet Selby was her lover-sister-friend, all rolled up into one she was going to do what was necessary.

“Okay, I will do this for you. But I hope you know it pisses me off that you believe you have to keep matters from me.” Za playfully slapped Selby's knee. “Now that you have me where you want me, is there anything else you been keeping from me?”

The smile left Selby face. “Yes, but let's take this one step at a time shall we? I suppose if you can tolerate Sy without killing him then we can discuss why he and Darius are not like any other men we have met before.”

“You promise to tell me before the wedding?”

“Since Darius and Sylus's family and friends are coming to the wedding...oh, most definitely.”

Zaza sighed, knowing she wouldn't get anything else out of Selby on the matter. “You know, I will hold you to your word and, with that said, bring on Mr. De Gauls. I have a bone to pick with him anyway.”

“Za,” Selby groaned. “What was all this dialogue for if you're still going to give Sy attitude?”

“I will be sweet after I find out why the hell he didn't return my calls after he discovered I was your agent? Selby, Sy is the owner of Diamond Blue, you know, the one place I have been trying to book you in for over two freaking years.”

“Uh-oh,” Selby grinned sheepishly.

“What ‘uh-oh’? Uh-oh, I 'm obliged to kick his ass or uh-oh, I already knew this and forgot to tell Za?”

“Uh-oh...the latter?”

“Selby!”

“I know...I know but I've been busy. Sy said when he realized who you were and he received a note of your last call, he was cool with the idea--“

“Sy, wouldn't be caught dead saying ‘cool’,” Za supplied.

Selby hid her surprise and her smile. She knew she was sensing something between the two and hope she wasn't making a mistake by throwing them together.

“As I was saying, Za, he asked me to tell you he would be happy to call in some special guest and turn it into an all night jam fest for me and you.” Selby explained.

“Then why didn't he just call me and tell me this?” Za's voice shrieked.

As Selby gave her a “sistha girl, please” look, Za felt the rapid spread of heat burning from her ears and across her shoulders. Of course, he wouldn't call after all the attitude she's given him recently. She just hated to look at him, because she inevitably found herself staring like a star-struck teenager. It wasn't like she wasn't use to seeing handsome men in her business, but he was just too fucking attractive for any one man.

“Point received,” Za conceded. “I will speak with him about it when I see him.”

“I hope so, sweetie, because Sylus really is an unique man, just like Darius. He is also a very reserved man, but I've found a wonderful sensitivity about him and, like you, he chooses sarcasm to hide his fears and insecurities.”

“Don't even try to compare me to that man, besides, you can't be talking about the same man, Selby.” Za rolled her eyes, crossing her arms in front of her. “I know fucking him doesn't change him that much.”

“Mmm, it changes him completely, trust me.” Selby cut a look at her out of the corner of her eyes. “Better yet, maybe you should fuck him and find out by joining us one night. You can watch and be with us once you feel comfortable with it.”

Za chuckled and shook her head. “I can't believe the shit that coming out of your mouth these days.”

Za had to admit she often wondered, especially after last night, if Sy fucked as good as he looked. She had a perception he did and then some.

Her clitoris twitched and throbbed.

“Will you stop being so stingy with the wine and hand me the damn bottle, woman,” Selby ordered. “This glass isn't cuttin' it!”

Za sighed, poured herself some wine in Selby's now-empty glass, and handed her country ass the bottle to finish. Selby's new wine fetish of drinking from the bottle was getting out of hand. Still, Selby wasn't the only one acting as if she had no manners. Za had seen Darius and Sylus do the same thing. All three of them drank the stuff like bottled water.

“Now, let's talk about those cruise tickets to Greece. I need you to get the biggest and best suite on the yacht. You know, the ones with the terrace and two rooms. I want it booked for a month. I believe Darius would love to see his home. He speaks so fondly of it. I can't wait to see it for myself through his eyes.” Selby eyes became dreamy. “Have I told you about the house he wants to buy there? He's driving me crazy...”

As Selby continued to chatter excitedly, Za was remembering how Sylus had forced her body

to feel by just playing the guitar. She wondered if his fingers could work the same magic on her flesh.

Cursing herself for her foolishly impossible thoughts, she submerged her sexual frustration into assisting Selby and pushed all thoughts of Sylus de Gauls aside. She understood the cause as to why she and Sylus didn't mesh. He probably loved to be in control as much as she did.

She would just have to learn to bite her tongue and tolerate him for Selby's sake. She was still determined to make this situation worth her while. Za wondered if Sylus had considered becoming a marketable product in the entertainment field. With that thought, she smiled. Her mind churned future marketing possibilities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Za was nervous; this was just the start of all the events that were to come leading up to Selby's wedding. Tonight was an official engagement party thrown by the recording label that was about to release Selby's newest CD in six months. The initial drop was pushed back to give her time for the wedding and the honeymoon.

This formal contract had been a great coup for Za and at first; she considered it an enormous mistake when only a few months ago Selby couldn't write a single original song. Yet, after she met Darius it was as if a new vein of emotions had opened up and she had pulled through with the most beautiful songs she's ever written.

Za was already clearing a space on the shelf for a future Grammy and if they chose to use one of Selby's songs for a featured film soundtrack, it would open an entire new source of revenue for Za's management group. Not to mention, Oscar potential.

She looked at her reflection in the mirror one last time and ran her slender fingers over her hips, making sure the dress was smooth. Her red satin thong assured no panty lines; in her field surrounded by many celebrities and the constant paparazzi, it was best to look good coming *and* going.

Tonight her stylist chose a red slip dress that offered a hint of seductiveness to her every move. It had an exquisite crochet overlay with ruffled trim around the deep 'V' revealing ample cleavage; there was the same ruffle trim at the tea-length hem. Za made sure she got her legs waxed and massaged with her favorite oils. She chose to leave them bare with a pair of expensive red satin open-toed slides with heel straps and rhinestone accents that revealed a beautiful pedicure.

She didn't know why she acquired additional care, but being on the arm of a man as gorgeous as Sylus de Gauls with his pale, angelic looks, a girl had to ensure she wore something that made people believe they made a lovely couple instead of questioning "what the hell is he doing with her?" Yeah, she knew her sister-girls; they always had something to say about something.

Fifteen minutes later Za eased down the corridor from her penthouse apartment to Selby's place. She began to use her key, but since Darius had moved in, she'd been trying to avoid walking in on them or showing up without calling.

Za took advantage of a moment alone at the door hoping to gather her nerves to ring the doorbell. How was she going to handle being with Sy all evening? She hadn't seen him since last week at Diamond Blue when he aroused her to foolishness without even knowing she was in the crowd. Now she had to face him up close and try not to think of that night. *Impossible.*

Even now she remembered how she touched her body and made herself come to a mind-shattering orgasm. She even cried out his name, everyone probably heard her over the music. She had never been so vocal before. Her face became flushed and her breathing heavy, just thinking of it.

Zaza could feel herself growing damp between her legs and shook her head to clear the wicked thoughts. She had a long night ahead of her, she couldn't soil her panties or she'd have to go change. She rang the doorbell twice with a trembling hand.

After another moment of no response, Za rolled her eyes and rang the bell again with a sigh, tapping one high-heeled foot.

"Don't tell me Selby and Darius are in there going at it like rabbits. Not this close to leaving". She ringed the bell once again and looked at her gold-faced watch. They were scheduled for pictures in about an hour, then cocktails would be served at 8:30 p.m. and at this rate, they will throw the entire evening off schedule and the recording company will be pissed. If nothing else, it was just plain rude to be late for your own, engagement dinner.

"Come on, Selby!" She cursed and rang the bell once more pulling her key out of her purse.

The door flew opened and caught her completely unprepared for the magnificent sight of manhood that stood before her.

Za's eyes took in his tall, well-proportioned body. He stood as if he prided himself on his good looks and he had every right to feel that way from what she could see, 'cause he was looking absolutely delicious standing there in nothing but a powder-blue towel hanging low on his lean hips.

Her eyes froze on his long, lean form. His muscular chest was free of hair and his shoulders wide.

Za licked her lips, his eyes locked with hers. She broke the contact by allowing her gaze to drop to his generous mouth as his lips parted in a dazzling display of straight, white teeth.

She held her breath.

"Good to see you are early, Miss Draper, I was wondering who was going to wash my back." He said the words with the confidence of a man who could get whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. Yes, even she was swayed but she'd be damned if she'd let him know it.

"You wish, *de Gauls!*" She pushed her way in, ignoring the shock wave of electricity that raced up to her arms and caused her nipples to become erect just from touching his naked chest. "Now where is the happy couple and don't you have a bathroom at your own place?"

Sylus shut the door and Za turned to face him. She forced herself to look shoulders up. Refusing to acknowledge his obvious semi-hardness of his cock. She blushed. Why in the blazing hell would he be erect? She doubted it had anything to do with her presence. Maybe he wasn't

showering alone.

“Uh, did I catch you in the middle of something? I thought we agreed to meet at six o’clock.”

“No, I’m the only one here. I was step in the shower when I heard the doorbell. Funny, Selby told me five and suggested I get dressed here.” He licked his lips. Her eyes followed his movement and he had the never to appeared pleased by her gaze.

“Why didn’t she call me? Did they say when they would be back?”

“Once I got here, they were already gone, so I didn’t get the chance to ask, but Selby left a message for us. She said that they were running late and would meet us there.”

“Yeah, I bet.” Za ran a nervous hand through her hair before she remembered the extra care her hairstylist had taken. She dropped her hand by her side. “I smell a setup.” She looked at her feet for a defining moment hoping to regain her composure since she found herself staring at him again. How could one man be so fucking beautiful? He must have spent too much time in the “Good GOD Almighty” line.

Whew, it’s getting hot in here.

Damn, look at him standing there with his arms across his chest, muscles bulging, crotch bulging...man, he even has nice well-shaped feet with long toes. She loved a man who took care of his feet. What was she saying? She didn’t care for men at all—well, she did...once.

Za took a seat before her knees gave out on her. Why was he towering over her like that?

“Zaza, I need you...” he reached down and clasped her hand in his; pulling her up from the chair she sat in.

Oh, he smells good. Did he say he was getting in the shower or that he had shower? Her eyes practically fluttered closed in aroma ecstasy. He smelled as wonderful as evergreen trees, freshly mown grass, and running naked in the rain.

Someone help me, but I think I need you too, she thought dreamily, not believing she was even considering the prospect of being with him, and he looked huge, *down there*. She wasn’t sure she was ready to tackle this “snake”. Za slowly breathe in and out to keep from having a panic attack. Now that would be really embarrassing.

Za licked her lips. “Huh...you need me to do what?” she asked breathlessly as she leaned lightly into him, tilting her face towards his.

Sylus’s nostrils flared. She wondered if he could sense how frightened, yet turned on she was by him at this moment? Surely he couldn’t tell. But she wasn’t so sure when he gave her a devilish smile.

He leaned forward slightly, just a hair’s breadth away from her luscious mouth and said with

his deep soothing voice. "I just need you to get your sweet ass off my tuxedo lying across that chair."

Za gasped as he released her hand, moved around her and lifted the tuxedo out of the chair to hang it on the door of the hallway washroom.

Silently she cursed him as she quickly recovered her composure. She felt like an idiot, and in front of him, of all people. Why did she believe Sylus de Gauls was the kind, and sensitive lonely soul Selby led her to believe? Hell, she desired to think it because it was hard to understand how such beautiful music could come from an ass!

Za noted how he moved about Selby's place as if he owned it. He wore that towel and his erection as if he was fully dressed and as limp as a weeping willow's branch.

Meanwhile, she didn't know if she would be able to move one foot in front of the other to return to the chair. All she wanted to do was stand there and watch the production of muscles rippling under his skin as he moved across the room and placed the tux across another chair.

Sylus lifted a bottle of wine off the sofa table.

"Can I get you a glass of wine?"

"No, if I wanted anything I know how to find it." Za rolled her eyes at him.

He watched each shapely ass cheek move beneath her hugging dress as she walked away from him. A whisper of disappointment escaped his lips as she sat on the love seat and crossed one shapely leg over the other.

Sylus's dark brown eyes dropped to her legs, making his progress upward staring at the shape of her thighs outlined by the clinging material of the dress she wore.

Sy cleared his throat, downed the remaining contents of the bottle of wine. He eased onto the sofa across from Za, unable to take his eyes off her scarlet polished toes. He daydreamed of prostrating himself on the floor and applying her delicate feet with tiny wet kisses. He moistened his suddenly dry lip, glancing up to find her watching him, watch her.

"I take it you like what you see." Her warm, throaty voice flowed over him. Smiling at him, she perused his partially naked body with open interest. There was no hiding the exceptional natural proof that her looking at him turned him on.

He looked down at his gaping towel and released a long sigh. Returning his gaze to hers', he cocked an eyebrow. "Oh that. Don't worry it has nothing to do with you. For me it's natural."

Liar! I want her and have so since I saw her in the karaoke bar for the first time with Selby.

"I guess I don't have to worry about you jumping over that coffee table and fucking me

mindless, do I?" Za spoke bluntly.

Sylus continued to smile, his dark eyes never leaving her face. "Sounds like an idea. Would you'd rather we remained here instead of going out." He winked.

"Miss Selby and Darius engagement dinner? I don't think so." Za countered.

"I am an excellent chef, so I can assure you, you won't be disappointed." He paused and added, "About anything. I can guarantee it."

Sylus didn't know why but he took pleasure in causing her discomfort. She was always so aloof and sure of herself. She needed someone of something to shake up that cold demeanor. He could see a light sheen of perspiration forming on her brow.

He saw how her eyes continue to drift over the expansion of his naked chest, to his flat stomach and the dark, thick line of hair disappearing into the waistband of the towel. If possible he hardened even more as she sucked on her pursed bottom lip.

"How could his hair be so platinum without dark roots and yet the trail of hair going to his groin was dark brown. He's got one of the best bleached jobs I've ever seen."

Sy scowled as he heard her words. Before he could process the fact he was able to read her thoughts, he returned a thought of his own. *"I don't bleach my hair! Every think about me is natural."*

Startled, Za frowned and shook her head. "...I'm sorry. It wasn't my intention to insult you."

Sy wondered how the hell that happened. He heard her just as clearly as if she had spoken. He also made the mistake by using his mind to answer her accusations. But this wasn't possible, she was human and he wasn't trying to read her thoughts. So how did they make the connection?

"Shit, I'm already messing this up and the evening hadn't started yet. Selby...I must think about Selby. I promised to try harder."

"It's okay. Forgive me for snapping at you. I think we both are a little on edge. Selby would be pissed at me too, so I want to be as civil as you do." Sy said aloud.

Her mouth dropped wide and she touched her temple with her fingertips. Dropping her hands she stared at him and replied, "Damn, I feel like you are reading my mind. This is some weird shit," Za mumbled.

Sylus cursed softly he needed to be more careful. But reading her thought was effortless for him. It felt so natural. "Would it be a bad thing if we could read each other's thoughts, *cara?*"

"Don't be ridiculous. You act as if it's a possibility when we both know it's not." She scoffed. "Don't you suppose you should be getting dressed now?"

He didn't like the way she was casting her eyes at him cautiously. He had scared her.

"Zaza, you have no reason to fear me. I could never harm you in anyway," he assured her.

"What...what do you mean by that? What has Selby told you?" Her voice sounded panic stricken to his ears and he could hear that heartbeat was pounding.

"Nothing," he said. "I just know you aren't comfortable around men and for some reason I seem to make you even more nervous.

Za rolled her eyes at him and pursed her lips. "Yes, I am a lesbian, but I'm not nervous!" She yelled. "I don't think of you one way or the other; just like you didn't think about returning any of the calls I left for you at Diamond Blue."

Sy didn't miss her sarcasm. Now he knew why she was so miffed at him. She finally found out he was the proprietor of Diamond Blue. It was obvious from her shock at seeing him on stage performing last week that Selby had failed to pass on his message to her.

"I chose to speak with Selby because I thought it would be better if the truth of the matter came from her." He leaned back against the sofa. Assuring that the towel was closed over his cock since her fear of him was like a bucket of cold water; his libido had calmed down quite a bit.

"I admit I would have been surprised." Za gave him a hard stare. "But I'm a big girl, I can handle the truth. Or is the truth is, you didn't think I was worth you sparing a crumb of your time?"

Damnably brat of a woman seemed determined to irritate him beyond reason. He had thought twice about taking a meeting with her once he found out she and the woman who had been trying to meet with him were the same. Her dislike of him was obvious so he felt it would be senseless to be the one to let her know the truth about him being the owner of Diamond Blue.

"I see that I owe you an apology. I should have returned your call. But since we are being honest, would you have listened once you found out it was me?" He clasped his fingers in front of him. His eyes dropped to those beautiful legs once more as she shifted and crossed them to the other side.

"No," she grudgingly admitted. "I probably would have been too angry to listen. I'm sorry for raising my voice at you."

He pulled his attention away from her shapely legs, looked into her honey-colored eyes, and saw her sincerity. He sighed with acceptance. This woman didn't have anything about her that he found unattractive. He wanted to dislike her, but he couldn't seem to do that, either.

"So can we remove the gloves and agree to at least try to be civil from now on?" He raised a dark brow in question.

Za crossed her arms over her breasts as her foot started to swing. "I already told Selby I

would try and I'm here aren't I?"

"Yeah, I can see how happy you are about it." Sy said wryly.

"Bite me, De Gauls!" Za mouth pressed tightly as if it was taking everything in her not to say something smart.

He chuckled. His heart was racing foolishly and he found her stubborn willfulness refreshing and arousing. He wasn't use to a woman flat out disliking him from the start. Usually, that came along much later.

"Za, may I point out you've practically ogled my cock for the past fifteen minutes; I believe formality between us is no longer warranted. You shall call me Sy." He released a deep exasperated sigh.

"Oh, you don't have to worry about me calling you at all, ever again." She mumbled.

"You aren't going to get past the fact that I never called you, are you?" His eyes drifted to her shapely lips. "Of course, I'm interested in Selby performing at Blue and for your information, I don't allow my personal feelings to influence business. Selby is invited to blue because she's talented and I look forward to having a session with her."

A sly smile came to her lips and immediately Sy knew he was in trouble. "If you're truly looking to make this misunderstanding up to me, I have a wonderful suggestion."

"*Maledicalo Donna*," he cursed, giving her a warning glance.

"I don't know what you said, but it takes one to know one!" Her bottom lip poked out.

Sylus couldn't help but smile and his smile turned into laughter. "Basically, I said *curse you, woman*." He released a long breath. "Look, I apologize. I tend to lapse into one of my many languages when I feel slighted."

"*La dee da*," she said childishly. "*Slighted*," she mimicked with a bad accent and rolled her eyes at him. "Now, who talks like that any more? Sometimes you act as if you were born in another century." Za's mouth dropped open as his laughter became louder. She smiled in spite of her attempt to be angry.

"If only you knew. Nevertheless, we were discussing business, were we not? And, might I add you're breathtaking when you smile. You should do it more often."

Reluctantly she said, "Thank you and if we are passing out compliments, I want to say I like your laugh. It's wonderfully contagious and makes me feel childish and playful." Za blushed. "I know that must sound corny coming from me."

"Not at all, I'm flattered you noticed anything about me, Zaza." He waved a hand elegantly. "As far as business between us, Selby can walk in at any time, like I do, sit in, or headline whenever."

I will give you my private number.” His eyes held hers. “Use it anytime...for anything.”

Sy felt as if he was drowning in her unusually light dreamy eyes. It was such a disarming look for a woman of dark skin. But it only added to her exotic attractiveness.

“Thank you, that means a lot to me.” Za broke the silence.

“Selby is Darius’s mate,” he announced as if the subject was too obvious to bother wasting time discussing. “What is mine has become hers.”

“I admit I never heard it put that way by the best friend of the man she is to marry. She is *Darius’s* fiancée, after all.” Her raised brow implied its intent. “But, allowing Selby to play in blue is not what I was implying when I said you can make this up to me.”

“Of course not.” He sighed and clasped his hands in his lap. Tell me what you have in mind,” Sylus encouraged.

“First, help me to understand this relationship the three of you have. Sometimes, I feel as if you, the three of you have some big secret and you don’t trust me enough to let me know.” She licked her dry lips. “Other times I feel...”

“Feel what?”

“I feel as if you all can communicate without even speaking. Selby and I used to be like that, but now...I feel--” She looked down at her hands resting in her lap.

“You feeling left out,” Sy finished for her. “I understand, why this would be so for you. You and Selby are very close and, like Darius and I, you are more than friends, you are also intimate.”

“So you don’t find me silly in my thoughts?” She looked back up him, surprised by his calm acceptance.

“How can I, when I also felt the same way when Darius told me he had found his feminine eternal mate? I know what it meant to us...to me. “A melancholy smile appeared on his lips. “I’m learning, however, change is good. Especially when it makes someone you love happier than you have ever seen them.”

Za shook her head in gentle understanding. “I agree. Selby definitely is happier than I’ve ever seen her. She is actually blossoming into someone I hardly recognize. I’m envious and lonely.”

“You are not alone, Za. Now, you just have a bigger family. Darius will protect you with his life and, where there is Darius...” He spread his arms wide. “There is, Sylus. It is why it is so important for you and I to get along with one another.”

“Really?”

The woman had the nerve to be looking down her nose at him. Obviously, the truce had yet to begin.

“What else is lingering on your mind, Zaza?”

“I’ve also had something else brought to my attention that I want to discuss with you.”

“I suppose I will not have a peaceful evening until I hear you out, am I correct?” Sylus mumbled.

Za’s lips curled into a wide smile.

Sylus stared at her erect nipples pushing against the thinness of her dress as she crossed her arms beneath them and leaned back against the cool leather seat. *Fuck, she has nice, thick nipples.* For a few moments, his entire body stiffened.

“Well, since we are getting everything out in the open, and since we agree you can be rude at time.”

“Huh? Surely, you can’t be speaking of *moi*. When was I rude to you?”

“Duh, all the time,” she snorted.

Sy eyed her suspiciously. “All right, tell me, Zaza, what will it take to make all if this go away? What do I have to do to gain your assurance that we will turn all our energies into making this wedding a special occasion for Darius and Selby?”

“Don’t you dare bring them into this! You know I would do anything for Selby’s happiness,” she chastised. “This is just between you and I and you have something I want.”

Sylus relaxed and smiled. “Well, I think I’m going to like owing you after all.”

“Oh, please,” Za, uttered in irritation at his intentional misunderstanding of her statement. “It’s still about business and business only.”

“What would you like me to do for you first? Lick you until you scream my name? Or...”

“Sylus, what part of I don’t fuck around with men anymore don’t you understand?” She evenly spaced her words for emphasis.

“That reminds me of something I’ve been wanting to ask you. Why are you a lesbian now? I mean is it actually something you can wake up one day and decide? Or have you always had a tendency towards women and you’re just now it’s popular so you can be honest?”

“Well--”

“I noticed you seemed to have no issues being around Darius,” he pointed out. “Is there something about me in particular that you dislike? Because, if given the chance, you would find that I am not like...other men.”

“Oh, your dick may be bigger, but at the end of the day, I’m sure you are just like all the rest.” She stated crassly. Her chin lifted and she looked at him almost defiantly. “But, for the record, I don’t dislike you.”

Sylus grinned, if he hadn't been a Satyr male, he might have been insulted. But, he could appreciate a foul mouthed and blunt woman. "It's good to know I'm in your thoughts," he teased.

"Actually, I don't think of you...much." She craned her neck and stared around, obviously trying to avoid his eyes.

"You are even beautiful when you lie." He leaned his head back against the sofa. He could smell her desire for him from the moment she walked into the room. He would know her scent at a thousand paces. Yet once again, she was fighting her desire for him. What was she scared of?

If he wanted to just fuck her he could enthrall her and appease his needs, but no, he found he wanted Zaza Draper to come to his bed completely aware and eager to please. The question was how was he to help her get over her fear. If she was scared of him as a man, there was no way she could be accepting of him as a Satyr lover.

"Zaza, from what I can tell, you are already respected and successful. So, let me warn you, I have been around a long time and I know all the tricks. If you are planning some aggressive business tactic, bordering on blackmail, to get what you want. I will not take it lightly." His dark eyes narrowed. "So tell me what you propose and stop playing games."

Za wavered.

"*Il mio caro*, my dear, I advise you not to waste this rare opportunity and tell me what you wish of me. I am not a very patient man."

"You're right, Sy. No more games." She uncrossed her legs and sat up straight with her knees together. She rested her hands together on her knees. "I had the privilege to see your performance last week and I would like to represent you in marketing your talent." Za pitched.

He couldn't believe she was actually trying to represent him! This had to be a first, spending time with her was getting more and more interesting.

"Za, why would I want to do that?" he snorted rudely. "I have no desire for my private life to be invaded by what you're selling. Do I look like a man who would have a need for fame or fortune?"

Za avoided his penetrating gaze, but he like seeing her squirm.

"You're right, I suppose I don't have anything to offer to a man who seems to have everything."

Sylus was disappointed. He had hope she would at least try. Well, he wasn't going to allow her to give up so easily.

Tossing his long platinum hair back over his shoulders, a full smile stretched his lips. "That is not what I said. *You* have a lot to offer, especially to a man that has everything."

Za cocked a wary eyebrow. "Oh? What might that be or should I ask?"

Sylus nodded. "Of course one should always, at the very least, ask. So permit me to ask you a question. Do you truly want to represent me? If so, I will sign a contract with you on a year by year basis and give you one hundred percent of the profits for the first year." He halted. "Under one condition."

Blinking, she waited and when he didn't elaborate... "Well, what do you want?"

"You." He stated plainly. "Be completely at my beck and call until after the wedding. Once Darius and Selby are married, we will return to a strictly business arrangement."

Stomach churning, rising from the love seat, Za stared at him. "You must be fucking crazy."

"At this moment I'm pained to agree with you, because for the life of me I don't understand why I would desire to spend time getting to know a lesbian shrew like you," he grumbled.

He saw her face reddened and realized that he should have kept that thought to himself. Sy continued to watch her while she paced. Could it be she was actually considering his offer? She paused and stared at him. He waited, holding his breath.

"Year by year for simple dating. Two years, guaranteed, if you're asking me to be your 'beck and call girl'." Za spoke loudly.

His brow arched and he smirked.

Za narrowed his eyes. "Don't even go there."

He let out a long, audible breath. "It just sounded a bit more interesting coming from your lips." He grinned. "So, I won't misunderstand you...two years of ...what exactly? That you will be at my disposal, whenever I need you. Does this also mean you don't mind an occasional two a.m.---"

"Are you always this blunt?" Zaza asked.

"Yes, I'm too old to mince words," he answered honestly. "Are you willing to put yourself in my hands? I don't mean only on your terms, just in case you're thinking of throwing this dog an occasional bone, petting me on the head, and sending me on my way."

Za rested her hands on her hips. She grinned as another batch of heat spread across her face indicating her guilt. "You have to be a mind reader."

"Or maybe I just know you." He winked.

"Sylus, before I sell my soul to the devil I need to ask you one question."

"Anything?"

"The song I heard the other night, was it an original song? Do you have more like it?"

"Yes, it was." Sy closed the space between them. His fingers curved under her chin. "I have a lifetime of songs tucked away." He cocked his head to the side; his hair fell forward, "Did you like

my song, Za?”

He felt her trembling as he cupped her chin. He searched her upturned face. Her breath blew hot and heavy as he bent his head slightly forward. She leaned lightly into him, tilting her face toward his.

“Do we have a deal?” he murmured, a breath away from caressing her lips with his.

One heart beat. Two-heart beat. Three-heart beat. Four-heart beat. Five...

She licked her lips. “Yes, we have a deal.”

His eyes narrowed on her face. She wanted him to kiss her and that pleased him, but not just yet. He felt like she was a doe caught in the headlight. One false move on his part and she would bolt.

Sy chose to nod; pulled away with a deep chuckle. “Well, I guess I’d best be getting dressed before Darius and Selby come looking for us.”

Za licked her lips once more, and he saw her disappointment. His eyes followed the movement of her tongue. He hoped she was suffering with the same need he felt.

Za eyes narrowed as she saw his knowing grin. He was enjoying her discomfort.

“Do it.” He urged.

“Do what?”

“You know you want to kiss me.” His voice was low and purposely seductive.

“You don’t get nothing from me, mister, until you’ve signed on the dotted line.” Za took a step back and returned to take her place on the loveseat.

“You can play the indifferent ice queen lesbian with everyone else but I know your scent and your pussy says you want me.”

She gasped and her nostrils flared.

“Oh, no one else can smell you’re aroused. I have a keen sense of smell.” He winked and made his way across the room towards the hallway leading to the guest bedrooms.

Za finally felt as if she could take a deep breath once he left the room. It was as if his aura soaked up every inch of space in an area. He may be overwhelming but he was right; every time she was near him, her pussy would sweat, but she would be damned if she’d confess it to him.

“Pompous ass,” she mumbled aloud.

“I heard that.”

Startled, Za jumped and turned in her seat as he was lifting his tuxedo from where he had laid it across the chair. He had a big sexy grin on his face. She did something childishly out of character for her. She pushed her tongue out at him.

“Dear heart, allow me to show you what you can use that sweet tongue of yours on.” His glance was bemused and opaque.

Za’s mouth dropped wide when Sylus turned his back on her and let the bathing towel fall off his hips to the floor. Naked, he disappeared down the hallway.

Za didn’t think in all her sexual years that she’d ever seen such a perfectly formed ass on a man. She giggled nervously at his shameless display and leaned back in her chair.

“Someone save me, that man is too fine. What am I thinking? I’m not into men...I’m not into men.” Excitement added a gleam of interest to her eyes. She repeated the mantra.

She heard Sylus’s hearty laughter echo down the hall as if he could hear her.

“Za, could you help me with something?”

“Hell no!” She shouted.

He laughed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Za was in Diamond Blue's for all of three minutes before Selby rushed her. She slipped her arm in her arm and guided her swiftly into the women's bathroom. Her best bud was nearly bubbling over with excitement.

"Okay, heifer, what gives? Tell me about this contract deal you made with Sy."

"What? How in the hell did you find out so fast? We just got here." Za disengaged her arm and placed her hands on her slender hips.

"Err...uh...Sy called Darius and told him you were on your way and he explained why you were running late," Selby spluttered, her full cheeks flushing.

"Liar," Za accused, placing her handbag on the counter as she moved to check her softly applied makeup in the mirror.

"What do you mean?" Selby scoffed, fluttering her lashes.

"I mean I know when you are lying and I noticed you've been doing it a lot lately." Za rolled her eyes and crossed her arms across her breasts. "I see that Sylus doesn't keep things from Darius, obviously."

"Come on, Za. Don't be that way." Selby rubbed Za's bare arm.

Za remained firm and unmoving. "Nope, it's not going to work this time, Miss Thang. Give it up."

Selby eyes grew wide. "Give up what, Za?"

Za looked deeply into her eyes and she looked away, all of sudden finding her lipstick in a mess.

She sighed with growing frustration. "Look Selby, you might as well not try to hide it anymore. Sy told me everything."

Stunned, Selby looked at Za's reflection in the mirror instead of her face.

"He...he told you? I'm surprised; I would have thought you would have been more disbelieving than this."

"Disbelieving, I don't think so. It happens all the time. I just never thought it would happen in our building. We pay too much rent--" Za saw confusion puckered on Selby's brow. "What? Is this where you pretend like you don't know anything about the fan that attacked you? Sylus, let it slip in the car on the way here!"

"Oh, the fan...yeah, of course. You know, girl, it wasn't a big deal or I would have mentioned it. Darius and Sy thwarted all problems and that was all there was to it," Selby spluttered.

Za realized Selby thought she was speaking of something else. She wondered what else Selby was hiding. "You know what, if I didn't know you had a partial hysterectomy I would swear you were pregnant and not telling me. 'Cause I'm sensing you are still hiding something from me."

Selby swallowed deeply. A soft smile came to her lips. "Well, I'm not pregnant."

"No shit." Za sighed, accepting at this moment she was irritated more by the fact Sylus had spoken of their agreement to anyone before it was even on paper. But, then again, Selby and Darius weren't just anyone. They were friends and lovers. She was just miffed she didn't get to tell Selby first. It was as if the three of them were a part of this secret society and she was on the outside looking in and she was getting tired of it.

Selby wrapped her arms around Za and gave her a big squeeze seeming to know what she was thinking and what she needed.

"I'm sorry, Selby." Za apologized. "I know how sensitive the subject of babies is to you and I shouldn't have brought it up. Tonight is a special occasion. Please forgive me."

"You know you my girly-girl and as I said the other day when we spoke, there are some things I need to speak with you about. We will in time, just not tonight." She kissed Za's cheek and fingered away the lipstick mark she left.

"Still--"

"No, still nothing. Tonight is all about wine, song, and...fun. In fact, we all have a surprise for you."

"Lord, help me, I don't think I can handle another surprise," Za mumbled.

"Mmm, another? So does that mean Sylus gave you one before you got here?" Selby cocked a brow.

"Don't even go there. We agreed to get along for the wedding, we will be working together...but I'm still a lesbian."

As Za made her confession, a gorgeous redhead came out of one of the stalls and washed and dried her hands. She licked her oversized plumped lips and winked at Za in the mirror before walking out. She ignored it. Selby didn't.

"Whatever." Selby smacked her lips. "Hoes are thick tonight, but it's another one of the side effects of our men."

"What do you mean? Besides, I don't have a man, so I can appreciate the extra onslaught of females."

"I forgot. You did help with the guest list." Selby giggled.

"Yeah, but you know how it is at these things. I'm sure the recording company invited

associates and the more females and liquor flowing, the more deals are being sealed.”

“Well, no business for you tonight, Za. Are you finished, yet? You look beautiful as always, let’s go get the surprise.” Selby clapped her hands together and it seemed to echo in the largeness of the blue marbled ladies’ room.

“Well, hussy, don’t keep me waitin’, what’s up? You better spill it because if you get any more excited, you and Darius will be up in here fuckin’ and sanctifyin’ this public bathroom, too,” Za teased, reaching in her purse and applying a fresh layer of clear gloss over her cinnamon-colored lipstick. “Besides, You know I hate surprises.”

Selby punched her lightly in the shoulder and sent the gloss over her cheek. Both of them giggled as Za snatch the offered tissue from Selby’s hand. “What the hell, Selby!”

“Okay, I will fess up.” Selby licked her tongue out and continued. “Darius and I wrote a song together for our wedding called *Two Hearts as One*. Sy agreed to join us tonight to perform it.”

Za became still. She didn’t think her body could handle hearing Sy play and sing tonight. It was hard enough knowing his perfectly tight ass was walking around with tuxedo pants and no underwear. Damn him for being so fine. She pitched her lip-gloss back in her purse and snapped it shut.

“Can I sell it?” Za asked with a calmness she wasn’t feeling.

“Dang, I thought you would be more excited then this. You will get to see my man do his thang, and well, you know what Sy got going on.” She gave her a teasing grin.

Za cut her eyes at Selby; there was no hiding the flush that traveled from her ears and across her chest.

“Looks, like someone got a little secret of their own going on, but unlike your impatient butt, I know you will tell me when you are ready.”

“Come on Selby, sound like DJ Mann is playing my jam and trust me, girl, I am looking forward to hearing your song, especially if you tell me you will think about releasing it as a single. Oh, wow, we can put you and Darius on the cover and---“

“Za, kick it out of manager mode. I want my friend tonight; I’m on the countdown to happily every after and for the next few weeks I hope to just enjoy being a bride-to-be. Besides, I don’t believe I wish to share such a private, intimate song that we composed for our special day in such a commercialized way.”

“Selby, you are a world-known platinum recording artist. Everything you do is news. Even though lately you intend to forget and get buck wild in public places.” Za leaned against the bathroom vanity. “If you sing it tonight, people will want to know when it will be released.

“First,” Selby giggled. “Excuse me.” She placed her hands on plus-size hips. “I learned from you. You’ve had your pussy eaten in many a bathroom stalls girlfriend, long before I got my groove back. Secondly, it’s my engagement party so it’s okay to do it here and at the wedding. But if we release it to the public, it will be song at every wedding from now to eternity. Maybe one day, but not anytime soon...okay?”

“Okay.” Za reluctantly agreed.

“Is Darius’s family going to start coming in sometime next week? You think you going to be able to keep their arrival on the down low? Every airport snitch will probably have reporters on speed dial the moment they start arriving.”

“Well, we can’t help that, but it doesn’t change the fact there will be no media at my wedding and there will be security to make sure of it.” Selby poked her lips out with determination.

“Sylus said he was handling security. Knowing him, he won’t miss one tiny detail. We are the one that will be rushing at the last minute. Darius’s cousins’ wives won’t be able to be fitted until a week before the wedding. Sera, I believe her name is pregnant and Mariah, husband has been ill for a long period of time it seems.”

“Za, don’t worry. As long as I have you, my maid of honor and best friend by my side, the wedding will go on. Besides we can always hire extra seamstress when the time comes, right? That’s what my wedding planner is getting the big bucks for.”

“True,” Za agreed while tucking her purse beneath her arm to prepare to leave the restroom. Quickly she shifted to the side as the bathroom door opened and two women pushed their way inside. The Asian girl gave her a quick checking-out-the-competition look and dismissed her in the same instant. She apparently didn’t see aging black women as a threat to her twenty-something hard body.

There was a time Za had the same attitude, but these days. She didn’t care much about what others women thought about her. She looked over the attitude, but she didn’t appreciate her not saying excuse me when she nearly hit her with the door.

The Asian girl turned her attention back to her mousy, animated friend who hadn’t stopped talking long enough to notice anyone else was in the bathroom with them.

“Anyway, Mae, the owner, Sylus de Gauls, is here tonight. Do you know how hard it is to get up in this place on the nights he comes in? Oh mi-god, I am...so...hyped. He is so fuckin’ fine, yanno.”

“I told you it was a good idea to come from Calitown tonight. I always luck up on seeing somebody when I come to Vegas.”

“Well, I know when I come with you I’m going to have a blast!” Mousy girl said.

“Well, it’s a private party tonight. That is why you see the elderly crowd in the house tonight. I only got in because I use to date one of the Label Executives.”

Za brow lifted in question as the Asian girl called Mae looked at her again. She felt Selby’s hand on her arm to still her, because she was about to tell her. “Yeah, I’m listening to you...now what!” She remained silent for Selby’s sake. There was no reason to risk a lawsuit for giving them a beat-down.

“Anyway, Amy, you can have the slimmer, pale one, that’s Sylus de Gauls, and I tried to get next to him, but I honestly think he is queer. You try and tell me what you think. I’m going to try for the one that performs with him sometimes. The big swarthy lookin’ guy...yanno the one, oh... what’s his name. Oh mi-god, I’d fuck him in a heartbeat.”

“Darius is his name.” Za supplied looking at Selby winking. She wasn’t looking so disinterested now.

“Any...way...” The young girl said rolling her eyes at Za. “I heard tonight is his engagement party to some black fat cow has-been singer from the eighties...early nineties...or whenever.” She giggled and added, “So I’m sure he will want some of this,” she pointed to her vagina with forefingers from both hands. “Before he gets saddle with someone like that ”

Selby met the young woman’s eyes in the mirror. “Why you...” She stepped forward and Za laughingly caught her by the waistline of her expensive black tuxedo skirt. “Time to go, girlfriend. I don’t want to be callin’ no bondsman to get your ass out of jail on the night of your engagement, I want my surprise.”

“Did you hear that, bitch? I will show her what a black fat has-been can do on her anorexic ass.”

Za was amazed. Selby, no matter what, had always been the calm, practical one. Lately, since she met Darius, she was a changed woman. Screwing Darius in a public bathroom, agreeing to marry him in a matter of weeks, and now ready to kick butt in a public place.

“I’m going to have to keep you out of public restrooms because every time you go in one lately, I’m a phone call away from calling an emergency publicist meeting.” Za laughed.

She finally came to the conclusion Selby was going to have to ease up on all that wine she been drinking lately, or she was going stick her in rehab. That is the only reasoning she could find for her recent change of behavior.

“Put them on stand by girlfriend, because there ain’t no tellin’ how this night is going to end.” Selby laughed dancing her way across the floor to the music as they made their way back to

their table.

Za shook her head, sending an agitated signal towards Darius, who was hurrying his way towards her. She wondered how he always knew to show up at the right time. For once, Za was happy to give up the reins and let Darius take over.

After being there for almost an hour with Za pretending as if he didn't exist, Sylus was in a somber mood. Every time he believed they took a step forward, she took two steps back and put him in his place with that sharp tongue of hers.

He felt the attraction brewing beneath the surface between them. Yet, she remained firm about the lesbian foolishness. If she desired to sleep with women, fine, but there was no basis to deny the fact that she was physically attracted to him. But something was holding her back.

Sylus had lived a long time, meeting all types of men and women. Never had he met a forced lesbian. Za tried too hard to convince herself and everyone around her that she was through with men, but her body plainly spoke differently. She desired him and she was fighting it and her battle to ignore her feelings made him even more intrigued.

"If you wish to know what Za's running from? Why don't you link with her?" Darius asked aloud over the rapid thumping of the music. His eyes continued to watch Selby as she partied on the crowded dance floor with Za.

"I need to fire that damned DJ Mann; I thought he was the best. I hadn't realized he turned my eloquent blues club into a nightclub." Sy scowled. "I see I'm going to have to start dropping in more often."

"The music was requested by Selby's record label, it's some of their top sellers." Darius stated.

"Except for Selby, they have no taste in good music." Sylus complained.

"Ignoring the relevant matter, my friend? I know this dance music is not what has your ire up." Darius tore his gaze from Selby's laughing face, a broad grin on his full lips as he felt her giddy pleasure deep inside his soul. "Allow me to help you."

"If you wish to help me, tell your bride-to-be to stop prodding at my thoughts. She's probably telling Zaza I'm over here thinking about her." Sy harrumphed.

"You know Selby would not betray your trust any more than she would Za's." Darius continued to smile. "Selby only pokes around in your head because she is still learning and, like an excited child, she is enjoying her new gifts. She will grow tired of it soon enough."

"Meanwhile, you're telling me to endure the discomfort." Sy leaned back in his chair, his

restlessness apparent to the one individual he couldn't fool.

His mouth tightened when he looked towards the dance floor to see Za's face leaning towards a beautiful redhead who was whispering something in her ear. The woman was so close her oversized fake breasts were pressed against Zaza's smaller ones. Any other time he would have found the thought of two beautiful women together arousing, but this time he felt as if the woman was breaching his territory.

"Darius, Selby is your mate...not mine. Sometimes, I feel you forget that. As much as I would wish to be a part of what the two of you have, I'm limited in my participation!" Sy snapped.

"Alright, enough, Sylus!" Darius spoke sternly; in a way, that only he could do with his ancient partner. "Satyr to Satyr. What is your problem? You appeared to be in a good mood when you arrived. I believed it was because you and Zaza had graciously achieved an understanding. Was I wrong?"

Sy bristled. "Is it even a possibility to understand that infuriating woman? Never have I met a mortal female who was immune to my fairness until now." Sy paused, his scowl deepened. "She took advantage of me."

Amused Darius cocked a brow and questioned, "How, may I ask, did a weak human female achieve such a deed?"

"Oh, my companion, you should have sniffed her sexual essence when she was seducing me. It was finer than any wine your family could make." He smiled fondly in remembrance. "She is magnificent when angered and a shrewd business woman."

"She must be to get you to agree to record your music." Darius pursed his lips. "I'm supposing you are actually developing loving feelings for Za. I've never seen you like this over a mortal, Sy. This is not your usual passing interest."

Sy inhaled sharply and picked at the elegant napkin lying across his lap before lifting it to place it next to his glass of barely-touched wine.

He released a deep sigh. "I desire her, that is all, and I assumed she felt the same; but I realize now she doesn't desire me at all. Her pussy burned not for me, but by thoughts of squandering my talents."

"Sex is one of your talents," Darius teased.

"Yeah," Sy agreed, and picked up the crystal wine glass, running a long finger around the rim; a soft whistling sound permeated the air, barely heard by the human ear above the loud music.

Darius stared at Sy in quiet amusement. He had discarded his tuxedo jacket and sat there, immaculate, in a snow-white black-buttoned silk shirt and a perfectly straight bow tie. To look at

him, no one would suspect the current turmoil he masked behind his uninterested exterior.

Sy fascinated men and women by simply walking into a room. He'd never known what it felt like to walk into a room and become invisible. He was a man used to drawing attention, holding it, and using it to his advantage. It was just the course of different individuals with unusual beauty and it wasn't even something they intended to do. It just was.

Darius, being what he considered average, was wise to what Sy failed to realize. Zaza Draper was his equal in many ways and she didn't feel the immediate need to cater to him just because he was striking and oozed sex appeal.

Za had the same effect on individuals around her and she was just as oblivious to it as Sy was.

Darius was enjoying the show immensely.

"I believe she's danced with and hit on every woman in the club to show me she has no desire for me or any other man!" Sy cursed her softly.

"Give her time, Sy; Za's been through a lot when it comes to men. You promised me you would be patient with my friend!"

Sy rubbed his temple as Selby's reprimanding voice floated into his thoughts. His eyes narrowed. "Darius..." he warned.

"I sent Selby a private mental message to leave you be." Darius gave Selby a scornful look. She laughed from the dance floor and twirled on her heels, disappearing as someone grabbed her hand, pulling her back into a throng of dancing bodies. He smiled and cleared his throat as Sylus looked as if he was about to give way to one of his infamous temper tantrums.

"Sy, you know how she worries over her friend. She just wants to make sure Za is safe from your well-earned insensitivity when it comes to women. It is no one's fault but your own that Selby feels this way about you. She saw your past disregards with other women from your own mind."

"That was an unfortunate chance," Sy injected.

"You allowed her to mentally link completely to you during lovemaking," Darius accused, still perturbed that Sylus had been so careless. "It was dangerous for a novice like Selby. If it hadn't been for her soul-binding link to me, she could have become cataleptic from the flooding of your centuries of knowledge.

Sy looked mournfully at Darius like an insolent child. "How was I to know about that humming thing she does with her tongue; you should have warned me, so I would have been prepared. She opened me wide like a bonfire, but it was only for an instant."

"For us immortals, an instant can be a century worth of data," Darius reprimanded and

poured more wine into his crystal glass. "It has been a hard adjustment for Selby, since Za is not a descendent of nymphs like she is. It troubles Selby to know that she will always remain as she is now, while Zaza, whom has always been by her side, will age and die."

Sy stiffened at the thought of the vibrant Zaza someday taking her last earthly breath. Aging wasn't what bothered him about humanity, although he found it difficult to understand death, no matter how many times he had witnessed it happening and in some cases been the cause of it. Death was an unnatural adjustment for an immortal and he supposed it would be for the living also.

"I don't wish to link myself with Za until I am sure of what type of bond I want with her. We can't have a future together because I can't change her into an immortal. I do sense she has been hurt deeply and I do not wish to add to that pain," Sy confessed after a long silence lingered between them.

"Understandable, but we both know you can erase those memories along with the ones that she will have of you. So that is no basis to deny yourself," Darius reasoned.

"Yes, but I can't use her that way. What would be the fun in that? For now, Za amuses me for the moment. That is all, and it has been centuries since I've been amused. Well, almost centuries." Sylus chuckled. "I did enjoy that mini-adventure we had with your cousin, Justus, several months back."

"Sy, don't even bring that up when Justus and Sera comes, next week. They are probably still healing from the loss of their babe."

"I'm not totally insensitive." Sy stared at Darius. "Since you found your mate, I feel as if you don't know me at all anymore."

"Well, since you have been brooding over Zaza, you have closed a lot of your thoughts to me." Darius glowered. "That is unlike you. How can I feel you with me if you shut me out?"

"This is true, I just..." Sylus trailed off and felt Darius caressing his thoughts with his to gain the absolute truth. He could feel his male life-mate's rising frustration, but he wasn't ready to share what he was thinking and feeling. He wasn't even sure what he was feeling. "Forgive me, but I have some matters on my mind that I choose to settle alone without yours or Selby's influences."

"That is understandable and you know I am here for you if you should have need of me."

Sylus cocked a brow in mirth. "You can no longer give me what I *need* from you, my friend. When you gave your essence to your female life-mate, you ruined any more sexual bonding betwixt us."

Darius touched and squeezed Sylus's shoulder. "I know, but Selby pleases us both, does she not, and I can still give you immense satisfaction with my mouth and hands."

“After centuries of you being mine alone, it’s not the same. Still, I don’t curse your fate; I envy it. Selby does please my body immensely but she is your heart of hearts. She can never be my life-mate. Nor can she bear my sons.”

“Nor can Za, Sylus.” Darius pointed out.

“Yes, she could if I so choose it to be,” Sylus stated softly; he fingered the pale single braid of his hair before tossing it back over his shoulder.

Darius paled and his eyes grew wide with disbelief. “No...Sy...don’t even think it, or joke about it.”

“I didn’t say I was considering such a thing, Darius; I just said there is a way.”

“I never want to hear you speak of this again.” Darius said coldly. “Sylus. I care for Za because she means the world to Selby, but not enough to encourage your current way of thinking.” Darius cursed and ran a hand over his face. He took a deep swig of wine. “Get...it...out of your thoughts, Sy. Do you hear me?”

Sylus decided to appease Darius; it was less straining than arguing with him over the subject, but in the end, it will be his decision and his alone. He changed the subject.

“I look forward to performing our song this eve and tell me, how is everything coming with the investigator you hired?” Sylus asked.

Darius visibly eased as the intensity of the moment subsided. “I’m glad you asked about the investigation, because I’m going to require your help. I find I can’t get around Selby’s suspicions that I’m up to something.” Darius chuckled. “I guess it’s because *I am* up to something.”

Curious, Sy leaned forward. “You know I will help, if it’s within my power. What’s going on?”

“The investigator believes he had found Selby’s natural mother in San Francisco and I need you and, if possible, Za to go speak with her and make sure. I’m allowing Zaza to decide if surprising Selby will be a good thing or if I should leave it alone.”

“Does it matter? We needed to find the woman regardless because of her bloodline.” Sylus pointed out.

“True, but Selby doesn’t have to be subjected to her, if she is not a good person.” Darius argued. “My bride is a famous and wealthy woman, marrying into a wealthier and well-respected Greek family. I need Za to decide if inviting this woman into our lives, as a wedding gift to Selby, would be wise.”

“Sounds like it’s something Zaza could do on her own.” Sylus towered his fingers against his pursed lips. “Why do you need me to accompany her?”

“The one thing Za can not do is connect with me and permit me to read the woman for myself.”

“What if you feel the woman is sincere, yet Za’s human emotions read her wrong and she’s against the idea?”

Darius could feel Selby approaching the table before actually seeing her through the crowd of people. “We will speak of this more later; Selby has become apprehensive as to why I am denying her entrance to my thoughts. But if Za proves to be a problem, I’m sure I can depend on you to make her see things your way.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that,” Sy mumbled skeptically. He had yet to persuade her to give him one blasted dance.

His eyes took in her dark moist face as she and Selby dropped down in their seats in non-stop chatter and giggling. Their eyes locked and his body instantly reacted. She was the first to look away with the ceremony of lifting up the napkin and dabbing at her brow.

Sylus felt an inner disappointment. She would never understand what he was and if she did, he couldn’t see Zaza contentedly staying at his side after she began to age while he remained the same. If she were to trust him enough to care for her until her dying day, how could he cast her aside once his life-mate came into his life? Would it be just to her?

He scowled and down another full glass of wine. When did he start worrying about how someone else would feel? Usually when he saw something he definitely wanted he’d use his supernatural skills to have his way and then moved on to whatever or whoever else caught his fancy. He mentally cursed Za, for hounding his thoughts unmercifully. Most of all, he cursed himself for desiring her to want him for who he was and not because he enchanted her. Sy ignored the wine glass and grabbed the bottle. His was filled with regrets.

CHAPTER SIX

San Francisco, California

Za was relieved to finally be alone. She felt as if she hadn't had the opportunity to exhale. From the instant Darius pressed her to join Sylus on this trip, she barely had time to pack before she was ushered into a limousine, then onto a private jet, and whisked away to San Francisco. If all goes well, Darius and Sylus assured her, she would be back home within one or two days, hopefully with Selby none the wiser.

Now that Za had precious time to reflect without those two gorgeous and persuasive men whispering in her ear, she wasn't certain how she felt about assisting in getting Selby and her mother together. She wondered if the woman had ever tried to look for her daughter over the years.

"I wonder what Sy knows about this woman that is suppose to be Selby's mother," Za muttered as she distractedly strolled out of her assigned sleeping quarters and entered into the hall.

She couldn't get over how beautifully decorated everything was as she paused to admire the several gilded framed black-and-white photos mounted on the butter-creamed painted walls. The portrait lights splendidly illuminated the surroundings without needing to switch on the three amber crystal octagon chandeliers overhead.

Za stopped in front of the marbled console holding a lovely tray with a sheet of smooth polished pebbles; a wall-mounted fountain above the oblong table presented the natural sounds of rain, and on both ends, large decorative vases holding cut willow branches. She closed her eyes to savor the serene elemental sound of the fountain and a waft of the scented willows teased her senses.

Za felt her tension easing and reluctantly continued down the hallway towards the door, which if she recalled accurately, was Sylus's office. Before he excused himself to return his brother's phone call, he politely showed her around the huge suite that used up the entire top floor of the exclusive hotel.

With his palm on the small of her back, as if he had the right to rest it there, he navigated her through the floor plan, willingly identifying the spectacular early 19th century French-carved paneling throughout the suite.

The master suite with his and hers private baths, held heavy mahogany furnishings, including a beautiful sleigh bed, with crimson bedding and fit for a king, was a bit much for Za's taste. There were three additional bedrooms and a substantial quantity of five bathrooms, one just as opulent as the last in its décor. If she'd assumed she and Selby were living large, considering their meager beginnings, she was completely fooling herself after seeing how Sy and Darius lived.

Za remained unimpressed by all the wealth until he showed her the state-of-the-art gourmet kitchen. Sylus seemed stunned by her obvious delight in something as trivial as a stainless-steel convection oven.

Za realized her mistake in confessing her love of cooking when he had the nerve to throw his pale head back and laugh. It would have served him right if she had clocked him over the head with one of the skillets hanging from a rack over the island.

The only thing that saved him was he opened the door to reveal an adjacent butler's pantry with a wet bar that opened into a large formal dining room. She ogled and read labels in the impressive storeroom. There were substantial food items and spices from every country imaginable, some stuff she'd never even heard of. At that instant, she had been in chef's heaven.

Za shook her head smiling at the recall. It had taken Sylus a good twenty minutes to pull her laughingly out of that room. *Laughingly*, because he cheated and tickled her ribs to gain her submission; otherwise, she'd probably still be in there, sitting on the floor, reading jars and sniffing spices, while mulling over the recipes she read in the various cook books she found in the room.

Standing at his closed office door she could hear him speaking with someone and realized he was most likely still on the telephone. Deciding she would speak with Sy later, she chose to try and make her way back to the kitchen and storeroom.

Za stopped as she came to the end of the hall and realized she wasn't quite sure which direction took her back to the kitchen. With an accepting groan, she continued straight ahead into the opened sitting room.

She made her way through the sitting area, glancing around once again at the seemingly-dark antique furnishings softened by cushions and draperies of cream, tones of gold, paprika, and a soft sage green. Zaza glanced behind her to make sure Sylus was still closed up in his office before she walked over to the beautiful painted portrait hanging over the fireplace.

In the portrait were two men who looked like Sy and Darius, except they were dressed in regency clothing and their hair was styled to fit the period. She moved closer and came up on her tiptoes to read aloud the golden plaque mounted on the bottom of the gilded frame. "Courage is like love. *Adieu*, and fare thee well, to my loyal comrades. *Napoleon Bonaparte*."

Za took a step back in amazement. It was obvious from the similarities these were Sy's and Darius ancestors. She could only imagine what a portrait like this would bring in an auction. It was awesome to see an actual *gift portrait* commissioned by the Emperor of France. Hell, yeah, she was impressed and envious.

She could only imagine what it felt like to be able to trace the family tree back this far. What

a blessing to have something this wonderful to pass through the generations

Deciding she didn't want to be found snooping, Za sauntered over towards the imposing floor to ceiling windows and carefully opened the retracting glass doors. A lighthearted smile came to her lips as she stood listening to the hubbub sounds coming from the bustling San Francisco traffic below.

Walking out onto the beautiful garden terrace overlooking the coastal city, she could make out the bay and, further away in the nearby horizon, the Golden Gate Bridge loomed. It was a beautiful sight to behold.

She continued standing in that position watching the waning sunlight as it appeared to descend into the depths of the water easing the coastal metropolis bridge into a dark outline. With the night came the dense mist and the twinkling lights as the city of San Francisco started to sparkle.

She loved the lights of Las Vegas but this was even more magnificent with the backdrop of water. She could grow to love looking out at this view.

Zaza leaned against the balcony. The couple of times she had visited San Francisco she was in and out within a few hours of business meetings and she never had the time to actually appreciate the city. With a reluctant sigh, she strolled about the sprawling garden balcony rubbing her arms against the damp chill of the evening air in several stories high, temperatures.

This wasn't exactly a delightful holiday either. They had to return as soon as possible, before Selby could get suspicious about both, her and Sylus, being out of town at the same time, especially with the wedding looming around the corner.

She jumped in surprise as lights around the garden suddenly came on as if by magic, illuminating her surroundings liken to something out of a fairytale. She could appreciate the care and love that went into creating this garden terrace even more. Za fingered the shiny healthy plants in the huge stoneware pots. There were also wooden boxes of green foliage, colorful flowers, and miniature trees.

Deep carpet of turf-grass dominated one side of the balcony terrace. The other held the soothing sound of a round fountain with a Satyr in the center. Za giggled. The water was spouting out of the goat-like creature's penis as if it was pissing in the pool of water.

To the left there were black scrolled wrought-iron chaises, chairs with colorful cushions. Again, as in the rest of the hotel apartment, nature played a big part. It was surprising how at ease she felt here. She wondered if it was why Sylus stayed here when he was in town.

Sylus. Za sighed aloud. There was so much she didn't know about him. She never thought of him as the outdoors type. He was too pale to enjoy being in the sun and his metrosexual beauty

almost bordered on narcissism. She chuckled and shook her head at that thought, because in all fairness she never seen him overly concerned about his outward appearance. She just resented the fact that he always looked wonderful in everything he wore.

Za couldn't contain herself; she kicked aside her gold colored jeweled strapped slides to walk around the terrace. She was a country girl at heart and she loved the feeling of the cool smooth stone beneath her bare feet before making her way onto the thick grass that engulfed her toes. A whisper of contentment escaped her lips as her bared toes wiggle deeply into the lawn. She closed her eyes and giggled.

In her penthouse apartment, she didn't have a terrace or the occasion to relax in the nearby park of well-cared-for lawn and floral gardens. She couldn't get enough of it. This place and the way she was feeling made her wish for a nice home with a big yard and lots of children that she could roll with in the grass and tickle them breathless. Za was stunned into stillness. When had she started wanting such things?

This garden was obviously one of miracles and magic because she had never imagined such silly domesticated living in her entire life.

"Do you like it out here?" The rich timbre of a male voice cut through her thoughts. "This is my favorite place in the entire suite. It was my way of transporting parts of my birth home here."

Za slowly opened her eyes to properly regard Sy casually leaning against the doorframe. She cocked her head to the side; her eyes settling on his long lean form. His muscular legs were crossed at the ankles, his fingers tucked in the front pocket of his cream-colored linen trousers and his well-developed forearms were exposed in a short-sleeved burgundy silk shirt.

Today he wore his long hair loosely draped behind his shoulders, the ends gently rippling in the breeze. He reached up and removed his reading glasses, placing them atop his head to keep his hair from blowing in his face. His fair skin magnified the darkness of his deep brown eyes. Za knew she was staring rudely, but she couldn't take her eyes off him.

"Those flowers you're standing by are red amaryllis. I plant them in memory of my mother. They were named after her, you know."

Za licked her lips and blinked a couple of times. "So, you are an outside person?"

He chuckled and grinned. "When ever it's possible. I love nature, I'm a part of it."

Za gave him a long look, not sure whether he was being sarcastic or telling her the truth.

"Uh...the flowers are beautiful." She said for lack of anything else to say. He always seemed to rattle her nerves like no other has ever done. "In fact, the entire hotel suite is, something else."

“I’m delighted that you like it.” He said.

“I believe if it were mine I would stay here every chance I got. How do you get on a list to purchase a suite like this or maybe I can lease this one sometime when I wish to get away.” Za was being fanciful.

Sy pushed himself away from the door, removing his hands from his pockets. He openly studied her as he strolled to stand in front of her. Taking a deep, unsteady breath, she cautiously stepped back.

Moving his shoulders in a shrug he smiled down at her saying, “Any time you would like to stay here, you are welcomed. No money is required. This entire top floor is the family wing. As you saw, it requires a special key code for the elevator to take you past the twenty-fourth floor.”

“This is a family wing. Does that mean anyone with a big family can stay here, with a reservation and enough money, of course?”

He chuckled. “Not exactly, it has to be my or Darius’s family. This is one of our hotels.”

Za’s brow disappeared beneath the spiky bangs lying against her brow. “I hope I’m not being too forward, but is there anything you don’t have your hands on?”

He cocked a brow.

She realized, maybe she was being, a little too forward. “I’m sorry; it’s really none of my business--”

“No, I like it that you are interested in me and the *things* I’d like to have my hands on.”

He came closer, his gaze intense. His nostrils flared slightly as if he was sniffing her scent on the breeze.

“I am curious about your family...I had assumed you and Darius were like me and Za. That you only had each other as far as close family is concerned.” She licked her lips while staring at his very kissable mouth. “I know Darius has cousins, because they are in the wedding.”

As if Sylus noticed her interest in his mouth he leaned in close enough that she thought he was about to kiss her.

“Do you really wish to *speak* about me and my family, Za, or would you rather be doing something else with that luscious mouth of yours?”

She swallowed deeply, her mouth suddenly going dry. The sexual magnetism that made him so self-confident was causing havoc to her feminine senses. Every time his gaze met hers, her heart turned over in response. Not to mention her moist snatch was dampening her designer panties. *This had be the biggest mistake I’ve made in a long time. Why did I agree to come here alone with this man?* Her thoughts raced.

She refused to play this game with him. When it came to dealing with men, the least amount of control you gave them the more they took. She reminded herself of a painful incident of her past and it was the cold water in the face she needed to find her voice.

“Is there some reason you don’t wish to talk about yourself?” Her voice was deep and dusky.

He sighed with exasperation. “Of course not.” He looked at her hard as if daring her to turn this simple conversation into another one of their many heated arguments. “I have brothers that are still alive. We are involved with several ventures; yet, my ancestors built the bulk of their wealth by crafting musical instruments back in the 1600’s.”

Before she could mask her emotions her light-colored eyes clouded with envy. Quickly she lowered her thick, black lashes. “It must be cool to be able to trace your heritage back that far.”

His features grew soft with understanding. Lifting one hand, he fingered the hair on her temple lightly. “I intend to forget that Selby isn’t the only one who grew up not knowing her parents.”

“I knew my parents. My father is imprisoned and my mother is dead,” Za said bluntly, not sure why she would want to tell Sylus her business. She felt as if he was nudging deep into her soul, urging her to share all her secrets. She also felt as if he actually wanted to know and wasn’t just being polite.

Za rubbed her arms and turned away, padding across the grass. She eased her feet into her shoes and made her way inside into the sitting area of the suite. She took a seat on the lush gold jacquard sofa, praying that he would drop the subject.

He followed on her heels grabbing the cashmere throw off the back of a chair he came to sit beside her.

“I’m sorry to hear of the loss of your mother.” Sy said wrapping the throw around her bare arms and took her hand in his.

Za tugged to free her hand, but he laced her fingers with his and pressed it tightly against his flat, hard abs. She conceded.

“My eldest brother, Quintan, is the head of the family business.” He continued about himself and she was grateful.

“How many siblings do you have?”

“Quintan, the eldest, as I mentioned and a younger brother, Roman.”

“Are they in the same business?” Za asked, encouraged by the fact he was easily revealing pieces of his life to her.

“No, most of our instruments are mass-produced now with the exception of special requests.

Special orders are the ones we still do personally by hand and if Quintan can't handle the order, Roman and I will pitch in. Quin, is...well, he is very private. I'm not sure he will come to the wedding at all."

"Private, or introverted like you?" She paused and sighed "I'm sorry, for some reason I..." Za trailed off.

Sylus grinned. "Don't worry about, I seem to always bring out the worse in people. Unlike, my baby brother, he gets along everyone and seems to be the complete opposite personality of me and Quin."

"*Roman de Gauls*," Za said aloud. "Oh, shit! Why didn't I put it together? Is your brother, Roman de Gauls, the famous European tenor? Oh my God, he is isn't he?" She snorted in surprised and laughed. "I can't believe this. What a small world."

"I'm glad to see you can be excited about something, related to me." Sy stated sardonically.

Ignoring his remark she shook her head. "I would have never guessed it in a million years."

"My younger brother is more like our father, swarthy complexion and dark hair, as a matter of fact, so is Quintan. I'm the only one that took after our fair haired mother."

"Except for the beautiful dark eyes, that seems to be a trait you both carry," Za remarked and explained. "You see I...I've met Roman de Gauls." She smiled in memory. "It was one season I spent in Zurich, during a private art opening of a mutual acquaintance."

"My brother is slowing down if he permitted you to slip through his fingers," Sylus voiced; his eyes narrowed. "I assumed you did go unscathed by his charms."

"If you're asking me if I *fucked* your brother, then I assure you, I could have." She arched an elegant brow.

Sy scowled.

"But we met at a very difficult time in my life, or I should say, one of many. It was after my wedding was called off and Roman, was kind to me. The doctor had put me on some medication to calm my nerves and I learned then why they tell you not to drink at the same time."

He remained silent as she continued.

Roman made sure I got to my hotel safely and he did sleep in my bed. We were both fully clothed and nothing happened, he just held me and I slept the entire night for the first time in months."

Sylus's face softened and he released a long breath as if he had been holding it in the entire time she was telling him about her encounter. They locked gazes.

"No man is as driven as I am, Za, when I decide I want something...or someone," he paused

and his voice deepened to a soft murmur. "I don't let it slip through my fingers. It's beyond my nature to do so. I admit I find you extremely attractive and I can't promise to be the gentleman my brother is."

"Oh, really," Za snorted, crossing her arms beneath her breasts causing the throw to slide off her shoulders falling behind her, her body heating up quickly. "Is this an admission or a warning? I saying, if I can your baby brother, why do you think I would even consider the likes of you?"

"I got something going for me," Sy announced as if the answer was obvious.

"What is that? After all, Roman is charming, handsome, sweet, and not a pompous ass, like someone I know." She cut her gaze at him.

"True, my brother is all of those things," Sy agreed. "I believe it is me you want, and don't think it slipped my notice that you find my eyes beautiful." His lashes fluttered playfully before he crossed his eyes at her and stuck out his tongue.

It was so out of character of him she laughed. Za also found his playfulness charming and disarming. She chose to tread on the familiar grounds of cattiness.

"Hmm," she grunted. "I *see* why you didn't want me to make you a household name. You didn't want to compete against someone as talented as your *younger* brother."

To her surprise, Sy threw back his head and laughed openly. "Don't even try it with me, *woman*, for I am too confident in my own abilities as a man for you to try and make me feel as if age is of a consequence. It is the indistinctive qualities that make up a man, not his age or obvious talents and you, my lovely, have yet to discover what makes me so special to you."

Za blushed profusely under her dark complexion wondering if that was true. She remembered public masturbation while experiencing one of his obvious talents. *That*, she admitted, had not happened when she saw Roman de Gauls, performance.

"Not only do I find you passably attractive, but you make me laugh." His teasing rudeness brought her back to the moment as he pressed the back of her hand to his lips in a kiss. "You are refreshing, Zaza Draper."

After a delayed reaction, Za smacked her lips together and tugged her hand away.

"*Passably attractive?* Shoot, man, you know I got it going on and you would tap this if I gave you some play."

Sy's face went blank. "Huh?"

Za looked away with a sly smile. "I said, I can't deny the fact that you are a talent to be reckoned with," Za managed to lie without laughing.

"That didn't sound like what you what you said." He glanced at her from beneath lowered

lashes. "I would swear that you were telling me you know you are beautiful and I could take you for a playful tumble in my bed, but only if you were willing."

It was Za's turn to laugh. "I swear, the way you speak sometimes." She shook her head.

"I speak?" He was surprised. "You should hear yourself... ohm...home lady?"

"What the hell is a home lady?" Za eyes grew wide and she began laughing in earnest, holding her stomach. "Don't--" she snorted. "Don't even try to go soulful on me, Sy." Snort. "Home lady?" Snort. Snort. "It's home girl!"

He flushed, a sheepish smile on his lips. "It's not that funny, truly."

"You have no clue. First, we aren't from the same place or race, so I could never...ever...be your 'home girl'!" Za wiped at the tears streaking her face. "My goodness, I swear you must come from another planet or somethin'"

Sylus stiffened.

Za came up short. She hadn't expected to hurt his feelings. "I'm sorry. I'm just messing with you. It's really not that serious."

"No," he smiled sadly at her, his gaze growing bleak. "That's not it."

As a melancholy expression shadowed over his usual unreadable appearance, Zaza reeled as some need, long hidden and denied in her deepest soul, began to open. She yearned to kiss away whatever made him so sad. She would ask, but she was afraid if she did and he confided in her it would open the door to questions about her own life. Admittedly, she wasn't emotionally prepared to be that *open* with him, not now...not ever.

"Za, do you believe in other beings?"

"Such as little green men from out of space or what?" She grinned.

Seriously he said, "Such as things more earthly known, like fairies, nymphs, unicorns, werewolves, vampires, and *Satyrs*...in particular? I mean the lists of possibilities are enormous. Don't you think?" He moistened his bottom lip.

She nodded, staring only at his mouth, swallowing against the dryness of her throat. Her face lifted towards his and she paused as his words sunk in. She looked into his eyes, confusion marring her features.

"What? I suppose. *Satyrs*, you don't read much about or see in movies, but there were a movie with a few in them that came out last year," she rattled on with laughter in her voice. "They looked like that little creature statue on the terrace *pissing* in the fountain pool."

"Clueless woman," Sy harrumphed and rolled his dark eyes with indignation. "That is a *fawn*, not, a *Satyr*."

“Excuse me,” she frowned and once again tried to pull her hand from his. He didn’t let go. She could feel the strong thud of his heart against the back of his hand as he rested against the sofa. To her surprise he seemed genuinely upset by this discussion. “Sylus, are you seriously asking me this question or are you leading up to something else?” She eyed him warily.

Sylus sighed, releasing her hand. He ran his fingers through his hair, accidentally pushing the forgotten glasses off his head. He distractedly placed them on the sofa beside him.

“It’s of no importance.” He pouted glancing at her. “We have this evening free to do as we please before meeting the private investigator tomorrow afternoon. Do you want to call up for dinner or go out?”

Za was disappointed. Whatever he was trying to tell her, he obviously changed his mind. For the life of her, she had no clue what she had said that had ruined the moment. She really wanted to know everything about him. It would help in their business relationship, of course. That he had confided anything to her at all, made her feel oddly empowered...and special. Never had she been able to not read a man from the get go. Sylus was an enigma. She wasn’t sure how to proceed with him. He didn’t fit any of her safe categories she placed men in.

She smiled sweetly. “The pantry and the refrigerator has been stocked...how about I make us a couple of my famous veggie and ham omelets with a hollandaise sauce and some toast?”

Sy quirked her a look of doubt and said, “How about I ring down stairs for them to send a chef up to the suite?”

She stood up with hands braced on her hips, and gave him attitude. “Look, you ungrateful pain in the ass. You can do what you want to do. I know how to cook for *one* person and--“

She screeched as Sy reached out and looped his arms around her small waist, yanking her down on top of him. He chuckled with satisfaction. “Ah, there is the Za I’ve come to know so well.”

“You...you...” she sputtered.

“Tell me, Zaza,” he grinned up at her. “Will your famous omelet taste as half as good as your exquisite mouth?”

Before she had a chance to digest his question, he cupped her head in his large palms and lowered her head, then pressed his lips to hers. Soft against soft. Heat against heat. She moaned into his mouth as he parted her lips, taking more.

She felt him harden against her stomach and, instead of her usual moment of doubt and panic, she welcomed the masculine feel of his hardness against her pliant flesh.

He deepened their kiss and she accommodated him by allowing the sweeping of his tongue in

her mouth. Her body rested comfortably on top of him while she enjoyed the flavor of his kiss. It was strangely unusual experience for he tasted of wild berry wine she stole once out of a convenient store as a teenager; sweet, addictive and could prove to be intoxicating in large quantities.

His stomach growled against her, or was he growling? Za smiled against his lips, and felt him smile back. She lifted her head and examined his face with her eyes and fingertips: the fullness of his kiss-swollen lips, which she nibbled at the corners; the arch of his thick brows, startling against his fair skin and light hair; his dark, downy, thick lashes.

Never had she witnessed such perfection in a man, from the elegant ridge of his cheekbones and prominent jaw line to his perfectly even and straight haughty nose.

Once again his stomach growled and she was sure, she heard correctly. "Sounds like my omelet may win out over my kiss," she whispered.

"I don't think so...mmm... more please," he murmured, shifting his body on the sofa to settle in for some additional foreplay.

CRACK!

"What the hell was that?" Za frowned.

Sy cursed softly his head dropped back against the couch pillows. "My eyes."

"What?" She frowned in confusion.

"I think I just broke my reading glasses."

Za pressed her face against the heat of his chest as he burrowed his fingers in her short hair in a frustrated sigh.

"Yeah, old men need their reading glasses." Her shoulders began to shake as she started to laugh. "I don't remember Roman having to worry about his reading glasses when kissing."

"Kissing? You said nothing about kissing!"

Her lashes fluttered with mirth. "Oh, didn't I?"

"Okay, *woman*, it's getting really dangerous in here and you have two options at this moment." He cocked a wicked brow while pausing for effect. "You may fuck me or feed me, but speaking of your lips on my brother's lips and laughing at my inability to read without my glasses, I will not tolerate an empty stomach."

She continued to laugh.

"Never mind." He raised his hands above his head. "I have decided you are no longer in charge of making rational decisions. With that said, I have no desire to screw a crazy female, such as me" he said in that superior voice that brooked no arguments. "Now you may get your body off of me, while I go and ravage the kitchen."

“Hey!” Za managed lifting her head from his chest, mirth still in her eyes and around her lips. “Come on sweetie, give me more kisses.”

“Nope.” He shook his head. “I decided I’m more hungry than horny.” Sy’s stomach growled in agreement. He grunted and sat up with her in his lap. “We better make our way to the kitchen.” He ran a fingertip caressingly along her lips. “Before I allow you to change my mind.”

“Too late, old man.” She pulled back. “By the way, how old are you, really?” Za asked.

“Old enough to know how to please a woman in every way imaginable.” He spoke seriously.

“You mean, as long as she don’t come with instructions.”

“I don’t understand.” His brow puckered in confusion.

She pushed his hair behind his ears and smiled. “Seeing how you’ve broken your glass and all,” she teased.

“I grow weary of your mouth.” Sy growled, playfully grasping her chin. “Tell me, what’s with your laugh? I feel like I’m back at the sow market in Piccadilly Square.”

“Hey! Are you saying I laugh like a pig? Why I--” Sylus bracketed her face with his hands to hold her laughing face in place and kissed her into silent submission.

Za found herself being thoroughly kissed, causing her body to tremble with hunger for him. He pulled away.

“Now, be a good little woman, get off me and,” he informed her with an ironic grin. “Show me these cooking skills you keep bragging about.”

“What?” she asked huskily. It was hard to think past the moisture that had pooled between her legs. Za never was this wet by a man’s touch. *God, my body is so hot.*

Za avoided his eyes. She fought to gain some semblance of control. “Well, you didn’t have to kiss me to get a meal. I offered.” She tried to rise.

He made a low, masculine moan deep in the back of his throat and his eyes softened. “Don’t fret, sweetness.” He nuzzled his brow beneath her chin and kissed her throat. “This is just the beginning of what’s to come between us, Zaza.”

Embarrassed by her inner vulnerability and the way his playful tenderness made her feel, Za pushed against his chest, scrambling to her feet clumsily. With a saucy stare she said, “Don’t count on it. This is not going to happen again.”

“Why not? I know you liked kissing me.”

“That’s...that’s not the point. You and I have a business relationship, a promise to Darius to fulfill, and a wedding to get through. These extra perks are not part of the bargain.”

Remaining silent, he moved aside on the couch and picked up his glasses; the lenses fell out

into the palm of his hand. He had such a boyish, dejected look on his handsome face she almost gave in to her need to touch him again. She had to put some space between them.

As she headed towards her bedroom, to change into something comfortable to cook in she thought, finally, she must have made him understand reason and know it was for the best.

He overturned that foolish conclusion by calling out and asking, “Za, does this mean you're going to handle the business of feeding me first, and then have sex with me later?”

Za turned to face him with limp-faced astonishment.

“What?” He smiled. “I'll even cut up the vegetables for you to speed things along.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sylus had never enjoyed his stay here as much as he did by having Zaza with him. There was something right about moving in unison with her throughout the kitchen, handing her pans, rinsing the pot and utensils, and placing them in the dishwasher—with her instructions, of course. He wondered how normal domestic routines could be so pleasing.

Several times while preparing and eating dinner, he found himself unable to think clearly when she brushed up against him to reach for something or absently touched his hand or arm in the midst of a discussion. He adored the way her eyes brightened and the animated movement of her hands when she became excited.

Sylus sat quietly as Za gave him an idea of how she planned on “packaging” his music to the world. It sounded like he was going to be busier than he’d ever been in his life, but he had never found anything more lovely to look at than her excited face in a long time.

If she noticed his distracted behavior, she never let on. Now she was speaking about a small town in Florida she had visit to scout some talent. Her mouth spread easily in a grin; he couldn’t take his eyes off her blush-colored tongue as she licked her lips.

He would enjoy being her lover and they would be excellent together. Sylus had a perception of such matters, based on centuries of experience and a Satyr’s instinct about a woman’s need. Za was good at pretending she was happy being single and alone, yet when she assumed he wasn’t looking he could see such a deep yearning on her face. He wondered what it was she truly longed for? He could smell her need desire when he was kissing her and her soft flesh was complacent for a man’s touch...his touch.

No, she may not come to his bed this night, but he would have her eventually. The desire to mate had weighed heavily on his mind since Darius had found his life-mate. Sy knew that his time was coming soon, that his mate would be arriving in his life at any time. So why was he pursuing Za?

What was he to do about his passions for her? Would his attraction fade once the gods and goddesses of Olympus blessed him with his heart’s desire? Should he even be thinking along these lines? Selby would never forgive him if he were to hurt Zaza in some way. This time he couldn’t afford to selfishly think about his own needs.

“Sylus, you aren’t even listening to me,” Za sighed and placed her crystal goblet of after-dinner brandy on the table between the high-back winged chairs. The gas fireplace crackled as if real logs were burning.

Sy shook himself from his deep thoughts and took a sip of wine before placing the glass down beside hers. "I apologize. I'm pleasantly full and I allowed myself to day dream over how blessed I feel to have sampled your skills."

"Thank you," she beamed. "I suppose it is getting late and I have done nothing but talk business. I apologize but I must admit I've enjoyed our evening."

He chuckled. "You say that as if you're surprised."

"In all honesty, I am. I often wondered what could we possibly have in common?" She grazed him with a disarming smile. "I never imagined antiques and arts would be one of our commonalities."

Sy winked at her. "I am a man of many talents if you would just give me a chance. I know of places and people who house some of the most breathtaking private art collections, you've ever seen. I, being one of them."

"Really? I never got the chance to ask. Do you have your own place in Las Vegas? I ask because, you seem to spend a lot of time at Selby's."

He cocked a brow. "I see," he stated. "Darius and I have a place in Las Vegas together, but he can barely tolerate leaving Selby's side for long periods of time. So he's practically moved in with her. She has kindly allowed me to utilize the other room."

"Sylus, you don't have to pretend as if you are only a guest at Selby's. She's confirmed what I had already expected. You and Darius are lovers. Also that you have joined them in their bed," Za snapped.

"I wasn't aware I was trying to *pretend* at anything Za; I was merely stating a fact." He rolled his shoulders. "Darius and I have not been lovers since he bound himself to Selby."

"Are you telling me you haven't slept with my best friend?"

"I have made love and slept with Selby with Darius's blessings; but, the occasion is rare for I long for a mate of my own." He cocked his head, waiting for some reaction from his confession.

"This is crazy. It's completely out-of-character for Selby. I'm usually the wild and reckless one." Za dropped her lashes. "I hardly recognize my friend these days; she seemed to have changed so much since you and Darius came into her life."

"So what are you saying truly, Za?" Sylus asked, not sure why she was so upset. Was she jealous of him being with Selby or Selby being with anyone other than herself?

"I don't know." She twisted her hands together in her lap. "Everything is changing so fast."

"Sweetheart, I know that Selby is more than a confidant to you and that you are also occasional lovers. I also know that she has welcomed you to share the bed with us yet you deny

what your body desires.” He leaned forward.

“That’s not true. Why would I want to share my bed with you or any other man?”

“You said it yourself you use to be the wild one, also you were with men up until a few years ago…”

“A man!” She yelled. “I thought I had found a man that could change me and I realized he wasn’t the one to do it.”

“So you decided you must be gay? Because that one man didn’t do it for you! Don’t you see how foolish that is?” He questioned. “You’re walking around telling everyone that will listen, you’re a lesbian, yet, Za, you can’t even hold a relationship with another woman and from what I can tell, you’re not happy.”

“Selby, talks too much!”

Her tone aroused and infuriated him. Tossing his hair over his shoulder he narrowed his eyes on her. “You have this big chip on your shoulder when it comes to men. What the hell, happened to you to make you feel so much anger?”

“I don’t know what you mean, I’m not angry,” Za stated quickly. Too quickly he thought.

“Yes, you are. You’re more then angry. You’re bitter.” Sylus argued. “Do you even know, what you want?”

He watched her close her eyes briefly as she pondered his questions. When she opened them once more, she blinked at him with unshed tears and it tore at his heart.

“Okay, it’s obvious you still don’t feel you can trust me. So, I will share something with you that only Darius and Selby knows about me.” Sy couldn’t look at her so he gazed into the flickering flames of the fireplace. “I despise being alone.” His face held a sad bleakness. “I rather die then be in my own company. Darius came in my life just in time. He saved me from madness or from becoming reclusive and embittered like my brother, Quin.”

She placed her hand on his arm and he tensed “Sy.”

“I don’t need your pity, Za.” He ground out between clinched teeth.

“It’s not pity I’m offering.” She removed her hand from his arm and clasped her fingers together tightly in her lap. “It’s just, I do understand loneliness. As a child, evening a room full of other children, I felt alone, different then the other children. I never fitted in and the other children seemed to fear me. That was until Selby came along. We clicked right away.”

Sy gave her his full attention.

“When Selby was permanently fostered and left me, I was lost. Then, I was in and out of foster homes, like a puppy that just didn’t work out. No one seemed to want to keep me around for

long periods of time.”

“Why?”

She shrugged. “Mostly because of the way looked. Husbands or sons would be caught staring at me too long for the women of the household’s comfort. So it must have been me, teasing and whoring myself to them, they would say.” A lone tear fell down her cheek. “It wasn’t true. I didn’t even notice until they tried to touch me in ways I didn’t want to be touched.”

He could see that happening. Za was beautiful, but it was sick of those that she should have been able to call family, to desire her when she was just a kid in need of home, love, and a family. “I can’t imagine how difficult it must have been for you.”

“What do I want, you asked?” She smiled sadly. “I wasn’t sure until recently and now I don’t know what to do with all these feelings, I’m having.”

“What is that you want, that you feel can’t have?” He asked his hand covering hers.

“I want a real home, full of love and children. They don’t have to be my own, but I would like to adopt children like myself and give them hope, love and security.”

“Oh, Za, I think you would be a wonderful mother,” Sy found himself confessing and not just out of kindness.

“I hope so. Single women are allowed to adopt all the time, now. I’m financially equipped to give them a good home.” she beamed.

Sy chuckled at her enthusiasm. “It sounds as if you are going to have a house full of babes.”

“As many as they will allow me to have.” She smiled back at him. They forgot the earlier tension that stood between them.

“Do you see a father in this picture-perfect family?”

Za snorted. “Why? I won’t be the first mother to raise her children in a single-parent home, and I doubt I will be the last.”

He wasn’t convinced by her snappy retort and he wasn’t sure she was, either.

“Za?”

“Hmmm?”

“May I ask something of you?”

She gazed at him warily as he pushed himself out of the chair and stood before her. “W...what?” Her heart pattered recklessly.

“Don’t make me sleep alone.” He held out his hand. “Will you sleep with me? Will you allow me to hold you? Please, I don’t want to be alone tonight.”

Za turned over on her side with a shuddering sigh. She didn't know why she was crying. She didn't know what made her feel worse, declining Sylus's offer or witnessing his open hurt at her rejection. It exposed a vulnerability she hadn't expected in him. So why was she so unhappy about her wise decision? *What do I want?* She asked herself again, for about the sixth time in the past two hours.

Sy probably felt sorry for her after she'd told him what she thought she wanted. She wished she could be as forthcoming in how she was feeling about him as she was about everything else. What about their playful banter on the sofa earlier, she did feel as if she could give in to him, right then and there. Her desires and passion had been genuine. She hadn't been scared of him then. But the thought of him being in her bed and the possibility of something more happening was a risk she didn't want to take. Za rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes and bit back a sob.

She had spent fifteen years in therapy to forget what had happened to her. No, she wouldn't ever be able to forget, she just wanted to get past it and live a normal fear free life.

Za looked up at the ornate ceiling over her bed, and did something she hadn't done since she stopped believing.

"Okay...don't trip from the shock of hearing from me, or worse, have an earthquake while my ass is here in San Francisco. Oops, is it okay to say, *ass*?" She had to smile at her own foolishness. "Anyway, I need to talk to somebody and it looks like YOU are it."

Za rolled her eyes. This was ludicrous. She needed to call Selby, but telephoning her best friend about Sylus was out of the question. Selby didn't know the two of them were even together and one thing would lead to another and she would end up blurting out the truth of why she was here with Sy and why she had to lie about it in the first place.

With increasing irritation, she pummeled her pillow and flipped over on her stomach, kicking the coverings off her naked legs while mumbling, "I swore after the shit with Peter I would never get seriously involved with *anyone* again. I didn't even allow Megan to spend the entire night in my bed. So why in the hell am I'm lying here, thinking about going across the hall to Sylus's room and crawling into his bed?"

She threw her hands up in disgust.

"Okay, this is the time Selby usually throws in her down-home country words of wisdom, with a side-order of attitude."

She continued anxiously, "*I need* someone to tell me I made the right choice tonight...tell me it was the *only* choice," she sobbed. Her, earnest eyes closed as she burrowed her face into the pillow

in a muffled scream. She balled her fist and hit the pillow.

“*Dammit!* I know I’m worthy to receive and give love, so why can’t I stop fighting the one thing I want so badly? I know deep inside everything that happened to me wasn’t my fault. Still, I can’t seem to shake this damn fear. What can I do to get pass this?”

Deafening silence haunted her for hours on end. There were no thunder, no angels magically appearing to save the day, and no words of comfort to assure her things would be better tomorrow.

Za pulled her knees up into a fetal position and closed her tear swollen tired eyes. She honestly hoped the powers of prayers were true but, once again, she had her doubts. No one heard her prayers that hot summer day when she was ten years old, and no one was seemed to be listening now.

Sylus had no idea where he was going until he ended up turning onto California Highway 1, guiding the leased black Jaguar up the winding path towards Muir Woods.

He was unable to stop thinking about Za. Deep down in his soul, he feared he might have discovered something he hadn’t realized he was capable of until today.

Tightening himself with resolve, he declared, *No, I do not know anything about the love of mortals. I will not allow myself to fall in love with Zaza, or any other woman of humankind. My eternal mate could appear at any time. A Nymph is what I need. She will be able to hold my immortal nectar and bear my sons.*

He knew it was too late. He knew it when he came upon her, barefooted, with her face looking up into the heavens on the garden terrace, her eyes were closed, and such a look of peace. He watched her for a while before he spoke. His eyes had misted, she was so beautiful to look upon, not just the outer shell, but he saw something exquisitely innocent and fragile radiating from inside her. He could feel a need so great coming from her heart, it stunned him.

How he felt for her stunned him more. For the first time in his life, he was in love. Moreover, the recipient of his affections was a reluctant lesbian over one thousand years younger than he was.

I do not want to love her.

“*Sy, I’m sensing turmoil. What is happening?*” Darius voice seeped into his thoughts as clear as a phone call.

He knew eventually he would be hearing from his male life-mate, how would he not when he was dying inside? He eased the automobile onto the shoulder of the road and cut the engine. Driving on this unlit road at night was madness and he had to partially shift into his true form to give him

better night vision. If he were thinking clearly, he would have realized the shift would allow Darius to feel him more clearly even at this great distance.

"Sy! Answer me, or I will call aid to my kinsmen near San Francisco to scout you out, until I can get to you myself!" Darius warned.

"I hear you, Darius. Stop yelling at me."

"Thanks, to the gods. You scared me witless." The relief was obvious in Darius's voice. *"You've been gone not even one day, what is going on there. Is Zaza all right?"* He paused before adding. *"You didn't hurt her, did you? Sy I told you not to play with her heart because you don't know what's she's been through. Selby will--"*

"Shut up!" Sy's knuckles became white as he gripped the steering wheel. *"You make it seem as if I would intentionally hurt Za. Have you once thought about me? What do I do if Za is hurting me? Has anyone considered that possibility? What does one do when they fall in love with a woman seems to fear him?"*

"Sy..."

"Darius, if she can't abide me in my human form, how am I to get her to accept me for what I am?"

"Whoa. You have me completely confused 'cause I swore in the midst of it all that I heard you say you were in love with Za."

"The gods have obviously cursed me," he moaned. *"I have fallen in love with a human female. What am I to do? She can't become an immortal or bear my sons. It will break my heart to watch her age and die leaving me alone again,"* he cried out. *"I don't know what to do."*

"Did you tell her?"

"Of course not. I'm just coming to accept what is so myself."

"Sy, I am stumped on how to comfort you. I've never felt these emotions from you before. I feel very mortal at the moment," Darius confessed.

"As I, my friend, as I."

"What I can do is call the jet back. Selby and I can be there first thing in the morning."

Sylus thought about it, he could use the distraction and maybe Selby could help him ease the hellish emptiness that was tearing up his insides.

"No, Sylus. I will not allow you to use Selby to ease your lust. She is our mate in love, not a piece of flesh that you can utilize and ease what ails you," Darius chided.

"Forgive me for even thinking it, my friend," he said humbly. *"I'm not myself. How do you deal with these cursed emotions? You have more experience at this love thing than I do."*

"I don't know what to tell you Sy, because Selby is a descendent of the Nymphs and this is her destiny, even though it took some time for her to realize it."

Sy took a deep breath and released it slowly. *"I will be okay. Just in case Selby is sensing any of this, go to her. I will try to relax. Rest assured Darius, Za is safe with me and I will take care of what we came here for."*

"Are you sure, Sy?"

"I'm sure of only one thing." He paused, knowing Darius would not want to hear this.

"That is?"

"As soon as my obligations to you and your wedding are completed, I will be taking a sabbatical to Mount Olympus."

"To visit the gods? Why?"

He could hear the suspicion in Darius's voice.

"You will be away with Selby for a time and I do not wish to intrude or to be alone." Sy rubbed his tired eyes.

"Selby would understand if we postpone the trip or come along."

"I can't. I must go home. I need to put as much distance between me and this woman as possible."

Darius sighed in frustration and Sy could picture him running his hands through his dark hair.

"I am here whenever you need me, Sylus."

"I know."

"I love you, Sy, and even though this is an impossible situation with Za, I am happy you were allowed to at least experience this beautiful and yes, sometimes painful human emotion."

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you at this time. However, thank you for your concern. I love you, too. Give Selby my love. I will call when we know something."

"Fine."

"Hey, Darius, one more favor." Sylus halted Darius before he mentally pulled away.

"Anything."

"I once gave you the time you needed alone. I disassociated my link to you when you needed to figure out your future with Selby--"

Reluctant to hear Sy complete his request, Darius intervened. *"Say no more. Call me on the phone if you need me."*

"See you soon."

"Tell Za!" Darius was gone, the psychic link dissolved before Sy could protest.

He and Za had no future, he decided, stepping out of the car and removed his shirt, throwing it in the front seat of the car. She was a woman in a deep need of not only love, but also stability and honesty. He hadn't been too honest with her thus far, so he didn't know if she would be willingly accepting at all to him in his true form.

Sy continued to undress until he was completely naked in the moonlighted darkness of the night. With ease and finesse from centuries of experience, he shifted completely into Satyr form.

His mental abilities became acute as the forest creatures of the dark called to him. Sylus took off through the woods in a frustrated sprint.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Za awoke with a start and set up in the bed. She remembered being upset and crying because she wanted to go to Sy, but was frightened by what might have happened, but she couldn't remember falling asleep.

She frowned, realizing what woke her up as she heard her cell phone ringing. Scooting out of the bed Za staggered across the room to lift her purse from a chair. She glanced at the clock and noticed it was only ten p.m., even though she felt as if it was later.

She removed her cell phone from her purse; and noticed it was an unlisted caller—her heart pounded rapidly. Maybe it was Sylus calling from a phone booth. Should she answer it? Why was she being so childish? Of course she should. She opened the phone stifling a yawn against her hand.

"Hello, this is Zaza." Silence. "Hello?" Nothing, but she could hear the person breathing. "Sylus?"

"Stay away from him, or die, bitch!" The voice rasped on the other line. Za dropped the phone. She stood trembling; she knew she must have stood there a full minute before stooping to retrieve the telephone. No one was there.

Feeling rattled, she sat down in the chair pushing her purse aside. She sat sixty-nine hoping to call back and she got a generic message. Za's first instinct was to call Selby, but decided against it for the same reason she didn't call her to speak about her feelings for Sylus. She closed her phone with a snap and a curse.

This caller was probably the same one that had been calling her home number and not saying anything before she had it changed. How did they get her cell number and who was the "him" they wanted her to stay away from? That was the first time the crank caller had ever spoken and it sounded like a man's voice.

The one thing she knew for sure was she needed to get her cell phone number changed. Za decided she didn't want to be alone tonight. She felt the need to surround herself with a lot of people. Hopefully, Sylus wasn't too upset with her and she could convince him to go down stairs to the dinner club, maybe even do a little dancing.

She shrugged off the uneasiness and pushed herself out of the chair. Within an hour, she had relieved her bladder, showered, brushed her teeth, and reapplied fresh makeup.

By the time she brushed and spiked her short hair, she decided she was going to spend the night with Sy.

Za removed her black silk bathrobe and replaced it with the sexiest outfit she'd packed as an

afterthought. The simply cut emerald green halter dress fit like a second skin in the bodice and flared seductively at the hem. There was no doubt she was a woman on a mission to seek forgiveness.

Za slid her feet into a pair of strapped, mint-green toeless heels and changed purses. With the grace of a model, she twirled in the full-length mirror and winked, thanking the fashion world for thongs.

“I can do this,” she said to her reflection.

Opening the bedroom door, she stepped out into the hall, closing the space between her room and Sy’s.

Her mind rattled with what she should say as she stood at his closed door. She realized he was right when he told her once, that she over-analyzed everything.

Za was surprised when Sy’s bedroom door swung opened and a stranger stood at the door.

“I’m sorry, *Mademoiselle*, I’m almost finished in here.” He smiled at her.

The room had a warm glow from the fireplace as she watched the suite valet turn down the bedding. This man was good at his job; everything seemed to appear as if by magic, and this was the first time since they arrived that she had caught him making the magic happen.

“*Mademoiselle*, do you need me for something?”

“No, I’m sorry to intrude. I was about to go downstairs. I was going to see if Mr. de Gauls wanted to join me.” She smiled. “Is he in his office?”

“I’m sorry. Mr. de Gauls had his car brought around well over an hour ago and he has yet to return.”

Za tried not to dwell on the disappointment that swelled inside her. She had no one to blame but herself. She destroyed what could have been a beautiful evening by allowing her fears to get the best of her.

Sylus said he didn’t wish to sleep alone. *Now he’s probably in someone else’s bed for the evening.*

“Thank you, if he happens to return before I do, could you give him a message that I will be in the club downstairs?”

The butler smiled, nodded politely, and returned to his duties while Za wandered slowly down the hall. She couldn’t blame Sylus for putting distance between them. She was an idiot.

Making her way toward the suite elevator, she made sure she had the elevator card key Sy gave her, so she could return to the private apartment and stepped inside. Za pushed the button for the third floor.

Melancholy began to set in and as she was about to push the button to return to the confines

of her room when the elevator doors opened. Music and animated conversations became clearer as she walked down the private corridor that led her to the rear of the club. She stared over at Sylus's usual table in the intimate corner and hoped she'd find him there, but was sadly disappointed.

"Miss Draper, good to see you again." A beautiful older woman with dark tresses swept up in a fall of curls and a black slim-fitting spaghetti-strap dress rushed forward, her French accent very prominent and lyrical to the ear. "We had so little time to speak earlier when Sylus was giving you a tour of the place."

She grabbed one of Za's hands and her thumb intimately caressed her inner wrist. "Hello, welcome back to *Club LeVamp*. Please, come. You can sit at Sylus's table; no one will dare to bother you there."

The woman continued to hold her hand as she escorted her to the table. Za cocked a brow, wondering how she missed the loveliness of this woman earlier; her skin was flawless and as white and translucent as skim milk.

On any other woman the opposition of her black hair, pale skin, and blood-red lips would have appeared to be a bad attempt at an older woman trying to wear the gothic look of today's youth. This attractive woman seemed to have created the trend.

Za couldn't help but gaze into her unusual colorless eyes.

"Thank you, but, you don't have to do this. I could have seated myself," Za managed to speak after what seemed like minutes of them standing there silently staring at one another.

"I assure you it's my pleasure to be your hostess tonight, Ms. Draper. Anything you desire, I'm sure I could accommodate. Sylus wouldn't expect any less for his personal guest." She winked playfully and licked her lips slowly.

Za didn't know if it was intentional or not but she was mesmerized by the simple movement and followed suit by licking her own. "Uh, please, call me Za."

"Only if you agree to call me Antoinette, or my friends call me Marie." The woman smiled and stood aside just enough to allow Za to slide into the booth; as Za moved passed her, their breasts grazed lightly against each other. Za's nipples immediately hardened and she cleared her throat as she secured her seat.

"Marie Antoinette?" Za arched her brow in question. "Like the French woman who lost her head?"

"You know, after all the good I...uh...she did for the French people before she was badly advised and made errors of judgment...it stands to reason, the only thing she is remembered for is losing her blasted head!" Marie placed her hands on her hips.

Za laughed, not believing the other woman was truly offended. It wasn't as if she knew the woman or something. But she could be some long lost relative or something. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to associate her with you. It's just that when you said it, the Marie Antoinette of the history books was the first thing to pop in my head."

"Well, the historians are the ones that deserved beheading for spreading falsehoods. Sometimes things don't always appear to be what one sees and I assure you she did not lose her head but retired to the country and lived to a fruitful age." Marie's voice lowered as she leaned in the opening of the booth towards Za. "She lived to give and receive all the pleasures that life has to offer."

Za's breath caught in her throat at the woman's sultry, dusky laugh. She grew moist between her legs. Lost in the woman's unusual eyes, Za leaned forward. She felt as if her bones were turning into liquid and she wanted nothing more than to...

"Marie, thank you for watching over Za while I was away." A deep familiar voice cut through the fog. "I believe I can take over from here."

Za released her breath. She hadn't realized she was holding it; her eyes fluttered as if she was awakening from a wonderfully sensual dream.

"Sylus, it figures you would show up at the wrong time." Marie placed a pouting kiss to his lips as he stared at her with mirth and a raised brow. "My rogue Satyr, I assumed you would be away for the entire evening. What brings you here?"

Za's pulse pounded as she took in his handsome features; his hair was damply slicked back into a tight braid and bound at the tip. He was immaculately dressed in a white shirt tucked into pleated tailored trousers. He left the top two buttons undone, giving her a view of the sexy column of his throat.

She didn't think she could ever tire of looking at him. He paused her breath just by entering a room? Za bristled quietly when she saw Marie place a kiss on his lips and wondered if she too was one of his lovers. Had he come to the club because he planned to spend the evening with Marie or did he come in search of her? She hoped it was the latter.

"Wishful thinking. I would never trust Za alone in your greedy little hands, Marie." He grinned and set her back from him.

"Well, you know a friend of yours is a *friend* of mine, *Mon Cher*, and you usually don't have a problem sharing."

"Not this time, Marie." He smiled down at her as she tugged on the braid at his back. "This one is all mine."

Marie's jaw went slack in surprise. "Oh, my, I have lost Darius and now you. Next you will be telling me Justus is a lost cause, too."

"Well, as a matter of fact you lost Justus to his mate Sera before you lost Darius to his mate, Selby," Sylus said smugly with a smile on his lips.

"Say it isn't so!" Marie placed a hand over her heart in exaggeration. "I have lost my virgin wolf. I have been after him for cent--"

Za saw Sylus shake his head and wondered why as he cleared his throat and ran a hand over his head as if he had become uncomfortable with the conversation. She was curious to what Marie had to say.

"Virgin wolf?" Za smiled. "That's a unique pet name for a man."

"Don't ask, a long story," Sy intervene.

Za's eyes narrowed suspiciously. She knew Justus was one of Darius's distant cousins and he was on the wedding list. She made a mental note to find seek him out at the wedding. It was obvious Sylus wasn't going to elaborate or let Marie tell her.

She continued to eye how Marie touched Sy with open familiarity and wondered how she thought this clinging vine of a woman was beautiful? She was going to scratch those strange eyes right out of her head if she was intent on fluttering those fake lashes on Sy. Za continued to fume in silence, intently watching and listening to the interaction between the two.

"Still keeping your women on a need-to-know basis, I see." Marie teased. "However, if she is your *Nymph* mate, I apologize for overstepping on sacred territory. I just hoped to see if she tasted as good as she looked and smelled."

"Oh...hell...no. Did you just call me what I think you called me?" Za raised her voice from the booth. "First, I don't appreciate you two talking about me as if I'm not sitting here. Also, Marie, you don't know me well enough to be calling me a *nympho*, so you best check yourself, girl."

Sylus and Marie looked away from each other in unison and Za fumed when they had the nerve to throw their heads back and laugh. *What was that about?*

Her heart had soared when she heard Sylus's voice. He had returned to her, or so she thought; now she wasn't so sure she was the reason he showed up at the club. The one thing she did know is she wasn't going to sit here and be some private joke between him and one of his women.

With a huff, Za grasped her handbag and started making her way out of the booth. Sylus smoothly slipped in beside her and put his arm around her shoulders, drawing her and holding her possessively against his side.

"Calm down, woman," Sy spoke softly, his lips just a breath away from the shell of her ear.

“Marie meant no harm. She intends to talk too much, but I promise she wouldn’t dare disrespect you knowing how I feel about you.”

“How do *you* feel about me?” She couldn’t help but ask. Her woman’s heart longed to know the truth yet feared the change that would come once he spoke them.

He nuzzled against the side of her face and Za savored the feeling.

“We have much to discuss, Za, but not now and not here.”

She nearly whimpered from the abandonment of his touch as he pulled back and turned his dark gaze on an interested and intently staring Marie.

“Marie, Za isn’t a descendent of the *Nymphs*, however, she is *mine alone* and under my protection. Spread the word to your coven and make sure they understand.”

“I shall do so.” Marie crossed her arms over her ample breasts and cocked her head to the side. “I never heard of this happening before for your kind. I can’t believe you’re actually in lo--”

“Don’t you have some *garlic* you need to take down from somewhere?” Sylus cut her off; his eyes narrowed, but there was laughter around his lips.

“What do she mean by *your kind*? Does she have an issue with my being black and you being white? Well, the bitch, didn’t seem to have a problem with it when she was hitting on me.” Za added her two cents, but she might as well have asked about the weather. Both of them ignored her tirade.

“Oh, that is low, Sylus de Gauls, even for you.” Marie chuckled. “Also, as you know, it’s not true. Garlic does nothing to us accept, like everyone else it causes bad breath. But we don’t mind simple mortals to believe they are protected with, this silly method, to ward us off.”

Za had not idea what the woman was talking about and was Sy sitting there chuckling? It was as if they were deliberately talking in circles to confuse her.

She leaned back as the other woman turned her intense gaze on her, smiling kindly said, “As for your rude comment, who a person are attracted to, is not an issue for me, *Ma petite*.” Marie folded her hands in front of her. “I’ve lived too long, for such trivial matters. The only man I’ve ever loved, saved my like by making me what I am today. He is a black that hails from the island of *Martinique*.” She leaned in closer.

Za met her eyes and leaned forward. “I’m sorry for making assumptions.”

“No apologies between friends. However I would be delighted to give to you what he gave to me.” Marie spoke in barely a whisper. “Did you know that the secret of the *Fountain of Youth* is concealed in an immortal’s kiss?”

Za felt as if she was drowning in a tranquil sea urging her to know all of Marie’s secrets.

Za's eyelashes fluttered as Sy grasped her chin and turned her face to his. She scowled. Why did he interfere? Marie was just about to share her beauty secrets with her and only her. "Sy?"

"Enough, Marie." Sylus warned. "Don't you *ever* do that to her again."

Marie released a throaty giggle and leaned back in her chair. Her face became serious as she turned her gaze solely on Sy and spouted something rapidly in a language Za had never heard before.

Za noticed that no matter what Za had said to him, he continued to disarm her nerves with his smoldering eyes on her face.

For some reason Za felt apprehensive. The seriously impassioned way Marie had spoke those foreign words before she stood and flounced away. "What did Marie say to you?" She asked him.

She saw Sylus gaze falter before he gave her an answer. "She warned that the day will come when I must decide my fate and when it does, she will stand by my decision."

"Decision about what?" Once more Za found herself holding her breath and waiting. There was much more taking place here than the eye could see, she had good instincts and she could feel something wasn't right about this entire situation. It hadn't been since Sy and Darius came into her and Selby's life.

"Za, it's of no importance at this time." Sylus shrugged. "What I'm curious about is, did you miss me while I was gone?"

"I didn't even know you were gone until I woke up, so of course not." She said lifting her chin stubbornly, deciding she wasn't admitting anything when he obviously wasn't willing to do the same.

"The reason I asked, *amori*, is I was wondering if you missed me half as much as I've missed you in these last few hours and if you had, then we shouldn't waste anymore time talking."

Za gulped deeply and her lips parted as Sy's finger crooked beneath her chin and raised her lips to meet his.

CHAPTER NINE

Zaza felt the taut hardness of Sy's shoulder as she leaned into the kiss. His fingers slid sensuously over her bare arm and she blindly reached out, lacing his fingers with her own; they were cool and smooth as he touched hers. She marveled at the perfect fit of her body against his.

How could something that felt so right frighten her? It wasn't the fact he was a man, this time. It was her growing feelings for him that scared the hell out of her.

She desired Sylus and she wanted nothing more than to make love with him. Her body responded to his brief touches; his kisses made her feel adored and expressed possibilities beyond her dreams. Still, she couldn't deny being with him aroused old fears and uncertainties. The same old question haunted her; what if she had thought to scream, what if she had fought back...

Come on, girl don't blow this. You aren't a child anymore. Just breathe and let this happen. Stop over-thinking this. Za mental struggle continued and she couldn't help how she felt. *I can't do this. Look what happened with the last man I trusted. I told Peter the truth, and it didn't stop him from...from...*

"Za, you're shivering and I can feel you tensing up on me." Sy asked against her ear, startling her from her thoughts as he tipped her chin to look up at him. "Talk to me, sweetheart."

Za nervously licked her lips and brought his mouth back to hers hoping it would stop him from asking questions. She couldn't tell him. She just couldn't!

Sylus tightened his hold on her and she could feel him lying back in the booth dragging her down on top of him. The minute she felt his swollen erection pressing against the apex of her thighs. She stiffened.

He broke the kiss and held her face in his hands. She reddened knowing he was staring at her. She knew he could see she was scared to death and it was humiliating to show him her weakness.

His mouth opened into an irresistibly devastating grin. As his dark eyebrows arched mischievously, she knew that he was very much aware that he was as sexy as hell. "See, you're doing it again, you're tensing up." He gazed deeply into her eyes. "Za, if you can't talk to me about what is going on with you, at least tell me when I make you uncomfortable. If you aren't ready to trust me, then say so."

"It's not you, well not really. It's..." Her voice faded into silence.

"Would like to return to the suite?" He inquired sitting up bringing her up with him. He adjusting himself into a more comfortable position and she looked away pretending to brush at none

existing wrinkles in her dress with her hands.

“No, not yet, please,” she said in a rush of words. “I mean let’s sit a little while longer. I was thinking of getting wild tonight and have two drinks, instead of one.”

“Drink as much as you like, you have me to watch over you now.” He reached up and brushed against the hair resting on her brow.

She could feel the heat radiating from his body and his hard cock still a visible outline in his pants. A strain of silence lingered.

“Excuse me, Mr. de Gauls, but there is an important call for you.” A server with a tray balanced on one gloved hand sided up to the table. “The office will be quieter for you, sir.”

His eyes narrowed speculatively as he nailed the server with fixed stare. His voice was more cold and exact when he stated, “No one will be calling me here. If it’s an emergency, they will call me on my sale phone.”

“I’m sorry for the inconvenience, sir; I was asked only to deliver the message. Would you like me to take a message for you?”

“No...now that you have already interrupted my evening, I will see what this is about.” Sylus heaved a sigh.

Za stared at his well-defined profile with a tender smile on her lips. “Go ahead, it may have something to do with our meeting in the morning.”

He turned his eyes on her. “You realize our conversation is far from over, don’t you?”

“Sy, you can’t push...okay?” She said bluntly.

“With that, I think it is a good time to take the call,” he said regretfully. “Unless you will like to come with me. I hate to leave you sitting here alone. Maybe I can send Marie here to keep you company until I return.”

Za smiled at his thoughtfulness. “No, I’m fine, besides it’s only a phone call. Go...it may be one of your brothers, but if it’s Darius, and something has happened to Selby, please...”

“It’s not Darius or my family; they would never call me down here on a unsecured line. Something isn’t right about this,” he said as he lifted her hand to his lips, turned it over and kissed her inner wrist.

She laughed. “Are you a spy or something? For God’s sake, it’s a freakin’ phone call. They’ve probably hung up by now. I know I would have.”

“You’re so mean to me.” Sy guffawed. “Okay woman, do not leave this spot without me. I don’t want this night ending without my getting the chance to tell you about my epiphany, while I was out driving tonight.” Standing he leaned down and kissed her.

“I’ll be right here,” she promised, her heart pounding in anticipation of what he wanted to tell her.

Za’s eyes drank in the sensuality of his powerful physique as he walked away. She felt passion rising in her like the hottest fire, clouding her brain of all doubts. She realized if she was ever going to take a chance on another man, Sy was the one. She couldn’t have asked for a man more patient, kind, and considerate of her feelings.

For some time after he had gone, her wrist tingled in remembrance of the kiss he placed there. She could trust him; she knew it in her heart. Her thoughts filtered back to the day she had found him half-naked at Selby’s place. They had been alone and he didn’t try to hide his desire for her, yet he maintained control.

Also, the other times they had been alone, the shared intimacy on the sofa. He wanted her but he stopped. Sy’s been like a part of her, sensing her desire, and sensing her apprehension. Not once had he made her feel incompetent as a woman or accused her of being a “cock tease”. No matter how aroused he was, he never forced his needs over hers. If Sy couldn’t help her overcome her fear of sex with men, no one could.

Za couldn’t help but smile in stunned silence covering her face with her hands in awe. “I’m in love with him. When the hell did this happen?” She whispered aloud to herself.

It had been a long time since she felt this hopeful about sharing her life with another. Still, she wasn’t fooling herself; a man like Sy was as skittish about commitment as she had been. It was probably why he felt so comfortable around her. She was a professed lesbian, and he felt he could tease and seduce her because he figured nothing would ever come of it.

Za decided that even if she didn’t have Sy as a permanent part of her personal life, she was strongly resolved to make this precious time with him a time for healing. She finally had met a man she knew she could trust to open herself intimately with that is if he still wanted her after she told him her shameful truth.

Her analyst continuously reminded her that the only way to conquer fear is to bravely meet it head on and take the control it had over her back. Could she truly be this close to being free from the monsters of her past?

“Excuse me, Ms. Draper. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

Za saw it was the same male waiter that told Syllus he had a phone call. “No, I’m sorry, my mind was somewhere else,” she chuckled, sitting back in the booth.

He smiled at her and removed the mixed drink from his tray to set it in front of her. “The gentleman thought you might would like a drink.”

Za beamed her thanks and took a sip of the apple martini. “Hmm, perfect, thank you. I take it this is Mr. de Gauls way of stating he's been detained by the phone call.”

“I believe it may be a while before he returns.” The man shifted from one foot to the other as if he was in a hurry to get on to his next task. “Can I get anything for you? Maybe you would like to see a dinner menu.”

“Thank you, but I will just sip on this and see what Sylus wishes to eat here or in our suite.” Za’s smile faltered, as the man continued to stare at her. As if there was something else he wanted to say. Maybe he was waiting for a tip.

“Here, let me get you a little something for your troubles,” Za mumbled, reaching for her handbag.

“No, it’s been taken care of by the gentleman,” he assured her, yet he didn’t leave. “It’s just...”

“Look, if Sylus paid you to look after me, it’s really not necessary. I’m a big girl and I don’t need a babysitter. So you can go and take care of someone else.” She assured him. “I promise I will tell him you’ve done an excellent job.” Za took another sip. “Also the drink is wonderful.”

She was surprised when the man still seemed hesitant to leave her. “Look, are you okay? You seem a bit nervous...”

“Enjoy your drink,” he mumbled and scurried away.

Za frowned in confusion, the fine hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. She suppressed a shiver and chalked it up to her nervousness about the oncoming evening. Thankful she had some liquid courage, to prepare her for the discussion she planned on having with Sylus, she lifted the glass to her lips and downed the contents.

Za removed the napkin from beneath her martini glass and utilize it to wipe the sheen of sweat that appeared on her brow.

“Why is it so hot in here?” She stifled a yawn.

After another fifteen minutes had passed since the last time she looked at her wristwatch. She wondered if she should go looking for Sy, but decided it against it because she was just too tired. Maybe she shouldn’t have had that drink after all; her head was spinning.

Za started to slide out of the booth, intent on finding Marie to tell Sy she wasn’t feeling well and returned to the suite. Yet, even that seemed too much of an effort. She placed both elbows on the table, closed her eyes, and held her head in her hands as she tried to remember what she was about to do.

“What’s the hells happening to me,” she swallowed and licked her dry lips.

"I see you got the drink I sent over." At the sound of the impossibly familiar voice, Za managed to lift her head.

"I'm delighted to see you're still an apple martini girl."

"It ca...can't be." She moaned trying to focus on the blurring vision before her. She could make out that he was even now as tall, dark, and handsome as she remembered.

"Damn, girl, I forgot how beautiful you are," he said tersely. "I use to lay in the darkness for hours trying to see your face once more. Now I see my memories of you have faded in comparison to the real thing."

"Peter..." She swallowed hard, lifting her head up off the table with effort. Her boldly met his blue-eyed gaze. "You're in prison."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose there is something to say about the judicial system and good behavior. Mind if I join you for a moment?" Peter answered, shoving his hand in his pockets; his thin lips broke into an open smile.

That smile used to be all it took to melt her heart and make her dream that anything was possible. Now she was wise to the truth, behind it hid a mad man.

"You aren't supposed to come near me...ever!" She slurred wiping at the spittle that came out of the corner of her mouth. "Oh God, you've drugged me again! Did...didn't you?" With a dazed expression, she tried to shuffle in the opposite direction to get out on the other side.

"I don't think moving around is a good idea, Zaza." He blocked her movement.

She swayed in her seat. "I'm here with someone and he will be back soon. You don't want to be here when he arrives," she rushed out in one breath.

"You mean the platinum *she-male* you were sitting with?" Peter taunted and sniggered. "What red-blooded male would be caught with all that hair and his face looks like a pretty woman? I didn't know whether to hit him or to fuck him."

Za's mind refused to register the significance of his words. His voice was emotionless and it chilled her. "Go to hell, Peter. Get...uh...get out the way."

"Or what bitch? I see you've gotten brave since the last time I saw you." He twisted her arm vehemently. "I've been in hell and it all because of you! We were engaged for a year, Za; we lived together for two weeks before we were to wed, and you couldn't spare the time to visit me in prison?"

"Why would I visit you after what you did to me?" she asked coldly. "After what you did to all those other women?"

"The other women were before I met you." The angry retort hardened his features. "As far as

what I did to you. You gave me no choice. You were going to leave me.”

“Let go of me,” she hissed yanking her arm from his hold. A wave of nausea washed over her. She moaned and held her head. “All those tapes...monster...I seem to attract sick sadistic monsters.” She didn’t want to cry, but she couldn’t stop herself. She glared at him with burning, reproachful eyes.

He glowered at her and looked about to be sure that no one was coming. “Don’t try to fight it Za, it won’t do you any good. Soon your entire body will numb. It will only last a few hours. By then we will be well away from here.”

Za fell helplessly against Peter while he tugged her out of the booth into his arms.

“You know in spite of what you did to me, I still love you.” He spat out the words contemptuously.

Za’s head rolled back on her shoulders as her arms and legs seem to become dead weight. She whimpered as Peter perched her against one hip. One arm held her up by the waist while with the other he wrapped around the back of his neck. To anyone looking at him or her, it would appear as if a man was helping his drunken girlfriend out of the bar.

She couldn’t seem to find her voice anymore. All she could think was “not again...not again”.

Za shuddered inwardly at the thought of what he was going to do to her once he got her alone. She must stay awake. *Sy, where are you?*

With a shiver of vivid recollection, the night before her wedding brought back painful memories:

Two weeks before they were to wed, she and Peter decided to combine their households until they could purchase their first home together. Za moved in with the man she loved. She had never thought this day would come. She had found a man she could trust, one who didn’t blame her for what happened to her as a child.

He was understanding and patient with her frigidity and even though she had an inability to reach an orgasm during penetration. He made sure to pleasure her in other ways. For once, Za could see herself spending the rest of her life living with another person and sharing all that she was.

The night before they were to marry Peter stayed at the hotel where his friends hosted his bachelor party, while she and Selby stayed in the apartment. After all the other ladies had left, Za was making up the bed in the guest room for Selby when she stumbled over a loose floorboard at the foot of the bed. She had no idea that her snooping would alter everything she had come to believe

true.

There was a hidden box of videotapes and she thought she had discovered his porno collection. Interested in knowing her future husband's taste in smut, she played one of the tapes. Her heart stopped for a brief moment as the breath rushed out of her body.

As she and Selby, inserted one tape after another, Za couldn't help but feel sickened by what she saw. There were twenty-two tapes in all showing the man she was set to marry in less than twenty-four hours.

He had taped himself molesting and raping unconscious adolescent girls and women; some he had used other objects on and even had male friends that were even now, a part of their wedding party, to join in. It was more than she could have ever suspected. She didn't even know this man in the video. She heard Peter's voice, saw his face, his body and smile. Yet the cruelty of his laughter and the pleasure he derived while abusing these women horrified her.

She wondered how she could have made love to this man, shared her darkest nightmare, and he be a monster in disguise as a nice guy. The one thing she hadn't expected was to see her self, lifeless across the bed while he and his pals raped her.

Instead of preparing to attend her wedding, Za and Selby went to the police station with what they had found. It had been a media nightmare when the truth came out. There were pictures of her as a grown woman plastered over the front pages and it wasn't the first time. But she was going to make sure it was the last, yet here she was again...

Opening her eyes, Za came back to the presence. She was in the arms of the man she had put in prison. What kind of justice system could allow him to be free to prey on women again? Her mind was languid, without hope, and her soul cried out to Sylus.

"Sylus, help me..." she cried softly.

Sylus groaned and rolled off his back onto his side reaching to feel the egg-sized lump forming on the back of his head. He felt a sticky moistness and with blurred vision strained to see his blood-soaked fingers in the darkness.

A wave of nausea swept over him as he managed to come up on all fours. With shaky fingers, he ripped open his shirt and let it fall to the ground, followed by the remainder of his human attire. It took almost all his strength to concentrate and picture himself in true form. If he could manage to shift into his natural Satyr shape the bleeding would stop immediately and hopefully the scent of his attacker was still lingering in the air around him.

With a mournful moan, the muscles beneath his skin started throbbing and rippling in his legs

and feet first as they extended into pointed hooves; silky hair sprouted and extended in length over his legs and up over his groin and hips. His calves became more muscularly defined and the horns in his temple extended and curved.

Almost instantly his vision became acute in the darkness. He recognized he was in a large utility room, hanging mops and brooms loomed above his head. He pushed himself up on his hoofed feet and stumbled backwards, shaking his head and snorting with the sounds of the beast he had become.

With Sy's night vision, all of his senses became sensitive to things beyond the walls and doors. There was no mistaking the sound of Za's distressed call of his name. He stiffened as icy fear twisted around his heart.

He grasped the locked doorknob in his hand with inhuman strength. The door groaned from the pressures and with a loud pop the doorknob broke off in his hand and the door opened. It took everything in him to not charge out like a mindless idiot, but he was in Satyr form and he didn't have his musical pipe flute or he could create an enchantment that would allow him to move about unnoticed.

Sy cursed and sighed in relief as Marie came rushing toward him, standing in the door of the closet.

"Mon Dieu! I have been looking for you everywhere. What are you doing in your true form and here of all places! Sylus--"

"Marie, not now," he interrupted abruptly. "Go! I need you to check on Za. I will be waiting in the private elevator. Bring her to me."

"Like that? Has she seen you like this before?"

He shook his head, his heart growing heavy. He would probably lose her forever once she saw him as the beast he was, but it took all he had to shift and he would pass out if he were to try to shift back before he was completely healed.

"Please, something is wrong, I can feel it. Bring her to me," he pleaded.

"I will create a mist of the bay to sweep through from the parking garage into the hall. Stay put, damn you, until it is safe to move undetected. I think this has been the most reckless thing you've ever done!" Before Marie had finished speaking, a mist was rolling in and over the Golden Gate Bridge towards downtown.

"It's not like I had a *fucking* choice. Now, *GO!*" He snarled.

She cursed and with a twirl of black skirts and dark hair she moved so quickly it appeared as if she vanished.

As soon as the mist stole into the hotel beneath the closed doors, Sy made his way down the corridor to the elevator.

Peter was grateful for the freaky fog that allowed him to pick up Za and carry her from the club into the corridor; his only guide being a lit exit sign above the nearest door. He didn't know anything about this part of the hotel; it must lead to a private area for exclusive guest. Still there had to be an exit to the parking garage elevator.

He couldn't believe his luck when he came into the lounge for a drink looking for an easy mark for the evening. He wasn't supposed to leave Los Angeles jurisdiction without permission from his parole officer, but he didn't care. He had some old buddies here that would be in for a good time.

The first thing he done when arriving here was hook up with an old dealer that was still in the business and scoring some liquid Rohyphnol. He never in all his live expected to find Zaza draper here. It had to be fate.

He needed to get off this floor before that platinum-haired bastard Za had been grinding with in the club booth, woke up from the blows he applied to his head.

He wondered where the waiter was who had helped him up to this point. He needed help getting out of this damned hotel. He showed him the back exit earlier, but he had some how got turned around in the mist.

Peter was relieved when he finally came to an elevator; he prayed it was the one that would take him to the parking garage.

Peter adjusted Za's limp body on his shoulder as he pushed the down button on the elevator. Nothing was happening. He stared up at the number; he realized it was already on the correct floor but the door didn't open.

With a curse, Peter tried to bend closer to see the buttons, thinking he must have pushed the wrong one since he could barely make out the panel. Every time he moved, Za's dead weight became heavier and awkward.

He had no choice but to place her on the ground next to the elevator and prop her up. Noisily Za's head thudded against the wall and he heard her moan, but he could barely make out her face in the dense fog that was engulfing her before his eyes.

Peter kicked at the door in frustration before deciding he was wasting precious time. He knelt to retrieve Za and halted in as disbelief and fear parted his mouth in a scream cut off by the hair covered clawed hands that wrapped around his throat. It was a mythical being of the likes he'd

only seen in fantasy games and films.

Peter wondered if he was caught in the middle of a movie scene being shot in the hotel? Is that why the fog was rolling in, it came from a machine? If that was true, then why was did burning agonizing pain of his breath being restricted feel real?

Oh, someone help him, it was the devil himself coming to take him to hell. Instinctively, Peter clawed at the hand, squeezing and lifting him off the ground. He never met a man that could lift a six feet, two hundred pounds man with one hand.

As the shock wore off he realized this creature was real and was trying to kill him, he flayed and kicked in earnest. The grip tightened and he welcomed the darkness of death to claim him from the pain. Like a rag doll he felt him self, flying against the opposite wall and the world went black.

Sylus felt as if the gods were on his and Za's side as he came upon her and her captor in front of the elevator. In the mist, the man obviously had taken an exit that led him in the wrong direction and only a special code or personal cardkey could get the doors opened.

He didn't sense that the man was a demon in human form, but some idiot that had chose to randomly fuck with the wrong man's woman. Now, *he must die* for his error.

"Sy, no!" Marie rushed forward with two of males from her coven. It took all of their inhuman strength to knock Sylus back against the far away from the inert male.

As Sylus shook off the blow, he quickly came to his feet and charged forward only to halt in mid-stride and find himself back against the wall. He snapped at muscular male vampires that had accompanied Marie.

"Damn you, call them off, Marie. He is mine." He roared and spittle came from his elongated incisors, the beast wanted blood. One of his horns ripped open the forearm of one of his male captors. He received an elbow to his throat, sending him to his knees.

"Don't harm him, you fool!" Marie hissed as she looked back from her kneeling position at Za's side.

Sy groaned and coughed as he shook his head, his pale long hair was matted with blood from the earlier opened wound on his skull. It clung wetly to his naked sweat-covered back, shoulders, and chest.

"How is she?" he managed to ask in a raspy voice as he felt the beast calming and the muddled fury of his mind functioning more on the level of Sylus the man.

"Her heart is beating slowly, but its strong and steady," Marie answered and leaned forward; she kissed Za's lips, her tongue sweeping inside her mouth, tasting, deciphering the familiar scent

she could smell.

“Why is she not moving?” He tugged to get free but the men wouldn’t let him go.

“Son of a bitch has drugged her with ‘X’; I can taste it on my tongue. He must have put it in her drink.”

“Marie, I’m okay now. Call off these Damned dogs,” Sylus bellowed.

Marie nodded and he was released, only to find his hindquarters were incapable of holding his trembling form up.

“Fuck!” Sy cursed coming up on his knees, he crawled through the mist to Za’s unconscious form. His hands anxiously searched her body to assure she remained unharmed.

“Who the hell is this man? He’s not a demon. So did he want your woman in particular or was did he just choose her out of the crowd.” Marie asked, pushing Sy’s hair aside to access the damage on the back of his skull. She licked at the blood and shivered with blood lust at his familiar taste. Her desire peaked and she ignored it as she continued to cleanse the area. She was thankful to see it was already congealing and starting to heal.

“If you hadn’t been immortal, whomever hit you could have killed you.” She commented.

“I don’t know for sure but it was one of your servers that called me away and before I reached your office someone nailed me from behind. I woke up in the utility room.” His voice was hoarse from anger that he hadn’t been there to protect her. He had promised to keep her safe. “I have his scent and this ones, so they will never be able to run from my wrath.”

His large callused fingers grazed across her unconscious face; he placed his lips to her brow and closed his eyes, thanking the gods for letting him find her in time. There was no telling what would have happened to her if he hadn’t awakened in time.

“No, I will take care of this one and once we figure out whom his accomplice was. I will take care of him also.” She assured him. “But it is not like the old times, my friend. We must handling things correctly as not to bring the mortals world upon us. You know the law.” Marie reminded, backing away as he checked out Za.

He turned on Marie. “Marie, I want that sick bastard brought to my suite so that I may find out if he was after this particular woman for a reason!” he said between clenched teeth.

“No, it is not wise for you to come in contact again this man, you are too emotionally connected to this situation. You are leading with your fury and not your mind. It makes you a danger to the welfare of us all,” she hissed. “The mist is clearing quickly from the air conditioning in the building. I need you to get in the elevator and take Za to your suite, now!”

“Marie, be warned I am not one of your minions.” Sy gave her a black-layered look.

"I dare you to speak to me thus!" Marie's teeth lengthened. "I remember a time when you Satyrs were slaves to the gods and my kind. Don't you dare, threaten me, Sylus de Gauls!"

Marie's coolness was evidence that she didn't find his subordination amusing. Sy knew how far to push Marie and he wasn't angry enough to make the foolish choice to have his immortality by one of his oldest and dearest friends.

To protect the secrecy of the Darkworld in which all things inhuman existed; he knew Marie would not hesitate to end his life and Za's.

"Forgive me, *Your Highness*. It has been a most challenging evening," Sylus conceded by using her old title.

Marie smiled fondly and brushed his long damp hair over his shoulder and behind his pointed ears with pale, long fingers. "I hope you know that this is a foolish notion, *Mon Cher*. "This can not be love, that you are feeling for this woman."

"This is not a mere infatuation, Marie."

She cupped his chin and tugged on the dark goatee that had sprouted during his transformation. "My darling Sylus, these emotions for a mortal are all in your head. For the two of you to be mates for life is simply not a physical possibility."

"That's true," Sylus stated with a grim face. "However, there is a way around our differences."

"Yes." Marie agreed. "But, it's a way of sure death and what for? Zaza, don't even know what you are? So, all your feelings are wasted on her."

Sy felt overwhelmed by a terrible sense of sadness. How could he live without Za now that he had found her? In this one woman, he found what he has always longed for. She could understand and appease his cursed loneliness. It didn't matter for how long, for any amount of time they could share together would be well worth the exchange.

His dark eyes filled with tears as he pulled Za into his arms and cradled her slumbering figure against his heart as he stood and staggered lightly with Marie coming up to her feet behind him to stead him.

The ancient woman's serene beauty mirrored his sadness. "Make sure as soon as you get into your suite you take in your nourishment of wine. You've lost a lot of blood. You're pallor is ashen."

"Thank you for everything, Marie." He stepped into the elevator after Marie pressed in the code for him. "You're wrong." He swallowed deeply, nuzzling his chin in the thickness of Za's short hair. "My feelings aren't wasted on her. It's because of her that I realized I'm capable of such a

human emotion.”

Marie shook her head a deep scowl on her face but he continued anyway.

“Tis in my soul that I sense she is the one I will spend the rest of my life with. Or at the very least, the rest of her life, if she would have me.”

“She would be a fool to not want a someone like you to love her, Sir de Gauls; however, remember she must accept you and all of us, of free of will and under our laws if it is permitted. Otherwise, your love could mean her death if she should deny all that we stand for.”

“Marie--“

“No, you know the laws of the Darkworld as well as I do, Sylus. If this human woman is to find out the truth of our existence, and if she is unable to return your love after your identity is exposed, then you know what must happen.”

Sylus shoulders drooped wearily as Marie stared at him intensely, her hand holding the door open to prevent the elevators doors from closing.

Her stance became as noble as the title she had once held during her historical reign. He realized she was about to make one final attempt to push the point, she was making. “Sylus, you’d better be sure she loves you as much as you love her before exposing your true nature or Za will die...by your hands or ours, if she can’t be enchanted into forgetting. Do you comprehend, what I’m saying?”

With a nod of understanding, Sy stepped into the elevator and tightened his hold on Za. The doors closed. He stared down at her and her eyes fluttered open and he tensed for his features were no longer human. He waited for the look of horror and fear that was to come.

To his surprise, she smiled up at him and said. “You came. You saved me.”

He smiled revealing elongated incisors, yet she still didn’t pull scream or fight to get out of his arms. Sylus took a deep sigh of relief thankful, for it must have been the drug that caused her to not fear what she was seeing.

“My love, of course I came. You have nothing to fear, I will spend the rest of your life protecting you, no matter what.”

She smiled again and buried her face against his chest. Her eyes shut once more.

CHAPTER TEN

Sy rolled this way and that in the big bed. Here it was, hours after their return and he continued to worry about Za sleeping alone. What if she awakened in the middle of the night in a panic? Shouldn't he be there to reassure her she was safe? *Excuses!*

Sylus told himself with a curse and turned onto his side in disgust, pounding the pillow beneath his head. This was not how he had anticipated closing this evening but after his talk with Marie, his plans to tell Za how he felt about her being interrupted was probably for the best.

Between his emotional run through the woods along with the deep fear he felt at witnessing the woman he loved unconscious on the floor, with a stranger looming over her, sent him into adrenalin overload. To add to his surmountable irritation, he also had a hard-on that wasn't helping his restlessness.

Sylus rolled onto his back staring up at the mocking laughing faces of the chubby cherubs with wings, painted ornately on the ceiling above his bed, he finally gave into the obvious; he would have to find some physical release before he would be able to sleep.

Arranging one arm under his head, with his free hand he flipped the bed coverings down to his waist, exposing his shoulders and chest. He welcomed the coolness against his heated skin. He closed his eyes while the recount of Marie's warnings, flooded his thoughts. If he wanted to keep Za safe from the Darkworld's powers that be, he had to set aside his own feelings.

Any other time having sex with a human female wouldn't be a quandary, but there had never been any emotions involved in the rutting. He never cared before.

With Za he felt an emotional intertwining of their destinies. If he were to make love to her and he couldn't guarantee he wouldn't turn into a Satyr while making love to her. Za seeing him in a drug induced haze in the elevator and her being soberly conscious was a different matter. She probably would find him repulsive and he couldn't bare that.

Sylus's heavy heart ached miserably his thoughts continued to drift. Za had been so vulnerable and lifeless in his arms. It had made him feel so angry and helpless seeing her this way.

After returning to the apartment, he had placed her unconscious form on her bed fully clothed while he took a cool relaxing shower until he was able to return to his human form.

Dressed in his bathrobe, he returned to her room with a damp cloth and gently washed the smeared makeup from her serene face before he eased her out of her dress, leaving her half naked in a lacy black strapless bra and matching panties. He still dwelled on the memorable beauty of his pale hands on her dark skin.

Sy's body tightened and his hand moved beneath the covers and wrapped his hand around his erection. He could still feel the weight of her body in his arms. The heady scent of her hair, a delicate tropical scent of coconuts and pineapples, lingered in his senses. He wallowed in the fantasy of being with her.

Sylus stroked his cock with one hand as the other stimulated his sac, and massaging the sensitive spot between his testicles and rectum.

Sylus moaned and grunted, speeding up his stroking. In his rich visions Zaza was riding him. His cock buried deep in her warm pussy. He could feel her hot, moist muscle rippling and drawing him deeper until the cheeks of her ass slapping loudly against his thighs as she rode him.

His long powerful fingers tightened and pumped around his cock harder and faster. He felt his scrotum tightening and the bottom of his stomach clenching. Blood rushed through his veins creating a heady sensation.

"Za." Sy called her name. His legs straightened, muscles constricted and his horns unfurled. He arched his hips off the bed. With mouth wide and eyes closed, he reached for the pending ejaculation.

"Ahhh, Za...yes...yes," escaped his mouth repeatedly. His hot cum spurted over his hands and onto the sheets. His legs relaxed, his horns retreated and he sunk into the soft depths of the soft mattress as his entire body became peacefully limp with a mixture of euphoria and exhaustion. It had been one of the most emotional days of his entire life. Tears seeped through his tightly closed eyelashes, he felt even lonelier, if that was possible.

Sylus's heart hammered and slowed as he turned over on his side and pulled the pillow against him succumbing to exhaustion.

He couldn't have napped a good three hours before he awakened from the sounds of his own voice crying out, "NO!"

Disoriented Sylus threw off the damp covers from his sweaty naked flesh and padded barefoot across the room into the adjoining bathroom where he relieved himself and used a damp washcloth to cleanse the moisture and dried semen that clung to him. He had a nightmare that. Zaza was being torn from his arms as unknown hands held him imprisoned in their clutches. Was it an omen of things to come?

Annoyed he realized getting any sleep tonight was not going to happen. Naked he stumped across the bedroom out the door, and down the hall to the kitchen. Sylus removed a bottle of wine from the cooler and popped the cork. He downed half the bottle before taking a breath.

Like some wild and untamed beast, he paced the cool marble tile in the kitchen battling with

his inner desires and the need to do what was best. He lifted the bottle to his lips for another deep swig, wiping his mouth with the back of his wrist and hand, he released sigh.

“Damn, what am I to do with these feelings?” he cursed both outwardly and inwardly.

With a freshly opened bottle in his hand, Sylus strode out of the kitchen back down the corridor towards his bedroom. Before he realized it, he found himself standing next to Za's bed looking down at her sleeping face. Her beauty was accentuated by the moonlight beaming through the ceiling-to-floor windows.

Watching her sleeping his interior softened even more, he didn't know what would come from his love for her, but he knew keeping her safe was at the top of his list. Who was that man? Was it someone she knew? He made a mental note to check with Marie tomorrow night and see what she managed to read off the man's mind once he awakened.

The more connected he permitted himself to become, the harder it would be for him when it was time to pull away from her. Nevertheless, until Darius's wedding was over and he could go abroad, and never see her again, he would make enough memories to take with him through eternity.

He took a drink from the wine bottle before placing it on the bedside table. His face was bleak and there was a heavy feeling in his chest as the last traces of resistance vanished.

Sylus quietly lifted the coverings and eased in behind Za's sleeping form. A smile came to his lips as she heaved a sigh, moaned, and nestled her curvaceous buttocks into his groin. He drew her upper body against his chest, one arm resting under her head, the other over her hip; splaying a hand over her abdomen, he settled in.

Now, I can sleep. Sy thought, pressing a kiss to her temple. He pulled her more firmly against him, as if he could use his body to shield her from whatever darkness hung over their future.

Za's eyes fluttered open. Perplexed and lethargic, it took her a moment to get her bearings. The first mystery was how did she end up in bed drooling on a *man's* chest? She clamped her mouth shut and wiped away the sleep spittle and his chest with the bed sheet.

Her first instinct was the initial alarm you get that makes you want to take off running; but, the last thing she wanted to do was wake the man up. It infuriated her that she couldn't remember what happened the night before. Za remembered getting dressed to go downstairs to the cocktail bar and nothing else. A growing sense of panic clinched her stomach as she silent prayed she hadn't picked up some stranger and brought him back to her room.

Slowly her eyes traveled upward across a generous chest, broad shoulders, angular unshaven chin, and full bottom lip.

A relieved smile came to her mouth. She knew those lips. She'd only dream about them hundreds of time. Za came up on her elbow, and looked squarely into Sy's smiling face.

"I thought it was impossible for you to be more lovely, until now." His husky sleep filled voice rumbled in her chest.

Feeling self-conscious from his intense gaze, she removed her hand resting on his abdomen to run her fingers through her mussed hair.

He reached out, covering her hand with his own, stopping her. "Don't, I'm not lying. Your hair is all over the place." His smile widened. "As if mussed by my fingers. Your lips plumped and full as if kissed by my lips. My lady, your natural beauty puts the fairest of fair to shame," he murmured.

Zaza couldn't take her eyes off his handsome face. Her eyes followed as he guided her wrist to his hair-roughed cheek and nestled his face against her hand, turning his nose into her palm. His chest heaved as he sniffed her scent before placing an acquiescent kiss against the inside of her wrist.

Her heart leaped, acknowledging the intimacy of his touch. She didn't wish to ponder on how wonderful it seemed to wake up and find him in her bed. Nor did she need to vocally admit that she wouldn't mind if he wanted to be here with her every morning for the rest of her life.

"I thought I warned you about speaking those 'flowery' words. It makes you weird." She pointed out unnecessarily. She just felt like she needed to *say* something. It didn't matter if he made her feel protected, cherished and all giddy inside.

"Is being different a bad thing?" Sylus asked.

Why did she feel there was more behind his questions? "No, you wear different, well." She laughed and moved to roll away and he tightened his hold on her, keeping her by his side.

Za's eyes drifted to his morning erection outlined by the bed sheet. It was close enough for her to lean down and kiss.

"Don't leave me just yet. I don't know if I will ever get this opportunity again and I want to savor the moment."

"Sy--" She closed her eyes for a moment from the intoxicating sensation of Sylus's wet mouth suckling her fingers. Her chin rested on his chest and she moaned, swearing there is a connecting line between her middle finger and her clitoris. With each tugged of his mouth she felt it between her thighs. *Oh, gosh! He's good.* "You got to stop."

Za really appreciated his unhurried movements, as if he had all the time in the world, to worship her sensitive flesh. She released an audible sigh. Still, she truly didn't know enough about him to be thinking what's she thinking of doing.

“Don’t speak, *MIA stella*, my star.”

Oh Sy was smooth, in fact, he was so smooth, she was barely aware of him maneuvering her over onto her back. Okay, she was aware; she just didn’t care at the moment. He threw one leg over her thighs and an arm beneath her breast, trapping her in his embrace.

Mmm...a kiss to the shoulder...to the neck...the ear...the ear...*oh, no, not the ear! Yes, the ear, again please...yeah, just like that.* She giggled when his ridiculously long tongue tickled her inner ear. *I must still be drunk from last night. I am enjoying this way...ay...ay... yes, right there...too much.*

She lifted her chin as he moved along her jaw line, obviously on his way to her lips. The slow burn turned into a pulse of anticipation between her thighs.

As Sy neared her mouth, reality crashed in. “Oh, no,” she croaked, putting her hand up in front of his mouth and turned her head away from him. “You *don’t* want to do that.”

As lovely, as the movies and television made waking up to sweet kisses in the morning seem, in the real world, she could taste that she had some serious stale-martini morning-after breath.

“Uh, yes, I do.” He grinned dipping his head once again.

“Un, huh.” She shook her head and pushed at his chest as he zoomed in on her lips again.

He pulled back to look at her. A ready smile on his face, he asked, “What you don’t like waking up to kisses?”

“Well, uh...” Za faltered. How do you explain to a man that looked this damn good in the morning and, as usual, had breath as sweet as wine, that you couldn’t kiss him because you suffered from morning breath?

She strained to get her face as far away from his as she could, considering his heavy leg over hers kept her trapped.

“Why do you keep trying to bury your face in the pillows? What is it?” Sylus chuckled.

Heat spread over her face. “My breath!” She managed, her voice muffled by her mashing her face against her shoulder and covering the other side with her hand.

Sylus laughed. “As if such things matters between lovers,” he clucked his tongue. He moved away but only long enough to reach for the room-temperature bottle of wine by the bed. “Drink, so that I can finish my morning kiss, foolish woman.”

Za rolled her eyes at him. She could see he was determined to do some kissing so she might as well go along with the program. She grabbed the bottle, taking a deep swig. She blanched and shuddered. Wine for breakfast definitely wasn’t her thing.

Sylus took several deep swallows and replaced the bottle on the bedside table. He wiggled

his eyebrows at her before lining her cheek and chin with gentle kisses. She leaned her head to the side as he nuzzled, kissed, and licked her throat.

I'm doomed to fall madly in love with this man, she thought. Za bit down on her lower lip to keep from moaning.

He put a hand to her nape and tilted her head. Her lips parted and accepted his mouth over hers. Short and persuasive kisses turned into long, wet, and deep. Za ran her fingers through his hair and locked herself in his exquisite embrace.

There was a clean, musky fragrance to his skin. His breathe familiarly sweet. Her body wanted more, but her usual doubts and fears kept her from completely abandoning all reason and let things progress naturally.

She tore her lips from his. "That's enough for a morning kiss."

"Huh?" His lashes fluttered in confusion. "There's a limit to morning kissing?"

"There is when it's kissing between friends," she reminded in a thickened voice. Her heart pounded foolishly. He was still too close to her face. All she had to do was lift her head and resume where they left off. Za released an inward groan.

"I don't believe I've ever heard of such limitations," he stated in a husky voice. He nibbled at the corner of her mouth.

"I can *feel* that you don't agree," Za gasped. "But most friends don't kiss like this at all, unless they are lovers."

"Felt like a *lover's* kiss to me. Besides, you we don't have to have sex to be lovers." He supplied. "It's the emotions that brings you closer, not the act." His brow puckered in concern. "There is much we can do, if you aren't ready to allow me inside you."

Za's eyes widened. She thought she was blunt. "Do you always speak what's on your mind?"

"In bed, yes. It's the place where one should always openly and truthfully about what they are feeling." He answered openly. "Otherwise, how would the other know they are pleasing?"

"You're kidding right?"

Za tried to put some distance between them; he wasn't budging so she resigned herself to have this conversation with him holding her.

"When it comes to bed pleasures you will find I'm very serious," he murmured--his voice the low, throaty voice of her dreams.

"Sy, don't you think things are progressing too fast for comfort?"

"Do my desires frighten you?"

She looked away from him. She didn't think she was ready for this honesty in bed rule of his. As a matter-of-fact, he shouldn't even be in her bed and naked! The best thing for her was to get off this subject.

"I know you have other things on your mind, but I have more important matters on my mind." She blurted.

Sy clucked his tongue, and teasingly drawled, "What is possibly more important than kissing?"

"This is not funny, Sylus. I'm really worried."

"About?"

She saw his expression had grown more serious and realized she accomplished her goal. "Well, it's driving me crazy, that there is a gap of time missing from my memory of last night. I don't remember coming back to the suite. Nor do I remember how the hell you ended up in my bed, naked!"

"Za, don't assume that I'm ignorant to the fact that you become argumentative every time the attraction that is generating between us is addressed. Do you deliberately do this in hopes that it will cool my ire? Because, it's not working." He smirked.

"Forgive me, if I'm more concerned about my lapse of memory than your libido at the moment." She gave him an insolent look.

"Why are you fighting your feelings? Is it the lesbian nonsense?"

"You don't know nothing, about me and my choices are not nonsense! Get off of me, you brute!" She grunted pushing at him, but she might as well have been pressing against a wall.

The thing that surprised her most was she wasn't scared of Sylus. Even though she knew he was much stronger than her and could force himself upon her at anytime, something deep inside her told her she was safe.

She wondered what was it about him that made give her comfort being around him instead of fear? But for now she needed to put as much space between them as possible. "I can't breathe with you all up in my face, so if you are going to stay in my bed, will you move to your side."

"Za...there is no sides, in bed." He warned, his eyes narrowing. "I see, that you've sleeping alone to long. I must teach you proper bedroom etiquette."

"Why do I feel you're making this stuff up as you go?"

"Never you mind." He grunted. "But you have plenty of breathing room. I'm in the same position I was a few seconds ago, even closer, and you weren't complaining then."

"You're scaring me," she lied. "I about to have a panic attack."

Incredulously Za stared in open disbelief at Sy as he sniffed at the air.

“I feel no fear coming from you, just arousal. Why are you fighting your desires for me?”

“How in the hell can you tell by sniffing the air? Now that is some weird shit!” She argued even though she didn’t know how he knew it, but he was right.

“So now we argue again.” He said in a way that let her know she was proving his point.

“Okay, Sy, I give. What do you want from me?” Za asked. “Besides the obvious of course.”

“The obvious is a good start.” He smirked.

Her breath caught in her throat, and then came out in a heady gulp of air. Yes, it was a good start. But it didn’t resolve everything. What if she found that she could make love with Sylus and not freeze up on him? Where would they possibly go from there? Even an idiot could see that Sylus wasn’t the committing type.

Oh no, did that thought come from her head when just weeks ago, she was arguing with Megan and kicking her out of her apartment because she didn’t want a committed relationship. What’s changed? She changed. The more time she spent with Sy, the more she was evolving into someone she hardly recognized. Just like Selby did after meeting Darius. Was that it? Was this love? Was she actually falling in love with Sylus?

Za had a feeling once she allowed Sylus to make love to her, all her questions would be answered and her life would never be the same again. She didn’t know if she was ready for the changes. She’s spent so many years relying on her own defenses. How would she protect her self once he discarded or disappointed her like everyone else had in her life?

“Tell me what you’re thinking, Za. Unfortunately, I can’t read your mind. I wish that I could for it would save us both time.” Sylus rubbed his cheek against hers. “How can I make you understand, for us, time is very precious?”

She frowned, not understanding why he sounded so serious. But the way he said it worried her. Was he saying if they didn’t come to some form of conclusion while they were here, he was finished with her? She couldn’t think clearly when he was touching her this way. He treated her as if she was something treasured and delicate. “Sy, I know we planned on resolving this while we were alone here in San Francisco, I may have need more time. I want to give in to whatever this is, but I’ve been burned so many times. I don’t know if I can trust you completely.”

“If you would stop listening to your head and follow your heart, it may make things easier on you, sweetheart,” he reasoned.

“You’re not like anyone I’ve met before Sylus, and I don’t quite know how to handle these

feelings I have for you. Do you want a relationship, fling, are we foolishly falling in love with one another?”

“Are you saying you’re falling in love with me?” He asked. “Is that what’s bothering you?”

She glanced away. “So you’re asking me to spill my feelings, share my dreams and fears with you? For what? Are you offering me a future or just this moment?”

He released a long sigh before saying, “Za, I can’t promise you a future until I take care of some external concerns of my own.”

“External? You’re concerned that your family will have a problem if you became serious with me because of my race?” She asked because no matter how modern times were, there was always this to consider. She just never expected it to be an issue Sylus would have to contend with.

“Not exactly, a racial issue, but before I turn my entire world upside down, I need to know if you’re truly capable of loving and having a close relationship with me or am I the one that is expected to do all the trusting and take all the risk?”

She exhaled sharply. “I’m not sure how to answer that,” she blurted her eyes tearing up as she looked at him hopelessly. “If I were only to listen to my heart, I could say yes, take a chance on me because I’m worth it.”

“Then say it, and mean it, and I will move hell itself to spend the rest of my life with you, Zaza.” Sylus

“I...I can’t make any promises because...”

“What? Please tell me,” he encouraged.

“I have PTSD! Okay? So now you know!” She admitted and allowed the tears to flow.

“What is this, PTSD?” He asked looking into her face...searching. Yet not allowing her to pull away.

“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” she sniffled. “I was abused and raped.”

He bent his pale head and her heart felt like it was breaking. Now he was disappointed, like all the rest. The dream illusion she presented on the outside was a lie. Za knew how to present the perfect outside appearance but once you looked inside you’d see she was defective. She felt his hold loosen and she took advantage deciding to get as far away from her shame as possible.

He caught her by the waist easily and pulled her back to him. His hold tightened as he buried his face in the side of her neck. To her surprise he was crying. She hadn’t expected him to cry.

“Sy, I should have told you sooner, but I’m so ashamed.”

“Za, you have nothing to be ashamed of.” He cupped her face in his hands. “Is that why you called off your wedding years ago? Is this why you only get involve with women because they make

you feel safer?"

"Don't do this," she whimpered. Turning her face away from him. "I can't discuss with you all that has happened to me in my lifetime, it's too painful."

He placed a tender kiss to her brow and leaned his forehead against hers. "Then tell me what you can, but you can't walk around holding on to all of *this*."

"I'm not," she protested.

"You must be or you wouldn't still be blaming yourself for something that wasn't your fault." Sylus reasoned.

Could she tell him everything? Of course not, at least, not yet. She wasn't strong enough to relive the beginning cause of the mental mess she was in. But she could explain about what happened with Peter.

"My fiancé was Dr. Peter Worth. I'm not sure if I told you that." She frowned in confusion. She rubbed the place that continued to throb in her temple. He thumbed away her falling tears. "If you key in my name, Zaza Draper, you will find on the Internet the archived media coverage of my public engagement and my public humiliation.

She felt Sy stiffen. "So whatever you went through, you had to do so in the public's eyes."

Za nodded suppressing a shudder from the memories. "When I met Peter, I finally thought I was cured. That I could fall in love and have the life I dreamt of. I can't tell you how many therapists I had to go through to learn how to trust, after the childhood I had?"

He reclined and drew her with him, sheltering her in the strength of his arms. Pressing her head against the corded muscles of his chest. His fingers raked through her thick hair. The touch of his hand was almost unbearable in its tenderness.

"No, I can't imagine," he said honestly and she was thankful. So many times people have told her they understood and it just wasn't possible unless they had been in her shoes.

"Peter told me everything I wanted to hear, which being one of my ex-therapist, he knew all about me so I thought, he must really love me to want to marry me."

"Did he--"

"Please, let me get all of this out, then you can ask questions," she interjected.

"I'm listening."

"When Peter proposed, I said yes, not because I was in love with him, but because I didn't want to lose the one man I thought understood me, the good and the bad." She pondered. "I figured love would come in time. Stupid, I know that now."

Looking back at her own situation and seeing Selby's happiness with Darius, she realized

one should never consider marrying without love, honesty and respect.

“The night before we were to marry, Selby and I found a hidden stash of video tapes of him and his friends doing horrible things to all these different women. They had to have been doing this for years, because there were so many tapes. It was obvious by the victims lack of response to what was happening to them that they were drugged.”

“I should have killed the bastard.” Sy mumbled.

“Huh?” She paused.

“I meant...I *would have* killed the bastard. If I had known you then. ”

“Trust me, I wanted to.” She mused, “Especially after the police told me I was in one of them. I couldn’t believe the bastard had done it to me, his own fiancée, how sick is that? I felt dirty and ashamed, knowing the police had looked at the tapes made me physically ill.”

She shivered and he squeezed her, offering her his strength to continue.

“Peter was offered a deal. If he would give them a list of his victims so that they could be notified that justice had been served, then he would only have to do twenty years.” Za bit back her anger. “I’m sure it was a comforting thought to those who had reached their statue of limitation, but for others, it wasn’t a fair deal because they wanted their day in court.”

“What form of justice is this? There was a time when the public executioner would have castrated him and hung him by his feet until he bled to death,” Sy voiced bitterly.

Za was taken aback by his vehement response. His outrage, made her happy he was a friend and not an enemy. Everyone else usually felt sorry for her, not Sy, he was the only one besides Selby that sounded as enraged as she felt. She knew she had to do the right thing for his sake. He was a highly sexual man. What if she was never cured? She couldn’t expect him to wait on her.

“Sylus?”

“Hmm?”

“I’ve been thinking about what you said and I believe I’ve come to a decision.”

“So have I,” he agreed.

They both voiced their decisions.

“We should stay friends,” she stated.

“We should become lovers,” he stated.

They looked at each other and busted out laughing.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Freshly showered and dressed, Za walked on to the terrace to wait for Sylus to join her. They had an appointment to visit the detective agency and then go out for brunch. She couldn't believe Sylus told her he wanted to become her lover. It went beyond logic and reason. Did he feel sorry for her after all? No, his attraction to her was as genuine as hers was to him. So why would he do this? Maybe he thought he was the man to help her overcome her uncertainties.

She eased over to the fountain and pulled a coin out of her purse she closed her eyes and made a private wish.

"That is not a wishing fountain you know. Sylus laughingly teased, coming out on the balcony. "Do you feel better after the shower? Did the pills I gave you help your headache?"

"Yes, thank you." She smiled at him. "You know it could be a wishing fountain and I christened it with the first wish."

"What you wish for?" He stepped closer.

"Once it comes true I will share it with you." She admired his attire. He must have a tailor because his choice of clothing was impeccable. Today he wore a natural-colored linen jacket with matching double-pleated trousers and a pale blue silk button-down shirt.

Dark shades were perched on his nose, hiding his beautiful eyes from her; yet did nothing to take away from his handsome features. Looking at him so handsomely attired, she was happy she decided to wear her crossover blue V-neck sundress with the white loosely tied shrug. It was if they conspired on their wardrobe.

When she saw him push the shades down to the tip of his nose, eyeing her from head to toe, she realized she wasn't the only one enjoying the view.

His appreciative eyes traveled from her the mermaid hem of her peach dress and to her calves. He moistened his lips once he stopped at her feet. Za hid a smile as his gaze lingered on the floral jeweled, chained ankle sandals.

"Are you ready to go, beautiful?" He inquired.

"Let me run and get my purse out of the bedroom." She scurried to pass him.

He reached out and grabbed her forearm. He pulled her to him. Gathering her into his arms, he held her snugly. His lips brushed a gentle kiss across her forehead.

Za felt his body react as she buried her face in his neck, tiptoeing in her heels placed her in a better position than usual; she breathed a kiss there. She adored the citrus spicy scent of his skin. Raising her face and leaning back, she waited as he dipped his head and touched his lips to hers.

Sylus cupped her face with one large hand his kiss was urgent and exploratory. She parted her lips, inviting more, while wrapping her arms around his shoulder. Side to side he moved his lips over hers; she enjoyed the exploring tongues dancing against one another.

He moaned.

She moaned.

Za loved his taste. Usually the silkiness of his hair would fall forward and curtain her face with silk but today he wore it tied back in a ponytail with a leather tie the nape of his neck.

Her hands smoothed his wide shoulders, upward until she delved her fingers into his hair. Greedily she reached for the leather tie to release his hair from its binding and felt his hand on hers. Za's eyes opened, only seeing the distorted reflection of her own face mirrored in his sunglasses. She blushed with open embarrassment; her lips looked ridiculously huge.

"If you take my hair down and start playing in it, we won't make the meeting." His voice was deep with desire. "However, I do apologize for starting something I don't have time to finish. But you looked so delicious in that confection of a dress I couldn't resist."

"Why do I feel as if things are leaning more towards your decision than mine" She grinned sheepishly.

"I thought you knew me, woman." He gave her a devil-may-care grin. "I always get my way."

"Because you hate losing?"

"No, because I like to win."

"Okay, lets see where it goes, but we have to stick to the plan and take care of the business at hand. We can worry about us later."

"I'm not worried. I know what I want, but as I mentioned before I have some things I need to see to. It will require that I go out of town, as soon as we return home," Sy confided.

"I see, anything I can help you with?"

"Not this time, sweetheart. I'm afraid I have to handle this one on my own. Besides Selby is going to need you to help with the wedding she probably will have much for you to do upon our return." He fingered her hair bangs into place as the wind blew then over her eyes. Seeing it was futile he dropped his hand to rest on her hip.

"What excuse do I tell Selby when I'm going to the pre-wedding events alone?" She looked at him through wide questioning eyes.

"I have my schedule and I hope to be back before the first event, but if not, let Darius handle the excuses," he suggested.

“This seems very serious, Sy, I think it would be best complicated for you if we just keep things the way they are now.”

He removed the shades and quirked a look at her. “How about you start working on that proposal for this glorious music career you have for me and I will handle my end of things?”

“Okay, you don’t have to look at me that way, I get the message.” She snickered.

“I think we best get out of here before I decided to carry you into the bedroom and see how far we can go. The sooner I learn where my boundaries are the more we will know what to work on.” There was a gentle softness in his voice. He cupped her face, his thumb caressed over her bottom lip. “Promise me, not to over-think this. We are going to handle this one kiss at a time, okay?”

She stood there, bemused, amazed, and please. It sounded like a great plan to her.

“I will try,” she promised.

He leaned in and whispered. “That is all we can hope for, sweetheart.”

Her heart sang, but still, it was difficult to be too hopeful when she was worried about the things he wasn’t saying.

“Sylus, promise me that now that I told you something big about myself, that you will do the same for me, soon.” She searched his face with her eyes, but it was as unreadable as usual. “I have tried to be patient because I know you are a very private man, but the less I know of you the more doubtful I am about our future.”

“There is something I have to tell you before I take that trip I was telling you about. There will be no reason to go after I tell you because you may not want a relationship with me.”

“Oh hell, now I’m worrying again. Maybe we should cancel the appointment today and spend the day talking about us.” Za suggested anxiously.

“I can’t do as you request and tell you something big about myself, if you’re going to worry.” He released an exasperated sigh.

“You’re right...you’re right...sorry. Go ahead.”

“Remember we spoke about the possibilities of Nymphs, Vampires, Satyrs, and such?”

She cast him a wary gaze. Maybe she wasn’t the only crazy one in this relationship. That might be why they bonded so well. What was he trying to say? He really believes these mythical creatures existed. Surely not, he seemed too logical for that nonsense. May that was his hobby he collected movies, or books about these things? *That* she could understand.

“Sy, I remember the discussion but I don’t remember our agreeing on the possibility of their existence.”

“Well--”

Za groaned in frustration as the suite butler arrived at the terrace door. “Mr. de Gauls, sir, you have an important phone call.”

He handed Sylus the cordless phone and excused himself. Sy looked at the face of the phone caller ID. “I’m sorry, Za. I must take this call.” He moved away from her. “Hello, Marie, what did you find out?”

Marie! I bet, it’s important? She couldn’t keep her hands off Sy last night! Za scowled and crossed her arms across her breast in frustration. She started pacing. *As usual in the middle of him finally sharing something important and we get a--* “Mr. de Gauls you have a phone call,” she mimicked aloud and paused

Oh God, she remembered what happened last night. *Sylus left the table because he had a phone call in the club office. Peter. Peter was at the club!* Za suddenly felt like she couldn’t breathe. *He’s out of prison and he had drugged her drink.*

Za bent over, her head swimming and her ears ringing as she tried to breathe. Her hands and feet became numb and she went to her knees. She couldn’t cry out. There was more. *Peter half carried-half dragged her out of the club. I can’t move away from him and I can’t scream, but I can hear and see but my eyes feel so heavy! Ouch, my head hit the wall hard. Peter’s cussing while beating and kicking against a door? What in the hell? I must be dead! It’s a Devil coming towards me! Tall, hairy, curved horns. Someone is fighting? Do I hear Marie’s voice? Did she kiss me? Drugs...yes...help me. Peter drugged me. So tired. Sylus carrying me? No, Sylus help me; the Devil’s carrying me! It’s okay...it’s okay...Sylus is the Devil. I’m safe. Darkness.*

“No! No!” Za mouthed but no sound came out. *None of it was true it couldn’t be. Peter is in prison and Sylus is a beautiful man, he looks more like an angel, nothing like the demon she imagined. Oh God, my chest hurts, she was dying or was she already dead and this morning had been an illusion?*

“Zaza!” She heard Sylus cry out, it was the last thing she heard before she fell over onto her side and fainted.

“You should have told me what happened to me last night!” Za yelled at him. “You should have told me about you! What the hell kind of *monster* are you anyway? How is this even possible?”

Sy cringed from her harsh words as though she had struck him. His vexation and injured feelings were evident as he bellowed back at her. “I was going to tell you everything last night and

then everything happened! Then this morning, after you told me what happened to you, I just couldn't lay something else on you. Do I frighten you now?"

"I'm frightened by the fact everything I have thought fictional could be true." She ran a hand through her hair. "Yes, that scares the hell out of me, but no, I don't fear *you*. I can't say I will fill the same about the creature you become. But he...it...*damn*..."

"I'm Sylus, Za, be it in Satyr form or this one." He gritted his teeth.

"I'm sorry, I'm not deliberately trying to hurt you." Za apologized.

He nodded. "I know, sweetheart."

"What I was saying is I'm not scared of you. You saved my life last night. There's no telling what he had planned for me, but we both know Peter couldn't afford to leave a witness." She paused and released a shuddering sigh. "I want to say, thank you."

"No thanks is necessary, I told you as long as you are with me I will watch over you," he reminded.

He noticed the intensity and anger from when she first regained consciousness was subsiding. For a moment Sy had considered calling Marie to come up and enchant Za into calming down.

"Za, I planned on telling you. I hated keeping something as important as this from you," he finished.

"As crazy as the truth is, Sy, I prefer to deceptions and lies." Za remarked. "Don't ever do it again. Not even to protect me, or I will lose all the trust I have in you and when that happens. I'm gone."

"Where does that leave us? Are you saying you will give me another chance?"

"I don't know." She shrugged. "There is so much I want to ask you, but I had enough. My head is killing me and I'm tired."

"I understand." He released a deep sigh. Desperately Sy wanted to close the space between them and hold her in his arms, but he knew at this moment she wouldn't welcome his touch, and he couldn't handle the rejection. "I called the detective and told him I would meet up with him at half past four. Why don't you try to eat something and rest while I'm gone?"

"No!" She blurted. "I want to go, with you."

"Za..."

"I need to do this, I need to focus on something else."

"Is that the only reason?" His voice softened and his eyes searched her face.

"No. I know you said Peter was arrested for breaking his parole and has pending new charges of drug possession, but the thought of them letting him out on parole in the first place

doesn't give me much comfort in the judicial system." She murmured. "Please, I really don't want to be alone right now."

"Trust me, you will never have to worry about Peter again. We made sure he didn't remember your name. That's why there aren't any attempted kidnapping charges also against him." He removed his hands from his pocket and crossed his arms over his chest. "I thought it would be best to leave our names out of it. Marie took care of everything."

"I will have to go down and thank Marie before we leave to return home," she murmured.

"I'm glad you want to come with me. It makes me feel better knowing you're with me, but I didn't want to push," he admitted.

Their eyes met and held. A blush flooded her cheeks. Nothing had changed for him. He wanted her. There was something so sensual and suggestive about the way she was looking at him. The emotions he had for Za defied all reasoning since there are no known records of a Satyr falling in love with someone other than his Nymph eternal mate. So why was this happening, was it her emotional scars that tugged at his soul?

"Zaza, may I ask you something?"

"What?" She eyed him guardedly.

"All the feelings you had for me prior to this happening, have they completely disappeared? Do you hate me now that you see I'm not like other men?"

Silence grew heavy and oppressive between them. Believing she wasn't going to answer his question, Sylus stood up from where he was seating and prepared to leave to wait for her in the parking garage. He took two steps and halted as she spoke. His back still towards her.

"You've never been like other men and I wish I did hate you, then I could walk away from you forever," she answered honestly. "But standing here looking at you, so familiar to me, makes my heart race and all I want to do is come over there and hold you."

Sylus's eyes misted over. "The last thing I wanted to do is deceive, or hurt you," He explained. "Nor do I want to lose you because I told you the truth." He turned to face her. "By the laws of those I am sworn to abide, I wasn't supposed to speak of this at all without firsthand blessings from the council. Yet, when you stared at me with confusion, needing answers to ease your fears. I couldn't let you go on believing you were crazy, not even if it meant I wouldn't lose you."

"My mind is telling me that I should have let you leave for the meeting, packed my bags and be gone before your returned," Za said.

"Why didn't you?" He asked shoving his hands in his slacks pockets, watching her stare past his shoulder out the closed glass doors leading to the terrace.

“Since I met you, I’ve felt this crazy bond between us and the thought of walking away and never seeing you again makes me hurt right here.” She placed a palm flat against the center of her chest. “I’ve never felt this way before. Have you cast a spell on me? I have no idea what Satyrs are capable of.”

“We call it “enchanting” and yes I have the ability, but what you’re feeling are your own” Sy told her.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t say that,” she sighed, dropping her hands to her side. “Can you make someone forget?”

Suddenly Sy felt panic. Was she about to ask him to make her forget him? *Please don’t ask this of me.*

“I could try, it depends on the memories and how emotionally attached you are.” He answered. “Za, good or bad, experiences makes who we are.”

“I don’t know what to believe anymore,” she cried.

“I know this may not mean much to you coming from me now. I should have said it this morning first thing, but I will say it now.” He paused to gather up his nerves and prepare himself to be shot down. “I’ve fallen in love with you for who you are, right now, at this very moment.”

“Damn you, for saying this, now.” She cracked a sad half-smile. “Why can’t you allow me to be angry at you for at least the rest of the day?”

“Because, if I didn’t say it now, I probably would talk myself out of saying it at all.” He grinned sheepishly. “I am a Satyr, Za. You said you wanted unconditional love, someone that understood all that you are and accepted the responsibility of what loving you entails. I’m offering to be the one.” He spread his hands wide. “Can you offer me the same?”

Za remained silent. Sy watched as her eyes closed, but only for a moment. He hadn’t realized he was holding his breath until his chest started to burn. He welcomed the pain for it would ease the one in his heart if she should turn him down.

If she did, what would he do without out her in his life now that he had met her? There was no way he could return to the life he once knew. He waited patiently for her to reply.

Her eyes opened, she stared up at him. “I can’t lie, I am falling in love with you.”

“Oh, Za!” He grinned and stepped forward stopping abruptly as she put up her hand.

“But... I can’t you anything until I know what is expected of me being with someone like you? I thought it would be hard enough tackling cultural differences, but now we are talking about, *species*.” She shook her head in disbelief even though she heard the word coming out of her mouth. “I mean can we actually make love? What about children?”

Sylus blanched. He wasn't prepared to answer those questions. Once he did he was sure to lose her. He released a sigh and said, "How about you make note of all the things you want to know and once we get the issue of Selby mother, taken care of, we talk."

"You promise that we will take care of this before we return home?"

"I believe the same promise holds, we don't leave San Francisco without knowing if we are leaving as friends or lovers."

He was relieved to see her smile and hold out her hand. "Agree," she said.

Sy walked over to her, reached out, and laced her fingers with his drawing her against him. When she didn't protest he wrapped his arms around her.

"I prefer to seal the agreement with a hug." He squeezed her and she returned his hug. He thought it was a good sign.

His mouth grazed her earlobe as he rocked her from side to side. "Za, I know I'm asking a lot, but if after all your questions are answered and you decide to give me a chance. I need you to give me time. While I'm taking this time I need you to trust in what we feel for one another. It's the only thing that will give us a fighting chance."

She pulled back to stare up at him. "Once I decide, I can only try, Sylus. But you must notice by now, I'm not the most patient woman in the world. I don't like surprises and I don't like not know what's around the corner, you know what I mean?"

His eyes grew wide with pretend surprise. He gasped, "Are you actually admitting aloud that you're a control freak." Placing a hand over his heart, "I think I must be dying."

"Oh hell, yeah," she laughingly said in a Southern dialect, "I ain't ashamed of it. So what cha got to say about that?"

"I he-ah-ya, girl-friend." He cocked a brow and grinned.

Za fell into a fit of girlish giggles. "Don't do that, please!" Giggle. "Don't *ever* do that again." She snorted on a laugh a manage to say. "Oh, my God, you sounded like a White-man in drag, trying to sound like a Black-woman. It doesn't work, not for you, not for them."

"I'm glad I could make you laugh, but I don't think it was that funny," Sy chastised.

"Aw, poor baby." Za kissed his cheek and immediately he felt warm all over. "Come on big guy, I think we better get out of here, I can tell by the look in your eyes you're about to get distracted again."

"Woman, I'm the one that gives orders here." He quirked a dark eyebrow.

"Sorry, that don't work with me anymore. You blew it by being more sensitive then I could have ever imagined," she complimented.

“Don’t tell anybody, especially Selby; she will give me that “I told you so” look.”

“You, too, huh.” Za, giggled. “But she was the one who told me, that there was more to you than what I was seeing. She told me that you were sensitive, caring and--“

“Stop. I see my reputation for being an ass crumbling at my feet.”

“Well, it’s a cute ass, if I must say so myself.”

“I knew you just wanted my body, from the moment I met you.” He winked.

“Will you please stop and listen? I need to be serious for a moment,” she said, loving the lighthearted mood. It felt so much better than arguing with him.

“Nooo,” he wailed. “I want to keep you smiling.”

Her shoulders lifted in a deep sigh and she said, “Okay, I will leave it for my list which is growing as we speak.”

His heart hammered foolishly, he felt sweat beading on his upper lip as he fought the urge to not push by spraying her gorgeous face with wet kisses. Taking a deep breath, he exhaled; deciding keeping her hands off her wasn’t going to be easy. They will have to get this resolved quick. Hopefully by bedtime tonight. *Slow down boy*, he sent a mental message to the semi-erection in his trouser.

“We hugged on that deal. How about we seal it with a kiss?” He said interrupted what she was saying because he hadn’t heard a word of it since he started staring at her mouth.

“Go to hell, Sylus de Gauls,” Za grunted as she caught him off guard and pushed him backwards a step, dodging his hands. “I’m getting my purse.”

“Hey, one little kiss is all I’m asking for,” he called out.

Za shook her head. “Nope.”

He followed and stopped at the front of the hall just to watch her walk. Sy heard her laughter as she twisted her way down the hall, the hem of her sundress swinging from side to side. Each perfect butt cheek molded by the dress was something to behold with each step. Sy moaned and adjusted himself. He was sure the extra shimmy of her hips as she walked, was just to taunt him and it worked.

“She’s killing me,” he murmured.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The drive to and from the private investigator's office was done in virtual silence. Both, Za and Sylus were deeply immersed in their own private thoughts.

Za was concerned about the drastic changes that were to come for Selby if her mother was interested in meeting her. Would Selby be glad she secretly helped Darius to find her, or would she never speak to her again?

"We're here." Sylus announced easing the car onto an empty lot walking distance from the residential address listed in the portfolio given to them by the P.I. hired by Darius.

Za was surprised by the sudden emotions that seized her. She couldn't believe what she was staring at. It wasn't what she had expected at all. She had anticipated finding a woman that was living modestly or poorly trying her best to make a dollar stretch. She was prepared for anything except this.

"Are...are you sure this is the right place?" She asked with a deep frown on her brow.

Sylus lifted and opened the file from the side pocket of the vehicle door and skimmed the page. "Yes, this is the right place," he verified.

Za felt sick with anger. She gazed out the car window at the picture-perfect Victorian home located in the beautiful and influential Pacific Heights area.

She felt Sylus watching her with a critical squint. He had pushed his shades atop his head. One of his long fingers tapped rhythmically on the steering wheel. He waited.

Za clenched her jaw to kill the sob in her throat. "Why?"

"Why what, sweetheart? Tell me what you're feeling." His voice had an infinitely compassionate tone.

"I'm hurt and angry for Selby," she responded. "This was not what I expected."

"I don't understand." He smoothed her hair with his hand.

Za closed her hand over his, lacing his fingers with her own. She held on to him for emotional support. She was thankful to have him by her side. "I assumed Selby had been born to a broken low-rent housing park like me, now I see I was wrong."

"Just because the woman lives this way now, doesn't mean her circumstances were the same years ago," he pointed out.

Za continued looking out the window, slowly shaking her head and praying that Sylus was right. Otherwise, she couldn't honestly tell Darius this was a good idea. Selby would be hurt by this and there was no way she was going to be a party to doing that to her.

“Yeah, maybe,” she replied softly. “I would hate to know that this woman gave up Selby just because she was a mistake. Even I was brought into this world with a mother’s love.”

“She must have loved Selby, because she carried her nine months and gave birth to her. That takes love, otherwise she could have just had an abortion.”

“Abortions weren’t so easy back then,” she argued.

“True, but it wasn’t impossible either, Za, especially if indeed this woman has been wealthy all of her life. We won’t know the situation until we actually meet with her and talk to her, don’t you think?” He brought the back of her hand up to his lips and pressed a kiss there.

She smiled at him wondering how did she overlook the fact that he was an optimist at heart?

“I hope you’re right. It’s easier to understand why your mother can’t keep you if she’s struggling and can’t afford to keep feed or care for you. Even if she dies, like mine did, at least you know you were loved and she would have kept me if she could, but I know I would have hated my mother if I knew she was living in luxury, while I suffered through the foster care system. Especially if things got better for her and she didn’t even bother to look for me,” Za explained her feelings as best she could.

“Za, I know you mentioned before your mother was dead and your father was in prison. I hadn’t wanted to press at the time but do you actually remember them or was this something you were told when you got old enough to understand?” He asked. His thumb caressed the palm of her hand intimately.

“No, I actually lived with my parents for a short period and I remember them, especially my mother.” Za confessed. “My father was in the military and things were hard for my mother. We were moving all the time and he would be shipped overseas for long periods of time while leaving us in places where my mom couldn’t find work because she couldn’t speak the language, nor friends, unless it was other military wives.”

She looked down at their hands intertwined. The way his hand molded hers made her feel safe. Za didn’t talk about her past at all, but since being with Sylus she needed him to know everything. Admittedly, she wasn’t ready to tell him about her past all at once, but gradually she knew she would tell him. Mainly because she felt that he would understand. She wondered if it was because he was different and she knew how it felt to be different. Was that why they felt this way about each other and never any other?

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want,” Sylus broke the yawning silence. “I don’t want you to suffer the pain of the past just because I’m curious to know more about you.”

“I know,” she leaned in and pecked his mouth with a kiss. “That’s why I want to tell you.”

She took in and released a shuddering breath. It had been a long time since she opened the veins of the past.

“My Mom barely made ends meet with what dad would send home. We lived off eggs and bologna for a months waiting for more money. I had a little cot in my parent’s room because the place was so small.”

“That must been hard for you.”

“No, I was a kid. My mother loved me and she was my best friend. She used to play with me and read to me. I was happy.” Za smiled in remembrance. “*We* were happy, that is, when it was just the two of us.”

“So things changed for the worse when your father returned home?” Sylus asked quietly.

She looked up into his face, as their eyes met, she felt the familiar awareness that Sy always made her feel and loved the tenderness of his expression as he looked at her.

She had to look away before she could continue. “My father was verbally and physically abusive, so things became intense when he was home.”

She could feel Sylus’s body stiffened. The hold he had on her hand tightened.

“On this particular night, my father had been gone all day. When he finally returned home, he was drunk as usual. Immediately he started in on my mom, telling her how useless she was as a woman. How he could have married better if she hadn’t gotten herself pregnant.” Za shook her head.

“I should have stayed out of it. I was only five at the time and I don’t know why I did it, but something felt different this time. He was so angry. So I threw myself around his legs.” She paused. “I held on to him with all my might, thinking I could weigh him down while my mom ran to get help.”

“Sweetheart--” He clicked up the steering wheel and put his hands on either side of her waist lifting her so that she was cradled across his lap.

Her throat tightened with tears for his loving comfort touched her heart. For the first time she received a glimpse of what life was like for Selby with the support of Darius. Was Darius, a Satyr like Sylus? Had Selby known all this time and kept the truth from her? If so, why would her best friend keep her in the dark?

No, she couldn’t think about this now. Sy had promised to answer her questions soon. She realized she was creating new disappointments in her head so she didn’t have to face what happened that night when she was five.

“There is no reason for you to ever be frightened again Zaza. I’m here for you to use me at will. I hope in time you will know that you can trust me with your life, for I would die for you?”

Sylus tightened his hold until it was almost painful for her, but she welcomed the comfort she felt in his arms. She began to weep silently as he brushed his lips against her hair. “I want to believe you,” she whispered.

“Have I hurt you?” He asked huskily. He eased his hold adjusting her against his hardness.

“No, you’ve been surprisingly kind,” She conceded with a teasing grin through her tears.

“I will allow you to slide on that one,” he commented in his familiar pompous way. “However, you come this far, you might as well tell me what occurred that night, to you and your mother?” He placed her hand over his heart. “You can open up to me darling,” he encouraged. “Tell me what happened when you tried to stop your father from hurting your mother?”

She began to shake as the fearful images took shape in her mind. “For the first time, he...he hit me, knocking me to the ground...oh, God, I don’t know if I can do this.”

“Yes, you can. You’re not alone in this anymore. I’m here for you, Za. Tell me, sweetheart.”

Her breath started coming in shallow quick gasps and her fingers clung to Sylus’s collar as dread seized her insides. As if her growing tension was too much for him to bare, he started singing to her.

Za closed her eyes and allow his beautiful voice to soothed her. A sensation of bottomless peace swept through her body. Immediately she relaxed in his arms. Za basked in the knowledge of his serene strength and her despair lessened. He halted and waited for her to speak.

“My mom became wild. Cursing at him and telling him he could beat on her but not her baby. She kept saying it repeatedly. The next thing I know she had a knife in her hand and he easily overpowered her and turned the knife on her.”

“Oh, Za,”

“There was so much blood,” she managed numbly. “I started screaming and I couldn’t stop.” She paused. “I don’t remember much of what happened afterwards. I woke up in a hospital and for a months afterwards, I couldn’t speak, I couldn’t feel, or cry. Nothing. I spent a little over a year in a mental institute, because I refused to eat, I hardly slept. Most of all I refuse to accept that my mother was dead.” She finished in a cold voice.

“When I started to feed myself and regain weight, I was moved to a foster home where I met Selby. She was the first person I spoke to in two years.”

Sy closed his eyes and rested his chin atop her head, quietly holding her until she stopped trembling. She was glad she told him. Every time she shared her painful past with him, she felt as if

he was somehow purging her of the guilt and anger she felt for all these years. Could it be a gift that the Satyrs had, to remove another's pain. Weren't they mythically known as the creatures of drunken happiness?

"What bout your grandparents?" He asked interrupting her thoughts.

"My mother's parents were killed in a car accident, no one else wanted the responsibility. My father's parents weren't considered fit by social services to house a child. I have no desire to see them ever again."

"You are so much stronger than you give yourself credit for, sweetheart, and the more I learn about you the more I love you." He whispered passionately against her ear. "I need you to understand I will be here for you as long as you allow me to be."

Za desperately needed to believe him, but could she? She feared the more she found out about Sy, the more she would realize there was no way for them to prepare a personal life together.

She was barely conquering her own demons and now she had to go in and meet this woman who may or may not be Selby's mother. She had to decide if Selby would be better off knowing she existed. But truthfully, if it was she the surprise was for, she wouldn't appreciate it. Now that the time had come the more she thought Selby should be here making this decision for herself.

"You've grown quite on me again," Sy voiced. "Anything I can help you mull over or are you ready to go to the door?"

"The truth?"

"Always."

"At this moment I wish that you could make love to me until I forget all the old stuff I've dredged up again since I been here. Also, I really don't know if any of us besides Selby has the right to bring her past into her presence." She stared fixedly out the window at the house as she spoke. "I know I wouldn't appreciate it if you were doing something like this for me, even out of love."

"I promised Darius I would do this, Za, and I can not go back on my word. If you feel you can't do this. I can handle this and you won't have to feel that you've betrayed Selby anymore then you have." He stated seriously, his tone became more lighthearted when he said, "This is just my theory but I think this was Darius's way of throwing us together to work through some of the tension before the wedding."

Za smiled back at him and arched an eyebrow in question. "You think so?"

"Oh, I know so. I could have done this alone and been back within the same day before anyone was the wiser." He finished nuzzling the side of her neck and ear.

“So, I have Darius to thank for this and if that is the case why are you getting all the liberties?” Za moaned as Sy licked and nibbled behind her ear. Not because it aroused her because she couldn’t feel a thing. She rigidly held her tears in check.

“I get the liberties, because if he hadn’t asked you first, I would have found away to get you alone to myself. Even if I had to kidnap you.”

“As if,” she replied in a teasing banter as expected and was kept her face buried in his shoulder as he continued his journey of kisses to the nape of her neck. She bit her bottom lip to keep from sobbing.

“Za, it’s obvious to me that you may not be serious about making love until you forget. I believe there is much more going on here and I want to know why are you trying to pretend that you are enjoying my touch?” He growled in exasperation lifting his head and cupped her face in his hands.

There was genuine surprise and hurt on his face as he noticed she had started crying again. “Now that you know what I am, can you no longer bare my touch?” He demanded and answer.

“No!” She shook her head even though he held her face. “Please, it’s not you. It’s me,” Za cried. “Help me, Sy. I need you.”

Uncaring of the possibility they were being watched or that someone could walk by on the sidewalk at any moment, she allowed Sy to maneuver her on his lap until her dress was pushed up to her hips and she was straddled him.

She was thankful for the large luxury vehicle with its large leather seats and adjustable steering wheel, it generously improved her odds of keeping bruises to a minimum. She didn’t care what he was about to do to her; she just wanted him to make her feel something besides this self-preservation numbness that had returned to claim her.

“I can’t promise you that I’m ready to go all the way, yet. At least not here...not like this; but, since I realized how close Peter came to getting his hands on me again, I haven’t been able to physically feel anything.

“Za,” Sy put his arms around her. “My love, your sorrow pains me. Tell me what I must do to relieve it?”

“Love me,” She pleaded huskily and bucked against the growing hardness that nestled between her spread thighs. She slid both of his hands in the deep V of her sundress over her breasts and urged him to gently squeeze and massage. “Sy, I’m afraid I will go back to being that girl who couldn’t stand to be touched at all, not by men or women. You said you will be here for me no matter what,” she reminded.

“Za, it’s in your head, darling. Your body can feel. Look how your nipples are responding to my touch. They’re plump and lovely,” he whispered appreciatively dipping his head to pull one into his mouth.

She moaned and he released it with a wet popping sound. “Don’t stop.” She arched against the earth-shattering spirals of pleasure radiating from the feel of his touch.

“Za, let me take you back to the suite,” he offered.

She smiled at his concern for her but she knew if she stopped him, she wouldn’t be able to try again once she had time to think about what she was doing.

She used her hands on his legs to brace herself as he released one breast from the sundress; she was thankful she didn’t wear a bra today as he took the protruding dark nipple into his mouth and suckled. She leaned back and the horn from the steering wheel behind her blared and startled the both of them, causing him to accidentally nipped her. She cried out.

The sensation of pleasure and pain shot through her body. She welcomed with open arms the familiar arousal and warm dampness seeping into her panties.

“Fuck!” Sy cursed. “Baby, did I hurt you?” He kissed and licked the spot. “I’m so sorry.”

She realized there would be a bruise come tomorrow, but she could feel him and she wanted more. Every nerve ending in her body came to attention when he accidentally bit her. She had never felt this hot for anyone...ever.

“I could feel it,” she sobbed and laughed at the same time. He probably thought she has gone crazy but she couldn’t stop now, she was so hot and her body hurt from something, what she didn’t know. “Bite me again,” she ordered.

“No, Za,” he said firmly between gritted teeth.

“Damn you, do it!” She yelled.

“I will not hurt you on purpose. That is not what you want. You’re angry and you want me to give you a reason to group me with everyone that has physically hurt you.”

She lifted her hand to hit him and he grasped her by the wrist and held them behind her back.

Za spread her legs wider to get her swollen clit up against the erection enclosed behind his zipped trousers. She wasn’t so lost in the throws of lust that she wasn’t aware he was still holding her in a position to keep her from hurting him and her self.

“Come on Za, use me for your pleasure.” He urged her. “Give me your pain.”

She breathed heavily and earnestly. Her clothing was sticking to her sweat covered flesh. The windows of the car had steamed over from the heat radiating between their bodies.

She desperately wanted to touch his face, release his hair to spill over his shoulders, but she knew he didn't trust her enough to let her go while she was in this frenzy.

The impassioned turmoil on his face turned her on more, if it was possible. She loved knowing she had the power to make him desire her and was in awe by his control. He didn't try to rip off her clothing, or the thin barrier of her panties to thrust his huge erection in her.

"Oh, Za, I want to be inside you so bad," Sy admitted.

Za could go through the array of emotions she was feeling as she first hand witness a brief glimpsed of the other side of Sylus. His head was thrown back, his face slack, and lips parted, showing elongated canines. She was in awe and a bit of terror at the realism that she was had fallen in love with something that wasn't even human. A gasped escaped her as the pupil of his eyes dilated into blackened pits of darkness.

Her first instinct was to recoil, but she rather die right at this moment, if the creature was so inclined to take her life, then to hurt Sylus or make him feel unwanted. Creature? She had to get that term out of her head. This was Sylus...her Sy.

This was the same man that accepted her and her shame? Even now, he was taking on her anger, frustrations, and self-doubt; making sure she did so with hurting herself. In his face she saw he was fighting his on desire, yet was only concerned about her achieving her own. Fresh tears fell down her cheeks and she felt like she was turning into a weeping fool. She never cried, why now so many tears. He probably fell in love with her for her strength, independence and confidence. Yet, she hasn't manage to exude any of that since they came to San Francisco.

"Za?" Sy broke into her thoughts and she realized they both were sitting still, the crazy passions of moments ago, a vague memory in comparison to the overwhelming loving tenderness that was taking its place. All signs of the Satyr she'd seen had been with the familiar angelic beauty of the man.

"What is it?" His speech was filled with concern as he released her wrist. She saw the anguish that twisted on his face. "Damn...damn..." he cursed. His head fell back against the headrest and he closed his eyes and wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Sy--"

"You don't have to explain," he interjected. "I should have known this would never work. I'm sorry Zaza. I didn't mean to scare you, what you saw is as far as it goes unless I loose complete control of my sense due to the onslaught of feelings and emotions. But no matter what I wouldn't never...ever...hurt you."

"Baby, of course you wouldn't. I wasn't scared. It's just --"

“It’s just that you felt as if you were making love to a...what did you call me...a *monster*?” She heard his bitterness spill over into his voice. He bent his head, turning her face away from him.

Innocently she had called him that, for lack of a better term. She didn’t know what he was, or what to call him. How could she make him understand without him thinking she was pitting him? For him to be ashamed of being born a Satyr was as ridiculous as her being embarrassed for being born black.

“Don’t give up on me yet,” she spoke softly. She leaned lightly into him, cupped his face in her hands to force him to look at her. Tilting her face toward his, she said, “Now, I need you to believe in me as you have asked me to believe in you.”

“You don’t have to explain anything to me, Za. This is why Satyrs usually don’t fall in love with human females. We can take our pleasure from those openly willing.”

“Openly willing? Explain please.” She chuckled. A warm glow flow through her.

He eyed her suspiciously as he answered, “Yes, usually those who believe in us and assist us from time to time--”

“Such as relieving horniness? No pun intended of course.” She said.

He looked skeptically at her before continuing, “There are also those foolish human women who considered themselves witches and think we are demons they’ve conjured to fuck. Those are really interesting because there is usually a coven and I can pleasure all night.”

“What?” She couldn’t help but giggle; it was all so utterly bizarre. “I’ve heard about these sixty-minute men, but never an all-night man.”

Sy scowled. “It’s not funny, one night is easy. Now, days can become tedious.” His perfect aristocratic nose lifted a notch. “Surely you’re not shocked.” He cocked an arrogant brow. “Woman, after centuries of boredom and cursed loneliness, you do wild things to past the time.”

She realized his sudden need to talk nonstop was his way of covering up the fact that she hurt him and he feared her voicing that rejection.

“Sy--”

“Don’t get me wrong, once Darius came along he relieved the loneliness, but he isn’t a woman.” A brief smile came to his lip but she saw it didn’t touch the corners of his eyes the same way it did when he was being genuine in his emotions.

“Baby...I...”

“Besides it’s a distraction from the tedium.” He cursed softly. “Look, Za, I won’t apologize for what I am or my past, or anything else.” He waved a nonchalant hand. Brushing her hands

away from his face. “Nor will I beg you to return my love. I have too much pride for that. So be done with it and say what you will.”

Za smile broadened. Now, this was the pompous ass she knew and love so well. Then again how could she not love him? How could he be so blind not to see that she did? Did he honestly think she ran around telling men she only known for a short period about her past?

Satyr or man, he was still an idiot for not seeing what was staring him in the face. She’s told him in a matter of days, what it took a lifetime of psychoanalysis to bring to surface. Why did he think she wanted him to know everything about her? Did he think she could give up on him so easily and leave him knowing all her business?

Za hardly knew enough about him, so she couldn’t be make any life altering decisions until she had a full understanding of what she would have to give up.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Za had never been in love before. It was a heady feeling. She was giddy with the newness of the situation and tempted to throw all caution to the wind. However she knew she wouldn't.

True enough she was worried about Sylus changing into something other than what she saw sitting next to her and yes, it scared the hell out of her, but mostly from not knowing what to expect, then by what he was.

In her opinion men always had their role. The trolls and the potential trolls. Yet, Sy had managed to create his own special category and it rested close to her heart. Possibly, because he never was like other men.

Za dealt with the cruelty from males that was supposed to love, cherish and respect her just because she was a woman. Instead they turned out to be "monsters". Her luck had been so bad with the opposite sex, she often wondered if there were something in her that brought out the worse in them.

She wanted to believe Sylus was a gift of hope sent to her because he was wise, handsome, talented and stronger than the average male. She knew if he sworn to protect her he would do so with his life as promised.

"Say something, Za."

"Oh, are you finished making accusations?" She asked.

"I was asking questions." He countered. "You aren't the only one who likes to know where they stand."

Za brushed herself against him and found that in spite of their long pause he was still stiff and attention. She gave him a coquettish look and asked, "What do you think? It doesn't feel like we're finished to me."

He clasped her by the nape of the neck and pulled her lips just breath away from his. "Don't play with me woman, I can be dangerous in this state and because I've never been in love before, I can also be a bit unpredictable."

"But you wouldn't hurt me." She said with all the certainty she felt in her heart, even though her body slightly tensed in unsure expectations. She suppressed a shiver.

He shook his head. "No, I could never hurt you, Za. Yet I'm beginning to see that you could easily hurt me, if you so wish. Maybe that is what this seduction is about? Do you want revenge on what Peter did to you or maybe because you feel I lied about what I am by not telling you before you found out?"

Even though it irritated Za that he would genuinely believe any of those scenarios were true, she couldn't blame him for doubting her sincerity for her actions hasn't been consistent since she met him. She was becoming a woman she didn't even recognize.

"Sy, since I saw you that night awhile back at the hotel bar, the night that Selby and Darius met. I've been all over the place." She smoothed her brow with both hands. "I have no appetite and even thought I didn't know you were a Satyr, I've had dreams of being with one in the woods naked. I assumed it was because of the statue, so maybe that's why I'm not more frightened. Who the hell knows, what's going on with me? I don't."

"Za--"

"You had your turn, now let me have mine." She demanded.

He inclined his blond head.

"I'm finding it difficult to remain centered on my business. I've become totally useless in helping Selby with the wedding these days. She's probably relieved I let town for business. Now she doesn't have to hurt my feelings about not finishing the list of things she's given me to do. I--"

"Selby understands, sweetheart, you're a busy woman." Sy cut in.

Za snorting a sound of disgust, added, "The most surprising thing is after all these years of on and off again relationships, I've dumped my steady lover, Megan, and actually meant it this time."

Sylus mouth spread into a wide smug grin. "Baby, you saying you've given up women because of me? You don't have to do that, just make me your only love above others."

Here eyes narrowed. "Why because you want to still be able to be with Darius that way?"

He frowned, "I always told you it is different for Darius and I, yet, we are no longer lovers, for he has found his eternal mate." He ran his hands up and down her arms. "Do I sense jealous here."

Za scratched her head and looked out the car window. "I'm not the jealous type, I was just asking."

"You beautiful liar. You were jealous of Marie, just last night."

"I told you my memory is still vague about what happened and I don't remember being jealous."

He grunted making it clear he didn't believe her selective memory theory. Surprisingly, Za was hazy upon working but when she remembered she remembered everything. Peter must have used something less potent or less of it this time, because never has remembered the night he and his

friends rape her. If it hadn't been for seeing the tape, she would have sworn the police were lying to her.

"I'm losing you again. You're thinking about Peter again, my love? I told you, he is gone for your life forever and I assure you he doesn't even remember you ever being in his life." Sylus reassured her and she was grateful. One of the many things she loved about him.

"You really want to know what I'm thinking?"

"Of course." He placed his hand on her hips and lifted her to adjust himself.

She grinned, wondering if his legs were going numb like hers for remaining in this cramped position. If so he didn't say anything and neither did she because she didn't fancy leaving him yet. Za long to finish what they started earlier.

"I want to continue sharing things with you and I want to understand more about you and your world." She blurted out in one long breath. "What do you want?"

Sy gave her a long thoughtful stare while caressing her cheek with the knuckle of his forehand. His hand moved of its own volition from her cheek to her jaw line.

"Za, I want to get rid of this erection so that I can think with my upper head instead of my lower one," he grinned.

She laughed and shook her head.

"Also," he continued. "I want you to be my eternal mate. I just don't know if it's even a possibility." He looked her in the eyes. "If I can't become mortal, could you except loving me as I am, for the rest of your natural life?"

She knew what he was asking her, and although she would certainly prefer to relieve his mind, since he did seem to be bothered about whether she loved him or not. She wouldn't be able to honestly say yes, for she had reservations. Forever for her meant growing old, while he remained forever young and beautiful. Would she be able to live that way? One day she would be his wife, the next, mistaken as a "cradle robber and he was already ancient. Could her insecure vanity handle it?

She readjusted herself in his lap and grinned at him. "How about we work on your first wish and allow me some time to think about the second? How do you let this seat back?"

A brief look of disappointment clouded Sy's face, but he masked it as if it never happened and grinned up at her. Remaining silent his hand reached over to the center console and the leather seat slid back as far as possible and reclined.

Za took care of turning on the ignition and cranking the air conditioning up to high. Soft instrumental music siphoned through the luxury sedan's speakers as she hit the CD button before taking one more look outside the windows to make sure no one was too close for comfort.

"You've done this before I take it?" Sylus tilted his head to the side in question.

"No, I can honestly say, you're the first *man*, I've made-out with in a car," she replied on a gasp as his hand caressed over the spot he unintentionally bit earlier.

"That's going to leave a bad bruise for a few days, sweetheart."

"Yeah, you give a mean love bite, mister." She leaned into him her head bending to his. "I suppose that means you marked me as yours."

"Not completely, but it's a start." Sy pressed his lips fervently against hers.

She closed her eyes allowing his kiss to sweep her away. Za had never imagined such sensations from something as simple as a kiss. But this wasn't just any kiss. It was a kiss between a man and woman in the throws of their first love. It didn't matter how much experience were between the two. It was as if this was their first kiss and neither would ever forget this moment.

Za reached between them and moved to pull down his zipper her hands trembling. She felt Sy's hand cover hers and halted her movement. She opened her eyes and broke the kiss to look at him.

"I want to."

"You don't know how bad I want you to do it Za, but if I feel the heat of your hand, mouth or pussy touch me I can't promise to be able to maintain enough control to keep from shifting and I can take the chance in such a public place." Sy reasoned.

"Hmmm, then what can we do?"

"Rub yourself against my erection," he suggested.

"You mean dry humping?" She giggled. "Like teenagers heavy petting?"

She gasped as she felt Sy's fingers between her thighs sliding easily through the side of her thigh underwear. He stroked her and she moaned, sucking on her bottom lip, her hips move back and forth.

"I don't know who called it dry humping because you're dripping wet, sweetheart," Sylus continue to manipulate her labia and clitoris with his fingers.

Za released a cry of frustration as he removed his fingers and he leaned back bringing her down with him. Her thighs widened further to accommodate his hips and brought her wet crotch right in line of his long and hard erection.

“Use me baby,” he urged her. See the pre-cum staining my pants? Trust me there is no “dry humping” happening up in here. But time is limited since we are in a very public place.”

“How...mm...how...ca...can...you talk so calmly when I feel like I dying here.” She picked up her pace.

Sylus grunted and bucked up to meet her movements. “You’ve forgotten already that I’m known for my great stamina?”

“Ca...can you come with me?” Her nostril flared and she trembled as he double up on his thrust in quick succession.

“Of course, my love,” he assured her.

No more words passed just the sounds of moans and clothes brushing against leather, along with the occasional giggle as Za’s sweat covered knees slid against leather causing her to lose the rhythm a few times. Strange enough it added a wonderful blissful sensation into the mix because it was unexpected.

“I...I...I’m going to come, Sy...Oh...oh...umm.” Za continued to move against him and felt his fingers return to the mounds of her vagina and pressed on her pubic bone as the cloth covered zippered front of his pants created wonderful friction against her swollen clit. “NOW!” She cried out and all the muscles in her body clenched in anticipation as the sudden release slammed into her.

Sy pulled her lips to his to swallow her cries of ecstasy into his mouth. It had been so long since she got off and she welcomed the calming effect it had on her entire body. Za felt his arms and body tightened as he bucked hard a few more times against her warm dripping heat and released his own climax,

She continued to hold his face in her hands as he jerked and shudder against her. It was sexy as hell and she felt another small tremor in her pussy muscles as she watched his face and listened to the low, growling masculine sound from the back of his throat. Her thighs trembled and she buried her overheated face against his neck savoring his sweat with her tongue. She playfully nipped and sucking at his throat as he held her tightly refusing to let her go. She believed she enjoyed the grunts and uncontrolled spasms from his body as much as she did the earth shattering orgasm.

Once more humidity settled on the inside windows from the mixture of air and body heat. Not to mention the heavy breathing that was going on. The aromatic musky sex aroma permeated the confines of the car.

Well damn,” Sy managed after what seem like forever before either one of them could move or breathe with ease.

“Yeah, damn.” Za giggled foolishly, wondering why she was feeling embarrassed with

him. She tried to hide her face again in the crevice of his neck but he wasn't having it

"No," she moaned. "Not yet."

Sy chuckled. "Why not I want to see your face. I don't think I ever seen anyone come as lovely as you do."

"Sy," she yelled in muffled tones. "Let's not *talk* about it."

"Lo and behold! Now this is unexpected." Sy was grinning as if he had achieved some great feat. "I never would have thought with all your sweet sass and attitude, you would be embarrassed about having an orgasm."

Za felt like the sweat from her knees were forever plastered to the leather seat of the car and she already ached from the spread of her thighs accommodating his hips. She also knew her hair had to be a frizzed mess from Sy's clutching fingers and she wouldn't have traded one glorious moment.

He pushed her away and took her face in his hands so he could look at her. She still kept her eyes averted.

"I didn't mean for our first orgasm together to be done this way. But I couldn't deny your need anymore then I could my own." He whispered against her mouth and kissed her before pulling back to look at her once more. "You're beautiful!" He beamed. "Look at you, you're glowing."

"That's cause it's hot as hell in here." She teased.

"Well you have done it now Zaza Draper."

She frowned. "Done what?" She caressed his full bottom lips with her thumb before pushing a loose damp tendril of pale hair behind his ear. Her wandering fingers had knocked the shade off the top of his head and she had no clue where they landed.

He gave her a heart-stopping smile that stirred her juices all over again. But her poor cramped legs weren't up for another round in the car. She wasn't seventeen anymore.

"I think it will be impossible for use to pay a visit to Selby's mother in this condition. Between your release and mine...uh...well, I imagine the front of my pants may be ruined."

"We're lucky someone didn't called the cops, in this neighborhood, they probably think you're some wealthy freak that has picked up a prostitute." She cocked a brow and slid off his thighs hissing from the prickles of pain in her legs, happy to be straightening them.

Sylus laughed and groaned. They both looked at his lap and indeed it wouldn't be something he would be able to hide, not even if he buttoned his jacket.

Za also notice he was still erect and she felt a familiar throbbing. "Do we have to talk to her today. We got the information? Maybe we should call first. Now that I see where she lives, hell we

might need to make an appointment.”

“You’re probably right and after the day we’ve had I can’t wait to get you home alone.”

Their eyes met. Za knew what he was asking and she felt the same. She wanted nothing more than to spend some more quality time with him. Hopefully getting answers to all the questions that she had turning over in her head.

“I’m sure Mrs. Vivian Samuels won’t mind living in her carefree world one more day without knowing what happened to her baby girl.” Za said. The bitterness she still felt about the situation continued to linger.

“If you want, why don’t we go ahead and stay the entire week here and enjoy this quiet time together before we return to all the questions and such that will come once they realize we’re together.” Sy announced.

“Are we together? I thought that is part of what we were deciding.” Za said softly.

“Listen to me, woman, we are going to be together.”

“You keep talking to me in that superior tone of yours it’s not going to happen.” She lifted her chin up a notch and rolled her eyes at him. “I don’t like to be told what I’m going to do. I told you I need to learn more about you and I need to think.”

“I told you, you think too much. I just want to know if you were willing to spend the rest of your life with me. As far as I’m concern that is what you’re deciding.”

Za tensed up. She stared at Sy as if he had lost his mind. He was staring back at her. She knew that stubborn look. He was already picking his battles and this obviously was going to be one of them.

“You know what? I wouldn’t spend the rest of my life with you, if I had two lifetimes to spare!” Za argued, clicking her seat belt on.

She thought she finally pushed too far. A feeling of dread welled up in her stomach, when Sylus didn’t come back with an objection. She chanced a look at him and his face was red in silent laughter.

“What are you laughing at?” She asked biting her bottom lip to keep a strait face. He really was wonderful to look at and him laughing was devastatingly handsome.

She sure she waited a good two minutes for him to catch his breath and say something. “I’m just amazed how just a moment a go I had you purring and docile like a pet kitten--.”

“I...I was not,” she sputtered. Her face blossoming red.

“Was too.” He corrected. “Now you have those claws out ready to swipe at my fragile nuts. Is this what I have to look forward to for the next forty or so years.”

Za felt an inner giddiness that he thought their future together was a given. She suppose being immortal like he was, time was not a concept he understood too well. Being in her thirties, she would be happy with a healthy and happy twenty-five years.

“You’re lucky if you get the next few hours. So are we leaving here, or what? I’m starving.”

“That is something we can agree on. I assume we also agree to arrange a time to speak with Mrs. Samuels?”

“Yes, but I have something to say in regards to Vivian Samuels.” Za added.

Sy released a long sigh. “Of course you do.”

She slashed him an evil stare and noted he politely ignored her as he adjusted his seat, steering wheel, and the rearview mirror she must have hit with her head, or grabbed at one time or the other, during the heated encounter.

“Promise me if this woman doesn’t agree to see us or if she does and her answers aren’t good enough; we will tell Darius that she wasn’t really Selby’s mother.”

Sylus reached out and linked her fingers with his bringing the back of her hand to his lips. “You know I love you, but I can’t lie to Darius. I, don’t lie to the people I love, Za.”

“I guess I should be happy to hear that.” Za murmured. “But you can withhold information for the greater good, because that is what you do everyday in regards to who you are, right?”

“Don’t worry, my sweet. I’ll give you my word. As long as Darius hears the truth he will understand your fears. He wouldn’t want to hurt Selby either.”

“Oh, so it okay for him to lie to someone he loves?” She cocked a brow at him, her voice dripping in sarcasm.

He laughed. “No. Omission and lying are two different things. If Selby doesn’t know to ask the question, then it’s not a lie. But if she were to ever suspect and ask, yes, he would tell her the truth.”

“I guess you’re lucky to have me instead of Selby, because I always ask questions.” She crinkled her nose at him.

He winked at her. “I am very lucky.”

“Yes, you are and don’t forget that when we start talking about us again.”

Sylus groaned. “Okay, I will allow you more leeway if you give me something I want.”

She glanced him suspiciously. “Heaven help me, what do you want this time?”

“You can choose which room and which bed, but we sleep together.” He asserted. “If you want we can try every bedroom in the suite.”

“Sy, today was a good beginning of how good we can be together, but I don’t know if I’m

ready to--”

“We don’t have to make love, if you don’t want. However I do want to be able to hold you, or touch you. I wasn’t kidding when I said I hate being alone. I can deal with it occasionally, but sleeping alone is the worse.”

She could see that he was genuine in his request. Za also thought he was too good to be true, but he was her fantasy her mind had chosen. The cure she’d been wishing for and she wanted to take advantage of however long they would be allowed to spend together. Even if it was just for seven days.

“Za, there is something else I want to tell you.”

“What?”

“The call I got from Marie earlier, it wasn’t just her telling me Peter had been taken care of. She also called to give me a heads up that Quintan has been alerted that you’ve been staying with me at the suite.”

“Your older brother?” Za swallow the lump in her throat. Something about Sy’s tone made her feel as if this wasn’t a good thing.

“Yes.” Sy cut a glance at her as he maneuvered the vehicle down the highway.

“Sy, what are you saying exactly.”

“Quin is the council member of the de Gauls family. Unfortunately, because of last night’s incident with Peter Worth, and my personal involvement, not to mention Marie realized the extent of my feelings for you...well...”

“What council? Will you just tell me,” she blurted, scarcely aware of the loudness of her own voice.

“The *Council* is apprised of all the elder heads of each species, family. They are accountable to the Gods of Olympus, who must approve all matches that are considered unnatural.” He paused. “Also, any human acquaintances that are brought into *our inner sanctum*. In short I should have told Quin about you before Marie had the chance.”

Za wasn’t sure she was ready to know all of this. She’s barely grasped the fact she is in love with a *Satyr* and now he’s telling her there is this whole world that is co-existing with this one, on the same planet and they have their own gods! How in the hell is this possible? Most of all, how are they able to keep it all hidden?

“Why did Marie tell him what happen and is Marie a *Satyr* too?”

“No, *Satyr*s are all men.” Sylus answered and added, “Marie had no choice. She’s on the council also and if she hadn’t reported the incident then it would have caused problems for her and a

new head of her coven would have been chosen. Marie use to rule a country so she would never let that happened.” He chuckled.

She couldn’t find anything humorous in this situation. “Marie Antoinette,” Za licked her lips. She couldn’t believe she was about to ask this, but she had to know the truth. “Is she the one in our history books?”

“Yes.”

Za continue looking out the car window as the scenery flashed by, it wasn’t as if she was interested in the view. She just couldn’t look at Sy right now. “What is she?”

There was a long pregnant pause before Sylus mumbled, “A Vampire.”

Za’s head snapped around to look at Sylus. “Oh my God, Sylus what have you made me a part of? Is Darius a Satyr or a Vampire? You know I can’t keep this from Selby--” Her lips clamped tight after seeing the guilty look on his face. “Damn...how could she not tell me? I’m her fuckin’ best friend!”

“Za, please, understand. The only way we can function in this society is with rules. Selby, is in the fold and she must follow these laws the Darkworld set forth.”

“So, I guess I was never suppose to know until, when? The day that I notice that Selby and I are growing old yet you and Darius remain the same?”

“I think this is a conversation you need to have when Selby when we return.” Sylus stated.

Za realized Sy was saying a lot, but he probably was leaving out a lot more. Which might be a good thing because she didn’t think she could handle any more, not today anyway.

“In all fairness to Selby and Darius they wanted to tell you. After he proposed to Selby, before she accepted, she voiced her concerns about keeping the truth from you.” Sy said. “Za, Darius has submitted a request to bring you into the fold through proper channels and is awaiting word from the council.”

“So, when your brother, Quintan, received word from Marie about me, he already knew who I was?”

“Yes, but he was surprised that I had fallen in love with you.” Sylus admitted.

“You told Marie, before you really told me?” Za accused more then asked.

“No, not quite. She saw how protective I am over you and she put it together. As I said before, a human and a Satyr falling in love is not a common practice amongst us. So, the reason I told you all of this is Quintan is coming here and he knows about your past, because part of being accepted into the council they run background checks.”

“Oh my God,” Za shook her head in disbelief that this was happening to her. Tears started to

flow and she wiped them away quietly with the back of the hand. She allowed her mind to break down the situation. The man she loved wasn't human, her best friend has been lying to her and now Sylus's older brother hates her before she even got the chance to meet him.

"You allowed me to go through emotional hell telling you about my parents and you knew all alone," Za spoke her voice cold and distant.

"No!" Sy denied vehemently. "Do you really think that I could be that callus, Zaza? Darius mentioned he would be making a request of the council and that's all I knew."

"You're telling me the truth? Marie, didn't tell you what your brother found about me?" She ran shaking fingers through her hair.

"Za," Sy released a long agitated breath. "When you fainted on the terrace, I threw down the phone and ran to you. Marie only had the chance to tell me about Worth, and the fact that a council meeting had been called in regards to Darius request to bring you into the fold before the wedding. She warned me that Quintan was coming and he wasn't happy, about my part in all of this." He shrugged. "The dossier is routine."

"I see," she sniffled.

"Why are you so upset, sweetheart, this is a good thing. I have Marie and Darius blessings and if I can get Quin to our side with their influences, we will get enough positive votes from the council to bless our union."

Sa shook her head, she wringed her fingers together in her lap. "We're over before we even got started, Sylus. There is no way in hell, your brother will find me suitable for you."

"Za, what is there not to love about you? Your beautiful, intelligent, you don't love me for my money because you have your own. You don't need me to socially climb because you're reputation in the music industry precedes you."

"You don't understand," she said mournfully.

He reached across the console tugging one of her hands into his. "Baby, your hands are ice cold and you're shaking. Want me to cut the air down."

"It's not the air, Sy!" She retorted yanking her hand from his. "It's me. Wake up and face the truth. It's over."

"Hell no, it's not over Za. Now that I've have you in my life I'm not just going to turn tell and run from my brother, the council or anybody else."

Oh Sy, I'm so sorry," she cried. "I'm not worth it. Please, don't get into it with brother over me. I don't want to know anymore about you, or these people. As we originally planned. When the wedding is over, so will we be."

“Shit,” Sylus cursed and took the exit off the main freeway, he pulled over and switched on his emergency blinkers. “Now tell me what the hell is going on? Why are we suddenly doomed because Quin is on his way here with a background check on you? You’ve told me everything already, right?”

She couldn’t look at him, but he wasn’t having it. He tenderly grasped his chin in his hand and forced her to look at him. When her eyes locked with his and she saw the love and concern, she felt as if her heart was being ripped from her chest.

“Sy, I was going to tell you, I just didn’t know how,” her voice was raspy with emotions. “Not after everything else--”

“Tell me what?” There was a faint tremor in his voice as though her emotional state was tearing at his heart.

“About Susan Renee Langston,” she said the name so low, he leaned closer to her but he noticeably heard her.

“Zaza, who is Susan Renee Langston?”

She brushed his hands aside and dropped her face into her hands. Sobs racked her body. She didn’t want to say it. It was over. They told her it would never come back to haunt her, but she knew it would. As long as they kept her entire nightmare on a file somewhere in black and white, here was a chance it would catch up with her.

“Za, who is this woman to you!” Sy demanded an answer.

“It’s *ME*! Oh, God, help me, it’s me!” She declared hysterically. “I killed a man...oh...God...I killed him,” she sobbed repeatedly.

Sy let out a long, audible breath and yanked her against him. She didn’t deserve his comfort or his love. She tried to break his hold and his arms tightened about her.

“Let it all out sweetheart. I’m here.” He crooned cradling her head between the crook of his shoulder and his hand. She gave into the strong comfort of his arms and wrapped her hands tightly around his back accepting his comfort.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Sylus drove into his private parking garaged and eased into his marked space in front of his suite's elevator entrance. He was thankful for the private entrance, since it appeared as if he had pissed himself.

His personal satisfaction turned into brooding. It was hard to imagine that this was the same woman that was all over him less than an hour ago. He might as well be invisible, considering she wouldn't even look his way.

Cutting off the car engine he sat quietly wishing Za would say something. He was clueless as to how he was going to approach Quintan and the council, if she refused to openly discuss what occurred, with him. He knew Za wouldn't cruelly kill anyone without a good reason.

If she genuinely assumed this new revelation was enough to make him stop loving her, it wouldn't work. He had killed countless of men over the centuries as a gladiator, vassal, knight and his listing could go on forever. What Sylus wanted to know was who and why?

He released an irritated sigh. He needed answers and he needed them before Quin showed up on his doorstep. He didn't like displeasing his older brother, but he had to follow his own heart.

Sy released his seat belt and turned in his seat; his dark eyes shifted to Za and lingered on her face in a questioning manner. "Za, tell me what happened?"

She didn't respond.

"You know, I worry when you don't say anything." He ran a hand over her hair. "It's been about fifteen minutes, that's a record for you."

She chanced a look at him and he saw all the familiar fire was gone out of eyes. Her misery was so acute that it caused him a physical pain in his gut.

"I think it will be best if I return home before your brother gets here, Sy. My life is cursed," she said with a bitterness that was telling. "I don't want it to rub off on you."

He proceeded to comb his fingers through her mussed hair, cupping the back of her head in his palm, he massaged her scalp and smiled when she closed her eyes in acceptance of his touch. He found it to be a good sign that she was still opened to him.

"I'm sorry that our coming into your life has stirred up your past. If I hadn't fallen in love with you the search into your background would probably have been minimum." Sy stated. "My brother is probably the one that dug deeper then necessary. That is the type of man he is."

"Please don't." She opened her eyes, turning to look at him. "Knowing you love me keeps me from completely falling apart." She touched and rested her hand on his knee. "It was just a

matter of time.” She continued. “When you live a lie, there’s always the chance someone will find out the truth. It could be worse, it could be the media instead of your brother.”

She gave him a solemn smile and he leaned in to place a brief kiss of reassurance to her lips. Pulling back, his heart pounded, then ached from the pain he saw etched on her face. For once in his life, he wished he could reinvent who he was...what he was. If he had been born human they could love freely. But then again, he would have died, centuries ago and never met her at all. Life was full of double edge swords.

“Don’t worry, Za, I’m sure we will figure something out.”

“Sy, I didn’t want this to ever come out. I wanted to tell you when I told you about Peter, but I’m not sure if I would have ever gotten up the nerve to ever say anything.” Her voice had become so soft he had to lean in to hear her. “I just feel so ashamed knowing your brother knows the truth. He’ll never believe that I’m good enough for you now.”

“Baby, no, stop thinking that way, right now.” Sy kissed her brow, cheek, and lips. “No one in my family or on that council, is in a position to cast stones against people for their past.”

“Sylus, promise me that you won’t allow me to become a rift between you and your family. I’ve never really had one of my own and I couldn’t bear the fact of causing problems for you with yours.” She said grabbing his jacket lapel in desperation.

“Za, I’m proud to call you mine and I’m sorry if my family can’t respect my choices, you will not be the one I will give up,” he said stubbornly.

“You don’t know what you’re saying. There is no happy ever after in our future. Not now, not ever! I should have known better than to hold onto such a stupid dream. Falling in love and being loved in return is not an option for me.”

Taking Za’s hand, he laced his fingers with hers. “Hold on to me and hold on to your dreams. That is as long as you see me a major part of the dream, because I’m not going anywhere. Not now.” He swore passionately. Don’t you dare give up on us this early in the game.”

“Sy, you hurting me.” She winced.

“I’m so sorry sweetheart,” he loosened the grip he had on her hands. At times like this, he forgot his own strength. He didn’t know how to explain it to her that he needed her to remain focus and strong. The only way he would be able to go forward is with her by his side.

“Why, do you want to do this for me?” She asked softly. “You could have any woman you wanted without all the issues I bring with me. So, why me?”

He smiled. His looks tender, his head tilted to one side, looking at her wild hair, full lips bruised from his kisses and eyes puffy from crying. “I have no idea, because you have been a royal

pain in my ass since the first day I met you.”

“Sy...” she spoke his name softly.

He shook his head and leaned his forehead against hers. “Still, I love everything about you. I won’t lose you, woman, not now. My biggest fear was you despising me for what I was, but you stayed with me. There is no way, anything that you’ve done in your life is going to separate up. I am here for you as long as you want me.”

Za pulled her hand out of his. “Sy, this could get really crazy.”

“Hasn’t already been?” He chuckled. “Sweetheart, love is important, but it’s not everything. I need to know that I have your complete trust and that you have the strength to be my woman.” He saw she still had doubt and quickly forged ahead.

“Zaza, the only reason I admitted to you *my deepest secret* is because I thought you were the strongest woman I’ve ever met. That you wouldn’t give up easily when things got rough? Did I make a mistake?”

She raised her chin meekly. “You don’t really know me, Sy, I’m not even sure if I know who I am anymore.”

He crooked a finger beneath her chin and tilted her face up to meet his. “Would you like me to have Marie, to try and make you forget that you love me? If so, tell me now that I was wrong to trust you with my heart. You say the word and by tonight we can go back to being mutual acquaintances with the common goal of Darius and Selby’s wedding.”

The silence stretched as he waited. The look of wretchedness in her honey-colored eyes snared at his insides, but he wasn’t budging this time.

Sy was finding this love thing was quickly becoming a tiresome and frightening emotion. He wondered how Darius and Selby made it look so easy. Maybe it was easy when you were born to be eternal mates. Leave it up to him to even make falling in love difficult by choosing to go against the laws of the gods and fall for a human female.

Actually, not just any human female but, Zaza, the one who wasn't like any woman, human or immortal, to cross his path. She held in her enough mystery, sauciness and uncharted passion to hold him in emotional chaos for at least the next hundred years, only they didn't have a hundred years. This is what made him anxious. Time was limited and they're wasting it debating whether they should even try.

Hell yes, they should at the very least try! Can't she see this? Even if he couldn't become mortal, he hoped she would spend the remainder of her life with him. He would care for her and make sure she never wished for anything until the day she went to her God, but not if she wasn't

willing to offer him the opportunity.

“If I must go through the rest of my life alone, I want to at least keep my memories of you. It’s just for some reason I’m scared, something else is going to go wrong,” she admitted weakly. “I don’t know what to do. Tell me what to do!”

Sy drew her shaking form in his arms as she started to weep freely once more. He realized she must be exhausted from the emotional upheaval of a very long day. They hadn’t had a quiet moment since the dinner they shared the night they arrived. Was that only the other day?

“Come, my love, you are breaking my heart,” he crooned, releasing her seat belt. Sy eased out of the sedan, strolled to the passenger side, and pulled open the door. Putting a large hand to her waist, he drew her form to him and swept her, weightless, into his arms before kneeling the car door closed.

He held Za tightly whispering soothing words of assurance. She tucked her head into the crook of his shoulder while he managed to enter the entrance code into the wall panel.

“We will get through this, together, I promise.” He entered the elevator and it automatically started to ascend to the suite after the door closed.

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep, Sy.” Za sighed.

“I don’t,” he said forcefully. Syus walked out of the elevator into the suite; immediately, the suite butler stepped forward, not even batting an eye at their disheveled state, to offer assistance.

“Fix us an early dinner and leave it in the warmer, we wish to be undisturbed for the rest of the evening.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Sy, put me down, I’m not helpless,” she mumbled to him. He bent his head and saw that she was frowning, her cheeks flaming with embarrassment. She reached up to smooth her hair, squirming in his arms but he on tightly.

“Stop fidgeting. I already told you, you were still beautiful,” he scowled in a chastising manner as if that should be all the reassurance she needed. Why do she care what a servant thinks? He wondered.

“Forgive his rudeness, Jeffery, but I can see to our dinner this evening,” Za said and he saw she was smiling at the man. She was just crying moments ago and now she manages to be polite and smile at this man.

Holding on to his light load, Sy harrumphed and headed down the hall. “Do as I asked, Jeffery,” he threw over his shoulder. He couldn’t help but feel a sense of triumph as he saw her lips tightened. Finally, he saw a glimpse of his spirited Zaza.

“You’re such an *ass*,” she hissed at him.

Sy grinned down at her and pause to turn back towards a gaping and amused Jeffery. “I apologize Jeffery, but this *ass* that pays you well, is expecting you to take care of the matter, right now.”

“Of course, sir.” Jeffery chuckled, taking off in the opposite direction.

“You can be so damned rude at times.” Za huffed.

“That’s a bad thing?” He nuzzled her nose and she jerked her face away.

“Yes, when you’re actin’ all superior with it,” she grumbled.

“Hush woman,” he ordered. “I’ve changed my mind. I don’t miss your peppered tongue after all.” Sylus bellowed and carried her into her room, dumping her on the bed.

He could swear she growled at him but he wasn’t going to stick around long enough to find out. He hurried over to the wardrobe throwing open the double doors, Sy shuffled through her things.

“What are you doing?” Za sputtered.

Sy removed a creamy confection of silk from one of the cloth-covered hangers and pitched it on the bed saying, “Take everything off and put this on. I’m going to run us relaxing bath.”

“I don’t need you to do that for me and I prefer showers,” she huffed.

“I don’t.” He countered. “I will be back for you, be in that robe, or prepared to be dumped in tub in that dress. It’s up to you, but I think it’s dry clean only isn’t it?”

“You bully,” Za yelled at him as he waltzed out of her room and across the hall to his own.

“Don’t you forget it,” he mumbled more to himself than her.

Grinning, Sylus went in his sprawling bathing room and started filling up the huge square bathtub. He poured in some special Egyptian herbal bath oils before sauntering over to a refrigerator built into a custom made wall. He removed one of the gallon jugs of whole milk, tucked two chilled wine bottles under his arm and balanced a bowl of fresh strawberries.

Taking his load to the marble and cushioned area next to the bath, he eased down his load.

As the tub filled up, Sylus dumped in the entire gallon of milk and discarded the jug while he retrieved two crystal goblets from the cabinet. Filling up the two glasses, he added a couple of strawberries. Contented with the scene he turned up the bottle to his lips and finished it off.

“Damn, I need that,” he sighed.

Feeling somewhat refreshed Sy popped the cork on the second bottle and placed it beside the glasses. Shutting off the water he hit the dimmer switch on the crystal chandelier above the sunken tub.

In record time Sylus was out of his soiled clothing placing on a hooded blue and white stripped Bedouin robe he kept around for those with more tender sensibilities when it came to nudity.

With a purpose of pampering her on his mind, he made his way back to Za's room. He was surprised she hadn't bothered to close and lock her door against him. He believed she would at least consider it.

His eyes narrowed suspiciously as he noted she had done as he asked and was sitting demurely on the side of the bed in the silk kimono. From the physical imprint of hard dark chocolate nipples pressing against the cream colored material she did as he told her and was completely naked underneath.

Sy licked his suddenly dry lips and strolled to stand before her. "Come, woman."

Za cocked her head to the side, looking at his hand offered hand. "I told you I will take a shower when I'm ready. So, don't you have something to do?"

"I'm doing it, taking care of you." Sy said.

"I don't need taking care of, just leave me alone and close the door behind you, please." She crawled up towards the pillows to lie down and gave him a nice view of her sweet bottom jiggling with her movement. His penis lightly swelled in appreciation of the view. He smirked.

She had to nerve to say he had a superior attitude when she lorded over him like the Queen of Sheba.

With a determine sigh he grabbed her ankle to pull her off the bed. He realized his mistake by not grabbing both her ankles when her free foot nailed him.

Sy coughed and held his groin, moaning loudly as he dropped to his knees and fell over on his side into a fetal position.

"Shit!" Za released a curse as she rolled off the bed in a frantic swoop she landed on the floor beside him

"Oh...Sy...oh, no, Damn, I didn't mean to you kick you there. I...I was aiming for your hard stomach." She kneeled over him. "I'm so sorry, oh baby, say something."

Sy took advantage of the moment and pulled her to the ground, rolling until she was on the bottom with him lying between her spread thighs. He held her flat by her wrist. His cock pressed against her nether lips. It was a glorious feeling and if he could, he would die right there between her legs. As Sy looked at Zaza's face he realize he just might get his wish because if scornful looks could kill...

"You...you ass! I thought I seriously did some damage and you were down here laughing at

me. Aaarrrgh!”

“Yeah, well good thing I have fast reflexes and you grazed my hip or I would be useless to you from here on. What good would I be with damaged vocal cords? Would you still want a contract with a broken down superstar?”

Za paused her eyes widened in surprise. “Is that true? Is this a *Satyr thing*? Your penis is connected to your vocal cords?”

“If I said yes, would you kiss it to make it feel better?” He asked while fighting hard to keep the amusement out of the eyes that met hers. When her eyes narrowed he realized he failed. Sy threw back his head and roared with laughter.

“Get off me, you...you ass,” she growled and bucked up against him.

Sy’s laugh broke off, his eyes smoldered and she grew still. Her breast nearly exposed from the parted robe, rising and falling with her heavy breathing. The unspoken mystery in her eyes seemed to beckon him.

“Za, Do you know you haunt my sleeping and waking thoughts? I know letting you walk out of my life would be best for both of us, but I can’t let you go...I just can’t. Please, stay with me and fight by my side. We have as much right to be together as anyone else.”

His hands eased from holding down her wrist to intertwine with her fingers with his. He leaned down, ever so slowly, and pressed his lips against hers. She tasted wonderful. He moved his lips back and forth across hers—a controlled, undemanding sigh of a kiss. Sy lifted his blond head, just a breath away, his eyes studying her with a curious intensity.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?” He asked.

“Yes, I really need to take a shower now,” she whispered against his lips. “I’m feeling tired and very hungry.”

“Your wish is my command, *mademoiselle*.” His voice was resigned. He would let her have her way for the moment, but there would be no rest tonight until he got her word that she would not leave him.

Sy came up on his feet and stood over her. “If you want to make up for kicking me, take my hand.”

After a few moments passed, with both of them at a stand still their eyes locked.

“Please,” he beseeched.

Without further hesitation, she slipped her cool fingers in his hand and allowed him to pull her to her feet.

“Where are we going?”

“Just let me take of things for a change, woman.” He could see the moment her reservations fell away.

“Okay.”

“Good, because you and I are going to have to cleverly learn to work together. I can't be unduly worried about losing you and you can't be worried about my elder brother. I will handle Quin, when the time comes.”

“If you're doing all this because you pity me,” she said bitterly. “Then...”

“For the last time, Zaza, you're *my* chosen mate.” He smiled reassuringly. He led her through the bathroom. “Don't mistake my love for any more then what it is. Besides, you know me well enough to know I pity no one.”

“Oh, this bathroom is nothing like mine, it's as big as my bedroom at home,” she cried out in awe.

Sy had become accustom to the luxury that he hardly noticed or appreciated the red and gold bathroom with its Gray Italian marble and cherry wood veneer cabinets. There was a fireplace in the corner and a cushioned sitting area. He wouldn't even show her the refrigerator built to look like the cabinet or she really would think he was decadent.

For a moment Sy reflect on her admitted poverty child hood when she slept on a cot in the same room with her parents. He felt somewhat embarrassed that even when he was a slave he lived in palaces surrounded by luxury. He supposed this room could be considered beautiful, he just never noticed until she said so.

A warmth seeped through his body. He couldn't wait to share everything with her and proudly show her places he's frequently seen. He would be able to see them again through her eyes and if she found this lovely he couldn't wait to show her his villa in Versailles.

He came from his daydream as he realized she was speaking to him.

“So you are really going to take on your brother and the council, for me?” She released his hand and walked up the marble steps leading to the sunken bathtub.

“For us.” He came to stand on the lower step behind her making them the same height. He placed his hands on her shoulders. “This is the room where I come to think. So, my love, when we come to this room, and get into this tub, it will be the place where we can share and talk about any and everything. What is said in this chamber remains in this chamber.”

“We better get in before the water gets cold.”

“It never gets cold, sweetheart. You see right here.” He pointed to some control knobs. “You can set your water temperature here and this controls the jet streams. There is a remote for it

and the fireplace somewhere but I keep misplacing it. But here is the remote for the television, see it's up there." He pointed. "The cabinet will open to a screen and here is a remote for the stereo system which is over there and the speakers all around."

"Wow, if I knew all of this was in your room, I would have kicked your ass out of here the first night," Za chuckled.

His mouth fell open in surprise when Za release the tie on the kimono and allow it to pool around her feet. She slowly descended into the bathtub with a loud contented sigh.

Sy couldn't take it eyes off her. Her dark skin glistening wet under the soft chandelier lighting. Dark ringlets curled on her forehead and on her nape from the humidity they created in the car.

"You coming in?" She asked.

"I just want to look at you for a moment. I feel like my heart is going to burst from my chest." His voice was husky with emotion. "Your exquisite beauty overwhelms me."

"If you keep saying things like that I'm going to start thinking I'm too good for you," she laughingly teased.

He cocked a brow. "Oh really? Well if it was left up to me, I would lock us both up in this suite and never allow my brother and the other degenerates I call friends to get a look at you."

"Why is that? If all the women around you is as beautiful as Marie, I'm sure I will become average in comparison." She said leaning her head back and dipping her head in the water. She swept her hands over her wet hair and moaned.

When he saw her close her eyes and lick her lip, Sylus thought he would become undone. His semi-erect status became a full-blown erection.

Sylus set on the side of the tub, hoping to mask the obvious until he could regain some control. He picked up a wine glass and sipped.

He found her quietly admiring him from behind lowered lids and the look he saw on her face matched his own state of awareness.

"What were we saying?" Sy cleared his throat. He dipped a strawberry out of his glass with his fingers and held it out for her. She waded towards him, her breast glistening from the water.

Their eyes locked and held as she bit up to where his fingers held the strawberry. His cock moved against his belly as she caught his fingers between her full lips and sucked before letting go with a pop.

She chewed slowly and said. "We were talking about Marie's beauty."

"Were we? I thought we were talking about you having me wrapped around your little

finger.”

Za smile coyly. “No, I’m sure it was about Marie’s beauty,” she chided and picked up the full glass and sipped.

Sy kept his eyes on her mouth.

“Well, yes, Marie is beautiful, but you’re darkly exotic, and there is something about you I just can’t put my finger on, but it draws me like a loadstone. I hope you don’t effect all of the shifters this way.”

“I’m not worry,” her voice was alluring and smoky. “I have my own protector.”

“Yes you do.” He leaned towards her as she took a bite of the strawberry and held it between her teeth lifting her face to offer him the other half.

He grabbed it with his teeth, there lips touched opened. He swept her mouth with his tongue and stole her half too. He pulled back with a grin.

“Greedy,” Za laughingly chastised.

“I can be.” He winked. “As I was saying before you rudely distracted me--”

“Oh...I better not do that again.” Za interrupted. “I know how difficult it is for old men to keep their train of thoughts.”

He narrowed his eyes at her in warning. “Anyway, rude woman, thank goodness, Darius’s ass of a cousin, Justus, has found his mate. He would have sniffed at your ass literally, just to get under my skin.” He smiled as his thoughts filled with good-hearted memories.

She shook her head, “I feel sorry for Darius. It appears has two *assess* he has to put up with in his family.”

“Oh that does it.” Sylus stood. I was trying to be a gentleman and you a moment in the tub alone to relax. However, I see you have enough energy to take cheap shots at my expense. So it apparent you’ve gained your second wind.”

“I was wondering when you were going to get a clue and come in to wash my back.” Za waded to the middle of the tub, staring up at him.

Sylus took hold of the hem of the long robe and lifted it over his head exposing all his naked glory in one fell swoop. He heard her let out a long, audible gasp for air and his chest puffed with pride.

“Not bad for an old man, eh?”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

He stood over her, boldly menacing. Za's eyes drank in the sensuality of his naked magnificent physique. His stance emphasized the force of his thighs and the slimness of his hips. She found him magnificent and the thought that he actually wanted to be all hers sent a thrill through her.

Her eyes continued to feast as Sy stepped down into the tub, the water just barely reaching his hips. He waded to the side of the bath that had bath pillows and moved to sit.

"Uh...do you mind letting your hair down before you get comfortable?" Za requested.

With a slow sensuous smile he reached behind and pulled the leather tie from the nape of his neck. He turned around and gave her a sweet back view as he tossed the hair tie onto the bathing room floor. His powerful well-muscled body moved with fluid grace. Luxurious platinum hair was cut in a "V" shape ending just above his tight heart-shaped buttocks.

Za released a deep loud sigh of appreciation.

He turned and looked at her over his shoulders, his hair moved when he moved. She wanted to bury her body in its silkiness, but he was staring at her and suddenly she felt embarrassed. She was treating him like he was her private play toy.

"Any other request?" Sylus turned to face her. "Maybe, you like me to get out and walk around?" He asked in a teasing manner. "I could even flex, for you. You should see how I can make my ass cheeks dance, that is if your--"

"Thank you, but I just think you have beautiful hair, so you don't have to start strutting like a peacock," she interjected looking down at the water because she knew her face must have turned a beet purple with embarrassment.

"Well anytime sweetheart, I'm a born exhibitionist."

"I bet you are...uh...could you sit please." Za asked considering all he had to do was walk a few steps forward and he would be the perfect height for her mouth to come in contact with his erection. The man was too blessed for his own good.

Za bit her bottom lip to keep from moaning as his movements in the water caused tiny rippling waves to wash against her sensitive nipples like a lover's caress. They hardened and she scooted lower thankful for the murky white of the water.

"You can look now," Sy said sarcastically.

"Why is the water white?" Za asked ignoring his remark. She cupped the water and let it dribble through her fingers.

“Milk.”

“I’ve always heard it was good for the skin, but I never tried it,” she chattered.

“Za, my love, I didn’t invite you in here to discuss the water. Now come over here,” he commanded.

“I’m good over here,” she gulped.

“Well, I’m not.” He looked at her intently, then sprung forward securing her by the waist and drawing her between his spread knees. “I’m lonely with you over there. So relax against me and lets talk.”

Za was glad she wasn’t facing him, but she didn’t know how he expected her to relax with his penis hard against the small of her back. Yet, there was something very sensuous about wet skin against wet skin.

He’s assured her more then once she was safe and that she didn’t want to happen. She believed in him and she loved him. What he had done for her with the bath, champagne and strawberries really was sweet.

Za decided to give in to Sy and the decadent luxury of their surroundings. She relaxed in the circle of his arms and leaned against his chest.

“Now, it’s that better?” He placed a kiss to the top of her head.

“Yes.” She agreed. “Now what do you want to talk about.

“I want you to tell me what happened to make you change your name? Was it the incident with your parents that you were trying to get away from?” Sy asked.

Za tensed and closed her eyes. She drew in a deep breath and blew it out softly. She couldn’t just leave him thinking she killed a man for no reason. He deserved to know everything and once she told him, he knew everything there was to know about her.

The water around them start to bubble, the noise of the jet streams were barely audible. They sat quietly, both of their bodies growing lax against each other.

Za appreciated how he asked her only once and left the decision up to her. She said a silent prayer that his erection was softening. He too must be feeling the relaxing effects of water. She was relieved. There was no way she would be able to tell him as long as his penis pressed into her back like a weapon. Only those that have been raped could understand how a penis could be seen as threatening and terrifying as a drawn gun.

She had not spoken about what happened to her since recounting in a court of law the sum of forty-eight hours of hell. The media frenzy that came along with it was as terrifying as the ordeal that made her so news worthy in the first place.

Za was glad he couldn't see her face, she couldn't bear to see Sy's face go from interested, to disgusted, and most of all, pity. She had seen it countless times before.

"I was twelve years old and in my second...no, third, foster home when it happened," she began.

"It was such a beautiful day that day. I hated school. I never seemed to fit in, because none of those children had been through the shit I'd been through."

"I liked this family. I didn't want to give them any reasons to send me back to the county home. Mainly, because Selby had been permanently placed closed by, so we could still see each other." Za leaned forward bringing her knees to her chest; she wrapped her arms around her legs, and rested her chin on her knees.

"On this particular morning I had the worse feeling that something was going to happen. So I figured as long as I could stay home all would be safe. I tried begging my foster mother and even pretended to be sick. When that didn't work, I refused to eat my breakfast so she made me sit there, until I did. I thought if I missed the school bus I wouldn't have to go."

She closed her eyes; her senses heightened by the gentle circular motion of Sy's hand as he used a mango scented bath-wash and sponge to wash her back. His touch soothing and comforting as she forged ahead with her story.

"Because of my clowning, I did miss the bus but she told me I had to go to school anyway." Za released a dry chuckle. "She said walking four blocks to school would allow me to reflect on my bad behavior. I--"

At the thought of having to tell Sy this, a wave of nausea caused her to bite down on the back of her teeth. She swallowed the hot flow of saliva filling her mouth and gagged.

"Here take a sip of this." He leaned forward and in a lower, huskier tone he beseeched, "Za, let me hold you."

She opened her eye accepting the champagne with trembling fingers. She took a sip and another as Sy's encouragement. She could see he was watching her intently the concern was written all over his face.

"I don't know if I can say this with you touching me," she rasped. Her heart jolted and her pulse pounded; she could see he needed to hold her as much as she needed him to hold her.

"Just tell me it's okay and we can try, sweetheart."

She nodded and propped back against him. Sy wrapped her in a cocoon of long arms and legs. His entire body seemed to relax with relief as he held her snugly, sliding down in the water until she was submerged to her chin.

She felt hot air exhaled against her ear as he whispered, “You don’t have to deal with this alone anymore, Za. You feel the strength in these arms and legs holding you? They are yours to use and always remember as a Satyr I’m stronger than ten mortal men.”

She swallowed hard taking in all that he was saying to her and loving him all the more.

“I know as a child, you weren’t strong enough to prevent all that has happened to you. You’ve probably blamed yourself a thousand times for not being strong enough to fight back. I want you to hear me, woman,” his voice broke with huskiness. “You don’t know this about me yet, but you have your own genuine Knight, even though my armor was donated to a museum years ago, I still can retrieve it at any time, but it was a tad rusty last I removed it.”

She managed a half smile through chattering teeth. It was a frightening chill from the inside out. She recognized fear, for it has been her friend all her life. Even dead, the bastard still had his hands around her throat.

She took strength in knowing if Sy had been watching over her when she was a child, he would have protected her as he promised. Her heart told her he meant what he said, and as long as she could overcome this last hurdle, she could rest easy in the love he was offering.

“I will give you a tip,” Sy continued and she knew he was trying to distract her thoughts. “If you ever spot a warrior whose armor is shiny, then I will be the first in line to run him through because it shows he’s a coward.”

“What if he just on his way to battle?” Za asked softly.

“Then that means he’s on his way to his death, because if he had trained as required before riding into battle, his armor will be tarnish and dented. That shiny armor stuff is for fairytales and romantic foolery novels.”

She felt his smile against her ear.

“Za, a real knight battle and train wearily. There is more time preparing one’s body and mind for battle than actually participating in battle. The answer is not to start the war, but to be prepared to defend what is yours. You don’t have to be physically strong to be smart and it’s your mind that keeps you alive. In my mind you are a warrior because you used your wits or you wouldn’t have survived.”

“I would have liked to see you as a knight,” Za reflected.

“Fore the gods, those were some good days. Your entire body ached with fatigue, and you stunk to the heavens, but you were so tired you slumbered a dreamless sleep. Back in those times, a knight could see the lines drawn and know not to cross it. These days there is no honor or respect, therefore no one knows exactly why they are fighting.”

“What did you fight for?”

“In the beginning I fought for the freedom of my species. Later, food and water for those that were on the properties of a greedy few who refused them what the gods gave them, freely.”

She felt him shudder as he drew in a shaky breath. Little by little, she felt warmth creep back into her body. She tipped her head to the side to look at him. He took her chin between his thumb and forefinger, tilting her face up to his, their lips almost touching. He gazed deeply into her eyes.

“Mmm, now you know another one of my secrets. When I feel utterly useless, I talk on and on about absolutely nothing pertaining to the current situation. After awhile, you’ll wonder how you could have ever loved me.” He kissed her lips tenderly, released her chin, and tucked her head back in the crook of his neck and shoulders.

“No, you’re the only thing I feel sure about, but I do wonder about our future.” Za admitted truthfully.

“You must live for right now for this moment, Za. You can’t dwell in the past and happiness is yours for the taking; right here and now,” Sy pointed out.

“It has to be wonderful knowing that once you reach a certain age you stop growing old and can live forever. It allows you to learn by your mistakes and do it right the next time.”

“You’re right, I won’t die from natural causes, Za, but I can die. Many times I fell in battles and almost died. You know why I didn’t? Because, I’m too selfish to give up when there was so much I hadn’t done yet, like find you, love you.” He rubbed his lips to her temple before placing a kiss. “Now, that I have found you, for the first time in my life, I know what it’s like to fear dying, because now I have something in my life I will miss more than breathing.”

Za glowed under his words, and welcomed them. “Yes, and leave it up to me to fall in love with you, and bring you problems. I must have been born under an unlucky star.”

“I know it may seem that way, sweetheart, but it’s time to let go of that way of thinking. I look into your eyes, and I see that innocent little girl, Susan, and it breaks my heart.” He rocked her back and forth. “I won’t ask you to finish telling me what happened, but the more I know the better prepared I can be for whatever, Quintan throws at me.” He gave her a loving squeeze.

“You have to do this for yourself, my love. *Only you* have the power to give Susan Langston her voice back.”

She gulped hard, hot tears slipping down her cheeks. She kept her eyes strait ahead. After all these years, she still felt the guilt and shame as if it had happened yesterday.

“It happened just a block away from school.” She admitted. “Someone came up behind me threw a what appeared to be a pillowcase over my head. Before I could scream I felt these big hands

around my throat squeezing and squeezing until I lost consciousness.”

“When I woke up I was naked and bound to small bed in a basement. I was in so much pain. Especially in the vaginal and anal area. He had raped and sodomized me while I was unconscious.” She drew in a deep breath and let out a shuddering sigh.

“It continued on and off like that for hours, until I could no longer cry feel. Now that I look back I don’t understand how I could have not fought harder. He abused me until I could no longer feel.”

“Sweetheart, you thought you were going to die, you were a child and fear can even take hold of a grown man,” he soothed.

“I hoped I would die, even prayed for it to come and take me, but God wasn’t listening to me. I thought it was because I had been mean to my foster mom that morning. It was sick how he kept ordering me to tell him I loved him and how grateful I was that he chose me. He would hit me until I said it.

“How long did he have you hostage?”

“Two days.” Za covered her face with her hands. “That was when his wife found me, she came home a day earlier then expected from visiting her mother.”

“You said you killed a man, was it your kidnapper?”

Za nodded her head. “Before she could get me out of the basement and call the police he came home. She told me to be quiet; we could hear him running through the house above our heads calling his wife’s name. Her car was home, so he knew she was home and I suspect he realized she had come to the basement and found me.” Her voice had taken on a cold impersonal tone.

“He came to the basement,” Sy commented.

“Yes, and he came equipped to leave no witnesses to his crime for he came down the steps of the basement with a gun in his hand.” She paused, willing herself to stop shaking and finish.

“Did he turn the gun on you and his wife?”

“He didn’t get the chance,” Za said shaking her head. “We were hiding under the steps and as he descended, his wife grabbed his ankles with both hands sending him forward down the stairs, when he hit the floor the gun slid across the floor.” Her voice became louder and her heart raced as she relived the scene. “He was groaning and yelling at his wife, he either twist his ankle or broke it, but he was at the bottom of the stairs and as she tried to pass him he caught at her skirts and brought her down on the floor. I was under the stairs, watching him as he was choking her. I had to do something, I kept thinking. Once he killed her, he would kill me. He probably was going to kill me before she got home. She saved me and I had to save her. I eased from behind the stairs, picked up

the gun and shot him...and shot him...and shot him...until the nothing.”

She paused and swallowed back the lump in her throat threatening to choke her.

“A neighbor from down the street was walking their dog and heard the gun shot and called the police on her cell phone. When the police arrived He was dead, his wife unconscious, and they said they had to pry the gun out of my hand, I was still pulling the trigger when they arrived. I must have been in shock because I don’t remember any of it past him falling down the stairs.”

“Oh darling,” he kissed her temple, the side of her face and ear. “Can’t you see you had no choice? I or anyone else in that situation would have done the same thing. You’ve been blaming yourself for killing a man, when you should have seen what you did as saving a woman. If you hadn’t acted, you wouldn’t be here in my arms now.”

He was right she’d never thought of it that way before. She believed that bastard deserved to die, but she would have like him to have suffered before he died. Suffer just like she did every time he rammed his penis inside her. The good thing was there was no telling how many innocent children she saved from his clutches. That alone made it worth it; at least she can see it now.

“I had to relive that horrible nightmare repeatedly, in the media, and in the courtroom. By the time everything had settle down, I was damaged goods, and no one wanted a little girl that was damaged goods.” She snorted with bitterness. “Well that isn’t entirely true. I had a few that wanted to take me in so they could reap the benefits of interviews, possible book deals and a few networks wanted to turn my life into a movie. I mean how many kids get to witness the death of their mother and kill a man by the tender age of thirteen?”

Za waited for the usual numbness of that came and helped her push little Susan back into the closet of her memory, only it wasn’t happening this time. This time she remembered every detail, saw all the blood, heard the exploding gunshot, the screaming sirens, yelling voices and flashing bulbs and slicks of cameras.

The floodgates were open and she was going to leave them that way. “Sy, even though I lived through that day physically, I could never be the same. Every time that sick bastard beat, strangled, raped, and sodomized me, I died. Every time a reporter shoved a camera in my face or took a picture of me, I died. Every family that used me for financial gain and every male member of those families that saw me as fair game because I was already used—I died.” Her voice was a hoarse whisper. “Susan died.

She could sense the barely-controlled power coiled in the tenseness of his body as he spoke. “All I can say if you hadn’t killed the son-of-a-bitch I would have hunted him down and allowed him to a long and painful death. Little Susan deserved that much.” He swallowed deeply. “I’m sorry.”

Za felt a calm tenderness spread over her as she looked at his tortured tear-stained face. She reached up and wiped the tears from the corners of his eyes with her thumbs. "You're crying."

Sy lifted her easily and turned her to straddle his hips and face him. Their wet flesh slithering against each other from the steady movement in the bath. She loved the feel of his rough padded thumbs feathering over her ear lobes as he held her face in his hands.

"I love you so very much," he said passionately.

Za buried her hands in his damp hair; she knew in her heart that she could trust his words. It was time for her to stop running. She wanted to spend the rest of her life loving him and pleasing him in every way possible.

"Show me," she murmured against his lips.

"How much I love you?"

"No, I know how much you love me." She slid her arms around his neck. "I want to see if the Satyr loves me just as much."

As though her words freed him, he drew her form to him until her soft curves molded to the contours of his lean body.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Za wasn't ready to look at Sylus. She felt awkward and unsure, standing in the middle of his bedroom in her robe while Sylus stood in his true form.

She kept her averted gaze at his hoofed feet, trying to accept that what she was seeing was real. Her heart felt as if it was in her throat. It wasn't because she was scared of him in general. The entire circumstance was surreal.

"You don't have to do this now, Za." He cleared his throat. "It's been a very emotional day. I understand if you're not as ready as you thought you were."

"No." She shook her head. "I want to see you. I don't want you to feel you have to hide who you are from me." She looked up at him and sucked in a deep, shuddering breath. Blowing it out in a long rush of air.

She was in awe. Not sure she could believe what she was seeing, looking into his eyes they were completely black, his pupils were so dilated. He was staring intently, gauging her reaction as if her love for him depended upon what she did and said next.

Za was speechless; his muscles were bulked up several sizes. There was a remarkable sense of power emanated from him that drew her to him. As she came close enough to touch him, his erect penis lengthened from the thatch of silky hair. An extraordinarily arousing odor emanated from him...masculine, sexual, pleasant, and very much Sylus.

Za suspected he thought she'd be repelled, but oddly enough, she wasn't. She found herself not only attracted, but there was a telling condensation between her legs.

Satyr or man, he was her first love and in her eyes just as desirable as he was when they steamed up the windows of the automobile earlier. This man-creature that gazed at her so intently, looked at her with such gentle adoring eyes. He loved her and she loved him, it was as simple as that.

"Za--"

"Shhh just let me look at you." She spoke softly.

Her eyes roamed greedily where her fingertips grazed. The muscles were hard beneath her fingertips, they tensed from her touched, but he allowed her to have her way.

She brushed her hands over the silky pelt of pale fur that spread from the 'V' pattern at his hips, it extending over his muscular high-setting buttocks tightened even more by the high-arch of his hoofed stance. His usually straight platinum hair hung in thick waves down his back sweeping from his broad brow where amazing curved horns protruded. The "elfin" ears were a complete turn

on.

Za didn't know if it was because of her love for mythical movies and books, or if she was going crazy, but she didn't feel threatened at all. If anything, she was surprised by how well she was taking in all of this.

She smiled at seeing the dark goatee on his chin and tugged playfully. "This is kind of sexy. You might consider piercing your ears. Then you would look wickedly handsome."

She noticed his deep sigh of relief and his stance relaxed as he realized he had her acceptance. His sensuous, wide mouth spread into a smile, revealing extremely white teeth and extended canines. "They were pierced in the seventeenth century. I'm afraid they have long since healed because I haven't wore anything in them."

"Amazing," she breathed. "I can't imagine all the things you have seen and experienced."

"Now that you know who I am, there is so much I can't wait to share with you. Places you never dreamt existed." He combed his long fingers through her hair.

"You are magnificent," she breathed. "To think you were a knight at one time boggles my mind." Her eyes brightened like a child in wonder.

"I still am a knight, milady." He presented her with a flourished bow.

Rudely, Za snorted and laughed.

"Woman." Sy's head cocked to the side in question, his dark eyebrow lifted. "If you were truly a lady of court, that graceful bow would have made you swoon at my feet."

"Yeah, right. Women back then actually swooned because their corsets were too tight." She teased.

Sy's eyes narrowed as he descended upon her. Za held up a hand, slowly backing up then halted in surprise. "Hey, you don't scare me," she said and paused in wonder. "I mean really, I'm not frightened of you at all."

"Good." He rubbed her upper arms and leaned down from his loft height to kiss the top of her head. "I couldn't bear the thought of you being scared of me, sweetheart. Not in this form or the other."

"Did it hurt?"

"Did what hurt?"

"When your legs and feet changed that way."

"No. It feels like muscle spasms. However, shifting can be difficult at times. It requires more energy to change back into the human form, especially if I'm exhausted or extremely agitated. So relaxing in a bath, sleep, or sexual release helps."

Za's eyes grew wide. "Sexual release?"

"Well, when I'm really aroused I automatically pre-shift, which means, pupils dilating, horns protruding, while in the midst of making love. Once I come, my body is relaxed and automatically shifts easily back into the human form," he explained.

"I don't know what it is about you, but I...I..." Za broke off not knowing why she was feeling shy all of a sudden.

"I know. My sense of smell is quite acute in this state. I love your scent. Even more so because you are very aroused at this moment."

Za gasped. Sy was correct her entire body was itching to be touch. It took everything in her to keep from touching herself right here in front of him. "I'm embarrassed." She covered her face with her hands. "You must think I'm a freak, because I find you very sexy like this."

"I would have thought you were a freak if you weren't." Sylus chuckled and tugged her hands from her face. Satyrs are erotic creatures; we were designed by the gods to frolic, offer happiness and pleasure. In our bodies we possess a huge amount of pheromones, that is why you body is reacting to me, without my having to touch you."

"Knowing this side of you explains a lot about you," Za said as she reached up, hesitating before actually touching his horns.

"It's fine; you can touch them," Sy encouraged and leaned over. "I like it, very much."

Za saw the euphoria on his gorgeous face as his long lashes fluttered and shadowed over his cheeks before closing. She withdrew her hands and his eyes opened; the passion buried in their dark depths sent her heart into a foolish flutter.

"So, who knew stroking horns can make a person *horny*." She joked nervously, but neither one of them laughed as their awareness of one another electrified the air.

"I don't think either one of us needed any help. I've wanted you since being with you in the car." He swallowed placing one hand on each of her hips and pulled her flush against his body. She threw her hands up around his neck, feeling his muscles ripples beneath her fingers as he shifted into human form.

Za gasped from the subtle shifting. It only took a shimmer and a blink before the hairless face and form she knew so well stood before her. "You didn't have to change for me."

"I know, but I have yet to consummate my love for you as a man. How about we start there? Besides, I assume it has been awhile for you and I'm a bit thicker in my Satyr state."

Za licked her lips, "You're thinking we're ready to go to the next level."

"Aren't you?"

“Oh, yes,” she paused. A light frown came to her face. “Sy, if for some reason I freeze up or panic--”

“Don’t worry, I’ll take it slow baby, and if you want me to stop at any time, just say the word.” He tilted his head in puzzlement and asked, “What is it?”

“I don’t know,” she shrugged. “I want you so much at this moment, I feel like I’m going to go up in flames and I’m tired of being scared of being hurt, mentally and physically, yet I feel that once we make love, everything is going to change.”

“My love, change does not always have to be for the worse. In our case it’s going to be for the better. I want to know you like no other has.” Sylus spoke softly into her ear.

“You sound as if I’m still a virgin.” Za shook her head, a sad smile on her lips.

“Aren’t you? I know I am.”

She looked at him skeptical. “Don’t even try it, because I know better.”

“Honestly, you’re the first woman I’ve made love to that I actually love, Za,” he reasoned. “Isn’t it the same for you?”

She felt his nimble fingers release the sash of her robe and it fell open.

“Yes, but I...I feel so inadequate when it come to men, I don’t know if I can do this.” Her voice was heavy with self-doubt.

“There is nothing inadequate about you, Zaza. You are the most brave, complicated, and mentally compelling woman I’ve ever encountered.” His breath feathered against her ear. “Even now, know so much about you, I feel as if there is so much more to be learned.”

With the flick of his wrist, the robe whispered to the ground between them.

“You’re the only one that makes me feel as I do when you look at me. I feel adored, sexy, daring and loved,” she confessed softly. He was swaying her gently from side to side as they danced around in circles even though there was no music.

“Good because I will be looking at you this way for always!” Sy laughingly lifted her high above him; like a graceful dancer. She squealed and braced her hands on his shoulders as his long tongue flickered at her navel. His strength awed her and made her feel petite in comparison.

She arched into him, feeling a wet brushing trail flicking against her stomach, up between her breasts, stopping to flicker, kiss, nibble, and pull a thick, dark nipple into the recess of his mouth.

Za buried her hands in the thickness of his long hair and cradled his head to her breast as she nestled her chin atop his head. Her heart was hammering in her chest so much he had to be able feel it pulsating blood to her engorged nipples.

She licked her lips; a moan escaped her parted lips. The sound of her breathing seemed very

loud to her ears. “Sy,” she cried out.

“Za, you taste and smell so wonderful.” His breath blew hot against her throat. He placed his arm beneath her knees and carried her over to the bed.

Her head swooped low to nip his bottom lip until his mouth opened in response to her playful eagerness. She felt the luxurious material of the comforter beneath her as he placed her on the bed and pulled back, towering over her, staring.

“Your lovely dark skin against the paleness of the bedding is striking.” His voice was murky and deep.

She looked at him, and leaned back on her elbow allowing her legs to wantonly spread, she lifted one foot and braced it against his chest. “It’s even more striking against the paleness of you.”

He took her foot in his hand and put her big toe in his mouth, suckling until her head dropped back on the bed her eyes rolled in appreciation. “Damn, a man that does toes.”

He released her toe with a wet ‘pop’ and a wicked grin came to his mouth as he massaged her foot. “There isn’t much I won’t do, sweetheart,” he murmured running his hands over her calf, kissing her ankle. “Za?”

“Mmm.” She licked her lips as her leg was lifted higher, her heel placed on his shoulder. Za anticipated the continued exploration of his hands as she felt them swirling towards her inner thigh,

When he stopped, she opened her eyes. “What? What!” She groaned her frustration. She knew he wanted her. Her eyes moved down his heaving chest and further to see his erection laying against his navel, before traveling back up to meet his concerned stare with questioning eyes. “I can see you are as turned on as I am,” she panted. “So what’s the matter?”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Are you?” She removed her foot from his shoulder and dug both her heels into the mattress. “In all honesty, making love won’t solve our problems or changes our differences. For some, it complicates matters. It will only make it harder when we have to part.”

Sylus stilled as if she threw cold water on him. “What do you mean, when we part?”

“Well, you are going out of town, aren’t you?” she reminded and inwardly smiled when she saw his open relief.

“The trip.” He nodded. “That may or may not be necessary depending on if I can get Quintan’s support.”

She looked at his throat as he swallowed deeply. She found something very arousing in the masculine, corded, column of his throat and shoulders. She licked her lips.

Sylus groan and she looked up at his face, beads of sweat were on his brow. “Za,” his deep

voiced simmered with barely checked passion. "Please..."

"Please, what?"

"Touch me. I don't care where. I just want to feel your hands on me." His eyes spoke volumes as he climbed in the bed beside her. "We will go as slow as we need to."

Za nodded reaching out to touch him, pushing him over onto his back.

The full moon penetrated through the partially opened window curtains, casting his pale skin in golden light. She allowed her eyes to feast and admire Sylus's body. She never knew a man's body could be so wonderful to explore. It was amazing how different the hard muscles were from the soft fleshiness of a woman's.

Her fingers trailed over his narrow waist and lean hips, along well-developed legs and wide chest. Sy gasped and his stomach tightened as the side of her pinky grazed the velvet head of his penis lying like a rigid tower just above his navel.

As if weeping to be touched once more, a shimmer teardrop of semen, appear at its eye. Za hadn't meant to touch it at all, *yet*, but while stroking his ribs and stomach, it was hard to miss it.

The shadowed hollows and ridges between muscles, contoured perfectly to fit against the soft curved frame of her body. She knew without a doubt once they merged as one, he would be a perfect fit. She said a silent prayer that she could remain strong and please him

Za's heart jolted and her pulse pounded as she beheld his dark passionate gaze. Ever so wickedly, she explored his collarbone with wondering fingers, followed by her lips and a nibble. Sylus flinched and snickered. Za guffawed. *He's ticklish*. She never would have expected Sylus de Gauls had one ticklish bone in his body.

"Is the tip of your fingers tingling like my flesh?" Sylus managed to ask from between clenched teeth.

"Yes, this has never happened to me before" she breathed out on a sigh. "As I touch you it feels as if I'm being touched in the same places."

To prove her point she pinched both his small blushing-colored nipples with her hands. They became hard pebbles between her fingers. Sylus moaned his pleasure as his eyes closed.

Za leaned forward taking turns sucking his nipples. Her hair was soft, thick and at the moment unruly from the earlier bath, but he seemed to enjoy it when she nuzzled the place in the center of his chest, brushing her short hair up and down as she licked each outline of his ribs.

She smiled. He had several ticklish spots and she was taking delight in finding every one of them.

"You are going to kill me, woman," he choked out. "Can I touch you now?"

Za smirked a secretive womanly smile. “No.”

Each time her trailing wet tongue went down, Sy would thrust his hips forward, trying his best to get his penis close for her tongue’s administration. When she pulled away, his brows would meet in the middle over the bridge of his arrogant nose in a frown.

The more she explored his body, the more her flesh screamed and tingled. Her nipples were hard and sensitive. Her clit was tender. The inner lips of her labia were puffy and she was wet with need. She was definitely ready to be touched.

Za hesitated a moment before she reached over and picked up his hand resting on his thigh. He opened his eyes. Quietly watching her. She heard his breath catch in his throat as she took turns sucking on his middle fingers.

Za released his finger with a wet ‘pop’ and guided his hand to one of her aching breast. “I’m ready, touch me.” She arched into his hand.

Sy didn’t hesitate. “Can I use my mouth too?” He asked as his large hand stroked along her sides and around to knead the fullness of one butt cheek. “Will you lay on your stomach for me?”

“Ah...okay,” she answered and eased on to her stomach. Her trembling hands clutched the bottom sheet as his tongue trail down the center of her back. He nibbled her buttocks and smoothed his thumbs in the valley between the full cheeks as he spread her to his view. As if sensing her tension Sy moved his hands to the mattress, leaning forward nuzzling the small of her back.

She gasped aloud as the wet tip of his tongue began to spell something on her flesh. She could feel it clearly against her sensitive skin, I...she keened and squirmed as he continued to spell, L...O...V...E...U.

She chewed on her lower lip and stole a look at him. The smoldering flame she saw in his eyes made her ache for the fulfillment of his lovemaking. As if reading her thoughts, she lulled in the caress of his silky curtain of hair sweeping across her back and sides as he leaned over her. The muscles in his arms strained as he held himself braced above her, with his knees on the mattress between her spread thighs. She could feel his penis against her ass, and she tensed again.

“Za,” he spoke hotly against her ear. “I am here to do your bidding; there will be no entrance unless you wish it. Just relax and let me please you.”

The feathered mattress dipped as he straddled her hips. As his hands moved in massaging strokes up her back and over her shoulders, she drank in the comfort of his nearness. The powerful, yet gentle manipulations of his hands on her quivering flesh resulted in the most erotic experience, close to actual lovemaking. She savored the heaviness of his muscular thighs encompassing her legs.

The longer he massaged her back, the more she became accustomed to his erection pressing

against her. The weight of his testicles rested and swayed against her buttocks with his movements.

Sy's hands molded her soft curves as he pressed upwards into her shoulders. Za felt his uneven breathing on her cheek before his kisses seared a path down her neck, her shoulders, up her neck to nibble at her earlobe.

"I adore the feel of your hair," Sy said as he combed his fingers through its thickness. "Just in case you wondered why my hands are always in it."

Za tried to reply but it came out like one big slur as he took advantage of her open mouth, leaning to the side he kissed her deeply. Her hands balled up the bottom sheet and she pressed her pubic mons into the mattress trying to ease the ache.

Sylus chuckled, breaking off the long wet kiss, "Mmm...I'm afraid I didn't understand a word you said."

"I said, I love the feel of your fingers against my scalp, but I must look really rough about now." She reached up to touch her hair and he pushed her hand away.

"I love it this way, the messier the better," he said. His long fingers curled in her tresses and tugged playfully.

"All right now," she threatened but he couldn't possibly take her serious when she was grinning like an idiot. "Don't make me get up from here and whip your ass. Haven't you heard that black women don't like you messin' with their hair?"

Sy paused. "Is that so?"

Za rested her face on her folded arms. "I'm sure it is for some women, but no one black woman, can answer for all black women. I personally like the lowest maintenance possible when it comes to hairstyles."

"Now back to that threat to whip my ass, is this something you would be interested in?" He released low masculine laugh

She released a moan shook her head in mirth. "Sy, you're such a freak."

"You don't know the half of it," he assured her. "This reminds me of..."

Za felt his hands halt briefly.

"What were you about to say?"

"Nothing, sweetheart."

"Please," Za beseeched. "I've told you've everything, I want you do feel you can do the same with me." She lifted her head and struggled to look at him.

He slid on to his side and she turned over on her side facing him, propping her head up on her elbow. She waited.

His brow puckered in deep thought before he said, "Have you ever heard of Donatien Aldonse François, le Marquis de Sade?" He asked

"Marquis de Sade...uh...yes, I think I saw the movie." She smirked. "Quite twisted."

He laughed again. "Don't say it like that, sweetheart; the Marquis was a brilliant man. It's disheartening knowing he's only remembered for behavior that was considered deviant during those times. If he had lived, he would have fit in perfectly in today's society, I assure you."

"If you say so, baby, but I can't understand how others can hurt each other and find pleasure in it." Za frowned lightly, trying to imagine the concept.

"That is why I regretted bringing it up, my love. You have spent your entire youth living through some form of aggression. It is not a matter to tease you with or to try and make you understand," Sy reasoned.

"I bet after living for centuries, seeing so much and living through everything imaginable, you must find me very boring." Za exhaled and rolled on to her back. Her arm over her breast.

He stilled. "Nothing in my life has been comparable to falling in love, Zaza. If I could change anything about you, it would be that you'd had a less painful childhood. Yet, if that had happened then you wouldn't be the strong woman you are. I love you for you."

"Yeah, you'll love me until one of those perfect little *Nymp-ho's* come along, that you and Marie were talking about," she mumbled.

"*Nymphs*, woman," He rolled his eyes in exasperation. "They are spirits of nature, that have inhabit the flesh of human women and because their species are nearly none existence so we must rely on the descendents of their bloodline."

"Is that why your brother is against my being with you, because I'm not one of these Nymphs descendents?" Za asked noticing Sy was no longer staring at her. She wonder what he was, not saying.

"Must we discussed this right now? I mean look at me, my body is dying for release." He grinned and winked at her.

Za decided to let it go for now, but she wanted to learn more about the connections between Satyrs and Nymphs.

"I suppose you better go take a cold shower now, because I'm afraid I'm no longer interested," she teasingly lied.

"What!" He groaned. "I told you I wouldn't push and--" Sy halted looking at her curiously.

She put her hand over her mouth and lowered head but she knew the moment he noticed her shoulders shaking in silent laughter.

“Why you sweet little liar,” he stated. “You had me going, didn’t ya?” Za squealed as he rolled her onto her back. His fingers seemed to be everywhere at once.

“I give! I give!” Za giggled, slapping at his hands. With a smile still on his lips, he cupped her face in his hands.

“It doesn’t matter if it’s in the extreme as my old friend de Sade, or minor love bites. When one partner says stop, there is to be no hesitation in doing so. That is why you only share your bed with those you trust completely. I want you to feel comfortable telling me what you don’t like and what makes you feel good.”

Za knew Sy was trying to make sure she was at ease. She never met such a wonderful and considerate man. She desperately wanted to spend the rest of her life with him. Even if that was not a possibility, she would never forget the time they’ve had.

“Tell me that I have your trust completely, Za. If you can’t then we shouldn’t be doing this,” he reasoned.

The feeling of his movements against her caused pleasure to shoot through her. His long hair shrouded his face as he leaned forward sweeping over her as his large hands swept across her stomach and her breasts in even strokes.

“Mmm...I like this. You have the most magnificent hands,” she sighed, arching her back to meet his touch.

While lying on her back, she could admire his powerfully built shoulders, the way the ridges of olive colored veins in his arms and hands became more prominent as he massaged her. Her eyes fluttered close and she licked her lips while his hands cupped and palmed her breast.

She couldn’t look at him; she was too embarrassed by the way he made her feel. Gasping, Za arched against his fingers. His thumbs were whirling and twirling her hard nipples.

“Do you like that?”

“Yes,” she breathed.

Sy glided one of his hands down her quivering stomach, pressing the heel of his palm against her high setting mons; his middle finger delved between her dewy pussy lips and circled her hardened clit.

“Do you like it when I touch you this way?”

“Don’t stop,” Za whimpered when he threatened to pull his hand away. Her treacherous thighs open wide to accommodate him.

“That’s it baby, let go,” he murmured into her ear. Her lips parted in amazement. The quickly building sensations caught her in its grip.

“Zaza, if we are to be lovers, you must trust me completely with your body, heart and soul.”

These were delicious, unnerving feelings of awareness. Chill bumps appeared on her skin and a pleasurable ache lodged itself in her lower stomach.

Za gasped as his fingers found a sensitive spot she didn’t know existed. Her toes curled and she arched against his hand a tear sliding down the side of her face. “Oh Sy...oh, yesss.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Sylus's mouth curved into an unconscious smile as he stared down at her parted lips and glazed eyes. He dipped his head, causing his hair to block his view; he swept it all to one side while his lips followed the soft shape of her jaw line.

Closing in on her lips, she sighed under his coaxing mouth. The sounds of her pleasure made his already tender emotions soar. Za was truly accepting of who he was and he sensed no reservations or fear in her as she returned his moist open-mouthed kisses.

Easy, as if they had a lifetime, his mouth pressed against hers, their tongues dancing sensuously slow. Nothing in his life had ever sounded sweeter than hearing a throaty keening sound coming from her.

He dipped his head lowed cupping a pert breast, he lightly squeezed as he took the nipple into his mouth and began to suckle. He tugged harder and her nails dug into his back, as she trusted against him.

Sy halted so he could gaze into her lust-hazed face. Her passion alone was enough to make him want to shoot his load, but not yet. He wanted to make sure that she understood the difference between making love and sex.

He knew she loved him and he knew that for the moment she was happy to let him be a part of her life. They were alone without her daily distractions of Selby's career and running a multi-million dollar agency.

He wasn't going to allow her to tuck him back into his place as *Darius's best friend* once they returned home and the wedding was over. Even though she hadn't said anything, he knew her well enough to know that as soon as all of this sunk in. She will want to run, but she was his future and she might as well become accustomed to the idea.

He relished the pressure of her breasts against his chest hairs and his erection brushing against her baby-soft inner thigh as he played with her lips and proceeded to French kiss her into a lustful frenzy.

"I...I think I'm ready, now," she panted against his mouth.

"Mmm, I love the way you taste. Not just yet, my love, we have all night." He ran his nose against the shape of hers, slanting his head to the other side to kiss her some more.

When she moaned and groaned his name in a pleading way, he made his way lower, grazing a trail with his lips, nose and tongue. He didn't stop until he was resting between her spread thighs with her legs draped over each side of his shoulders.

“Oh, baby, you’re so wonderfully wet.” He kissed the top of her neatly waxed mound as if it was something to be revered.

“Do you have to look at me that way?” Za asked her sultry voice even duskier from her aroused state.

“Yes, you’re beautiful all over and I want to savor every part of you,” Sy confided. He winked at her with a lascivious grin.

Za placed both hands over her face with embarrassment. He thought it utterly charming, it was one of the many reasons he adored her. She was such a contradictions of emotions. Tantalizing vixen and scared child, ice maiden and hellion, all rolled up into one.

With a smile on his lips, he separated her folds with the two fingers that became slick by stroking her. His nostrils flared as the taste of her settled on his tongue. He cupped the round cheeks of her ass in both his hands and lifted her hips up off the bed so he could feast on the essence that was Zaza.

Sy’s long tongue swirled and twirled against her dark, swollen clit. Never had he savored the sweet nectar of sexual juices as he had hers. He suckled on the thick labia before moving to the dark protruding bud swollen and sensitive to his tongue-lashings.

It swelled his masculine pride to hear her lustful grunts and moans as her hips bucked against his face. He moved to the opening of her pussy, thrusting his tongue in and out like small penis, making a point of using the tip of his nose to nuzzle her receptive clitoris.

As he tongued the flesh between her vulva and anus, he had to brace her with his arms locked about her thigh, her entire bottom half reared to meet him.

He glanced up and saw Za reached over her head to grab, her thighs tensed and started to quiver in unison with her shaky guttural release. “I’m going to come,” she cried.

His long hair curtained about the bottom of her body and tugged her closer to his mouth and pulled long drags on her clitoris, inserting two fingers. She released the headboard with a whimper and fisted handful of his hair as her back stiffened.

He felt warm all over as she cried out his name over and over. Sy could feel her beginning spasms and quickly remove his fingers to replace it with his tongue. Having the taste of her and the rippling and gripping sensation on his tongue almost made him spill his sperm.

Sylus was greedy; he wasn’t relinquishing his spot until she he slurped up the last drop. Sy winced as Za yanked his hair repeatedly.

“Oh, damn, I feel so sensitive down there...ahh!” She blew out a couple of short breaths and rode the orgasm. He could feel it subsiding.

Only when Sy could barely breathe from her pussy pressing into his face, and her thighs locked against his ears, muffling her sweet whimpering cries did he remove his tongue and unlocked her legs easing her bottom back to the mattress.

He wanted nothing more then to shove himself inside her and release the deep longing that was tearing him apart. Yet, he wasn't sure if she was ready and if he did something to make her panic, or her because of his large size, it would set them back no telling how far.

Still he had to seek relief even though he decided he wouldn't penetrate her, at least not today, especially after she just relived what happened to her by telling him the truth.

"I love you," he said aloud in a raspy voice.

"I love you, thank you, I needed this," she sighed. Her voice was barely above an exhausted whisper. She moved to ease her legs around him and roll over onto her side.

Sy stayed between her legs and halted her movements. She looked at him, her light colored eyes wide, "Not yet, please, I need to ease myself, let me look at you, smell you and taste you a little longer."

Sy's eyes drifted back to her hair-free pussy and stroked him self, he kissed and nuzzled against her inner thighs. He sucked and left his mark on her, all while his hand pumped his penis in a frenzy to climax.

Za moaned and pushed herself up on her elbows to get a better view of his hand working on his cock. He could tell she was turned on all over again by watching him. She started to move against her hand and his tongue.

"You're so fucking sexy," Za spoke passionately and proceeded to talk nasty to him and he loved it.

"Oh...Za, keep it up...fuck...yeah! That's it...that's it, baby." Sy growled his fist tightened around his penis. His pupils dilated until his vision blurred and horns unfurled, as his face went slack-jawed. He grunted once...twice... before he buried his face against her vagina and moaned. His hot semen ejaculated into the sheets of the bed.

A few minutes' later Sy's horns receded and his pupils returned to normal as his pulse slowed. With her moisture clinging to his smiling lips he came back up to lay beside her and pulled her limp body against him. She released a weak whimper and nestled her bottom against his softened erection.

As a cloud covered the moon the room grew dark, Sylus remained wide-awake listening to Za's faint snores. He realized a bit late they had yet to eat but he didn't have the heart to wake her. She felt so right in his arms; he knew she was the one he had waited centuries for. He didn't need the

magic bonding of the gods to choose his life-mate; love worked its magic on its own.

At that profound moment, Sylus knew he made the right decision. Za was worth giving up immortality. He silently prayed the possibility was not a false legend that had been passed down through the centuries. If anyone could find out for sure, it would be Marie and his brother Quintan. The first thing he had to do was make his brother understand this is what he truly wanted and it wasn't just one of his many phases.

"Who the hell would be calling this time of morning?" Sylus mumbled, disengaging his arms and long legs from Za's limbs, turning over to reach for the phone by the bed.

"*What?*" he yelled into the mouthpiece, only to hear the blaring dial tone. He cursed and placed the cordless back on its cradle.

The ringing continued; he set up, looking around on the floor. Seeing Za's discarded handbag, he leaned halfway off the bed and reached for it; the phone fell out of the side pocket. Sy dropped the purse in favor of the cell phone.

Za grunted and stretched like a naked cat, a contented smile on her face. Why did she wake up? She was having the sweetest dream. *Oh man, I'm starving!* Despite her sleep-induced haze, Zaza recognized her ringing cell tone. Her eyes grew wide and she sat up with a start, the sheet gripped to her breast, she turned over just in time to see Sylus answering her phone.

When Za saw his face mottle a shade of red, she knew it must have been the prank caller again. She cursed and fell back against her pillows, throwing her forearm over her face.

"Za, tell me how *fucking* long have you been getting these types of calls?" He asked, spacing the words evenly. "Do you have an idea who it is?"

"*Do you* know how rude it is to answer someone else's cell phone without permission?" she remarked, pleased at how nonchalant she sounded. "What did they say this time?"

Sylus didn't say anything and she felt the bed dip and shuffle. Slowly, she chanced a peek from behind her arm, getting a magnificent view of pale naked-ass, as he walked into the well-lit adjoining bathroom.

She smiled, biting down on her lip to keep from laughing as she heard his urine hitting the water in the toilet and he loudly passed gas.

Za rolled her eyes, mumbling, "One intimate evening and he pisses without closing the door."

She sat up in bed, drawing her legs up under her chin, and wrapped her arms around her legs. She patiently waited for what was to come.

“Don’t forget to let the toilet seat down please,” she called out

She heard it fall down and he said something in a language she didn’t understand, but by his tone she could imagine the choice word. She also heard water running in the sink. She was thankful he was at least the type of man that washed his hand afterwards.

He stomped his way naked and even though looking at the clock they only slept for four hours, he still looked damned good to her. “The son-of-a-bitch on the phone said ‘*Bitch, do as you’re told,*’ what were you told to do, Za?”

She looked away from his questioning eyes shrugging off the chill that ran through her. The last call told her to leave “him” now this. What the hell was going on, she wondered. “Nothing to worry about. It’s just a fellow competitor, trying to intimidate me into giving up a client’s contract.”

He looked at her with doubt. She returned his gaze, biting on her bottom lip.

“Damn,” he cursed softly shaking his mussed head.

“What?”

“I can’t think what I was going to say next, because I was wondering how in the hell could anyone wake up looking as lovely and sexy as you do right now? Your skin looks as if it’s glowing.”

Za blushed, remembering he was the one that put the glow there. He had been gloriously giving and she had two orgasm that literally knocked her out. No woman came close to eating pussy like this man.

She didn’t want to think about him having centuries to practice. “Ah, yeah, about what happened--”

“If you’re talking about what happened between us, there’s nothing to discuss. It was wonderful and it will be even better for you the next time, I promise. So, please don’t over analyze it to death,” he interrupted abruptly.

Za’s eyes widened, wondering if he was serious. How could it get better without causing an orgasmic overload?

She also realized by the return of his grim expression that there was no way to get around the threatening caller.

What is the caller was serious and her ignoring it was putting Sylus in danger. If nothing else, what if the caller was watching her, then she would bring trouble to Sylus and the people from his world. Especially if anyone had caught what happened in the hotel dinner club yesterday.

She had no choice but to do as the caller instructed at least until she could find out more about what was going on. Then again, what if it was Sy’s brother that was trying to scare her away? The calls didn’t start on her cell phone until she got here in San Francisco and it wasn’t Peter, so it

could just as well be someone who knew Sylus.

“Why didn’t you tell me about the caller,” he asked in a dull and troubled voice. “Have there been many of them? When did it start?”

Za ran her fingers through her hair scratching her scalp nervously. What could she say that he would believe and what if she refused to say anything? No, she could tell by his accusing glare they weren’t leaving this room to eat something or get any more sleep until they had this discussion.

“I haven’t had many and there has been so much going on with my dealing with the past, falling in love.” Her lips spread into a closed mouth smile.

He didn’t return her smile. A deep look of concern remained on his face as he sat on the side of the bed.

“Sy, don’t look at me that way,” she pouted prettily, knowing her effect on men and women when she set out to get her way. She could tell he found it charming, too, when he smiled at her.

To her relief she seemed to be making leeway until she opened her mouth again. As usual when she got anxious she talked too much.

“You know, maybe I should return to Vegas today and you finish things up here. As long as we are together we’re going to be distracted...” Her words trailed off.

His eyes were sharp and assessing before turning his back to her. He shook his head with a weary sigh, “Za, I’ve come to know you very well. Surprising and rare as it may be for a woman with your many talents...” He paused smiling sadly. “You are not a good liar. What is the real reason you want to return home alone?”

“I’m not lying,” she said defensively. He still wasn’t looking at her.

“Drop the pretense, and admit that you’re as frazzled by these calls as I am.” Sy spoke freely. “It scares the hell out of me that something could happen to you. Especially if it’s because of me.”

She crawled, naked and uncaring of her nudity, across the bed and wrapped her arms about his shoulders; her nipples hardened as the softness of his hair teased them. She felt reassured when he picked her hand up from his chest and kissed her palm.

“I don’t regret one moment of the time I’ve been with you...well, except for my passing out on you. We didn’t even...well--”

He chuckled as he felt her hot face bury into the side of his neck and decided to soak it for all it was worth. “Yeah, what a greedy, selfish woman you are. I felt so...so used.” He turned to look at her, fluttering his lashes.

She giggled and nipped his shoulder with her teeth, before tenderly kissing the spot. “I’m really sorry. I truly wanted to try and see if we could make love.”

“Baby, it’s okay. We have time. There’s no reason to think that every time we share an intimate moment it has to end with penetration. Even if you didn’t have your fears, your pleasure is most important to me.” He said softly.

“That’s not true.”

A light frown marred his features. He linked her fingers with his own. “Such as?”

“We don’t have time.” She placed her chin on his shoulder, her hair brushing against his ears as she nuzzled closer. “Time for you is endless. I’m over thirty now. That’s half a lifetime, depending on the expectancy of my lifespan and if I’m fortunate not to develop any illnesses. I know you want to be by my side through whatever, but I don’t think I can bear the thought of being around all of you, watching you look the same, while I fade.”

She cried out in surprise, as Sy pulled her onto his lap. The texture of skin against skin was wickedly delicious.

She relaxed; her head fit perfectly in the hollow between his shoulders and neck as he cradled her.

“Sweetheart, no matter how many years pass you will look the same in my eyes,” he reassured her.

She quirked her brow and said, “I don’t think you will feel that way once I’m actually an old woman and we go to award dinners. You’ll be looking handsome in your tux while I will be heavier, wrinkled and everything falling south.”

Sylus grinned and crooked a finger beneath her chin, tilting her head back to look into her eyes. “Didn’t anyone ever teach you, it’s not wise to point out your shortcomings to your man? If a man is a blind fool in love, allow him to be one.”

“My man,” she echoed. “*Blind fool in love*. I’m digging that.” She squirmed and shifted her position to straddle his lap, her core pressing against his growing erection.

“I’m digging you,” he said seriously.

Sylus grabbed a handful of her hair and pulled her head back to run his lips over the column of her throat. “Fore the gods, woman, you make me forget all reason but we need to talk about our future. There is something I want to ask you.”

Za grew still. “No, Sy. Let’s not ruin what we have today by thinking about the future. Let’s stick to our original plan to enjoy each other’s company until after the wedding, then we’ll see.”

He halted, his hands dropping limply by his side. He stared at her with open-mouthed disbelief. “Za, you truly believe after all we have been through together, and the feelings we have for one another, we can just go back to where we were before this trip.”

"I *think* we have much to consider. Your family being one of them." She pointed out. "We should slow down, enjoy the way we make each other feel, then see what comes next."

His face turned stormy with anger at her suggestion. "I'm not going to allow you to put me on one of your neat little lists, penciling me in when you get horny, just because you feel safe with me. I want more from you, Za."

"Please understand," was all she could say.

It wasn't enough.

"No I will not understand and I will tell you how it will be." His chin lifted a notch. "Once we return to Vegas, you will move into Selby's with me and Darius so that we may watch over you until this situation with the phone calls, my family, and the council are settled."

She tensed.

"If you don't want to leave your place, I will allow you the choice of us moving into your place or, better yet, we all move out to my and Darius's family estate in Lake Tahoe, which is easily guarded." Sy took a deep breath before continuing. "Even though I find Darius's cousin Justus a pain, his estate is adjoined to ours and it doesn't hurt to have shifting wolves around just in case we need them."

"Hold on...stop talking!" Za placed her hand over his mouth. "You're already disrupting my life. Do you know how *Twilight Zone* it feels to talk about werewolves, vampires, and this shifting stuff, as if it was normal, everyday conversation?"

He said something and she rolled her eyes at him in frustration, dropping her hand from his mouth.

"Damn you, it *is* normal, and you might as well get use to it!" He smiled...a slow, lazy, sexy-as-hell smile. "Might I ask, what is this, *Twilight Zone*?"

"You know? The old black-and-white television series, they rerun it all the time--"

Sylus's head leaned to the side, staring at her, completely oblivious as to what she was saying.

"Never mind," she grumbled, her face becoming an aloof mask.

He wasn't having it. He lifted her chin with a forefinger and forced her to look him in the eye. "Talk to me, woman. Why are you fighting me on this? Why are you running hot and cold? Face the obvious: you are getting threatening phone calls and you need me. It's okay to let someone else handle things. It doesn't mean I'm trying to run your life."

Za took a deep breath. It took everything in her to break the hold of his eyes. She saw so much love and vulnerability it nearly broke her heart.

“Sylus,” she began, pushing herself off his lap while proceeding to pull the sheet off the bed and wrap it around herself.

He released a loud groan. “Here it comes.”

“The last thing I want is another person taking charge and managing my life. I had enough of others handling my fate as a child. I didn’t get to choose where I would stay, what I would wear, or even what to eat.” Za tried to explain.

She saw he was allowing her to finally say her peace and forged ahead, praying her would understand how important this was to her.

“I’m finally the one in control of my environment and everyone I allow in it. This is the only way that’s best for me. Surely you can understand.” Her eyes locked with his. “When I’m with you I feel vulnerable, exposed, and out of control.” She cupped his face. “I love you. Yet, I’m not ready to give up my independence and play house with you.”

Sylus cursed softly. “Why are you doing this to me?” Sy spread his hands wide with palms up. “Can’t you understand why a man who loves you, would want only to protect and take of you. I have the means to do so, so let me.”

She dropped her hands from his face and crossed her arms over her breast to keep the sheet in place. “It’s just a phone prank. Nothing else has happened. Let it go.”

“Sweetheart, why do I feel like you are asking me to...to let *you* go? I feel as if--”

“Hey,” she held a hand up to stop whatever he was about to say; she didn’t think she could bear to hear more and continue being strong. She would love to give in to Sylus, but something told her once she did her life would be out of her control from here on. Somehow, she must make him see reason.

“Za.”

“Sy...just because I confided in you and I spent the night in your bed, it doesn’t change anything. We both were emotional. I was feeling sorry for myself. Now, that our minds aren’t clouded with emotional pain or lust. We can think clearer.” She walked over to the window. She couldn’t bare to see how her words were hurting him.

“Za, speak for yourself.” He said in a deep tone. “My lust for you is not something I can get over with in one night. So please, don’t minimize what is between us just to make *yourself* feel better, when your heart is telling you, you’re wrong.”

Her eyes sparkled with unshed tears as she turned to stare at him. “I won’t deny I love the way you make me feel, but it doesn’t mean I want to be sheltered and taken care of.”

“All of this, just because I wish to keep you safe?” His mouth curved with tenderness. “I am

here because of my feelings for you. Doesn't that mean anything?"

Za made an exaggerated sigh. "Look, you told me once you were a man used to getting what you want. Maybe all of this will turn out to be just a fling. Come on, admit it, *lesbians* are a challenge to men like you."

"True, so are virgins and married women," he admitted without shame. "Still, this is not the same thing. *I love you.*"

"Don't keep saying that. I mean here we are, two people that never loved before with matching egos. How in the hell do we know if we're in love if neither of us has experienced it?" Za yelled. "Maybe after we actually fuck each other--"

"If, we fuck each other, remember that hasn't been proven to be a possibility yet!" He roared spitefully.

Za looked at him and dropped her head in shame. It was the truth, she wasn't even able to completely fulfill his needs and already she was trying to call all the shots.

"Damn Za, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. It's just you're speaking for me too and I don't agree with what you're saying." He ran a hand through his hair, sweeping it out of his face. "Baby, if I wanted to just *fuck* you for my ego, I wouldn't have given a damn about finding out more about you, or exposing my soul for you to trample on."

His eyes narrowed and his voice grew dangerously low. "Nor would I feel the need to protect you. I would have used you and discarded you leaving you thinking I was but a dream."

"Sy."

"Za, this entire trip has truly been about you and my desire to explore my attraction for you. So, *I know* I'm in love with you. Maybe, what you're trying to tell me is you got off last night, it was enough for you and you realize you don't love me after all." His eyes moistened.

For once, she was speechless. Obviously, he wasn't. She could see he was in pain and he wanted to lash out.

"Tell me, Za, even you've admitted so far in the car and last night, I was the one giving. You were the one taking. What does that say about you? What attracted us to each other in the first place is that we are of the same coin, my sweet. I love being adored, yet in control of my surroundings as well as you do."

He came to his feet and closed the space between them. She remained unmoving in her expression as he continued speaking his thoughts.

"Come on, you've played the selfish *bitch* so far. You're sure you don't want to twist the knife, now that you've plunged it in my heart?" He glared at her. "Why do you think I carried your

suffering as if it was my own? Do you think you're the only one who has survived the pains of life? As many centuries as I have lived, you think it has always been like this, with the luxury and comfort?"

"Sy--" She tried to get a word in and he wasn't hearing it.

"The first part of my life I spent in bondage; we were slaves of pleasure and entertainment for the Vampires, Lykians, and gods. We didn't have this ability to shift into a more human form; that came later once the gods freed us. As Satyrs in Ancient Rome they used us like their horses; we pulled their chariots and battled in their arenas."

Za touched his arm and he shrugged her hand away. His voice was stern with no vestige of sympathy in its hardness.

"Only after the gods grew weary of using us for sport, they gave us the opportunity to build lives and gave us leave to marry, have families of our own. We acquired the ability to shift into human forms so that we may fit in with the new ways, as the old ways of the world evolved into a secret society, called the *Darkworld*."

He shook his head rubbing a hand over his brow. "The new religions came and the mortals that lived among us stopped believing we existed and proceeded to kill what they no longer understood."

She gulped hard, hot tears slipping down her cheeks as she listened to him. She had to fight her own battle of personal restraint to not fall to her knees and beg him to forgive her for hurting him. She truly hadn't considered what his life had been like even though he had mentioned several already. She truly was a selfish person.

"Zaza," his eyes softened. "Even finding love is a game in which we have no choice. The gods bound each Satyr to love only one female and she had to be the descendent of a race of women that had become extinct centuries before. Therefore, we wait and go through life sniffing at human females like hounds in heat, praying that she is our eternal mate and we can finally rid ourselves of the cursed loneliness and wanting."

He grasped her upper arms. "Don't you see why your callous attitude about my love for you, rips me apart?" He released his hold on her arms. "These feeling I have for you are madness, an abomination against what is suppose to be. Nonetheless, here it is, and these feelings are real to me. This cursed pain--" he splayed his hand across his hard abdomen. "It's like something I've never experienced before."

Za raised her eyes to find him watching her...waiting. His voice was cold and his words were biting. "Still, it's only about what *you need*, that matters, isn't it?"

She sniffled. Silently, she decided he did deserve happiness and she doubted she was the one to give it to him. Especially when her being mortal and not the one chosen for him by his gods. She had to let him go before it was too late to let go.

Composure firmly back in place, she said, "The truth is any resemblance to something good in me died when I was a child. Yes, I'm good at reading people and saying what they want to hear to make them feel better or to get what I want, but I don't *feel* any thing."

She turned away and said a silent prayer for strength. She shrugged in mock resignation. "I didn't ask you to fall in love with me. Nor do I deny when it comes to my sexual desires, I can be ruthless, selfish, and last night you had your chance to get out of me the only thing I have to give. It's not my fault that for some stupid sentimental reasons you didn't just go for it." She closed her eyes and bit down on her tongue until she tasted blood to keep from sobbing.

"Za, you can't be serious." Sy held all the pain he was feeling.

She had no choice but to make him believe she was serious.

"Why? I was just as curious as to what the sexy, talented, mysterious club owner Sylus De Gauls had to offer, like all the other women." She turned to look at him, putting her serene business mask in place. "You were a challenge, a way for me to face my biggest fear. If I could conquer the heart of the most elusive bachelor in Las Vegas, then I could conquer my fear of men in general."

"Then why can't you look me in the eyes and say this?" He asked.

She ignored his question. "You taught me that I was right. With this pretty face and desirable body, I could easily manipulate the most seemingly aggressive men into being as docile as kittens. The key is, don't lose control of the situation and make them fall in love with you." She shrugged. "Actually, I hadn't expected you to be so easy."

"Are you through yet?" He asked, but this time she heard something strange in his voice.

Za took in a deep breath and turned to face him, her head cocked to the side.

"Sy, *we* are through. I rocked your world and got off on snaring you and here you are, ready to set up house." *Forgive me*, her heart cried and she struck the final blow.

"Now, all the mystery is gone for the both of us, I'm not the damsel in distress that you thought I was and a creature, like you, sure ain't my hero."

Sylus remained silent.

She succeeded. She got her way; she was independent and could continue to live life her way. So why was she so miserable?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Sylus felt sucker-kicked in the stomach. How could things go so wrong so fast? He knew they couldn't have. She was lying; he could read her like a lie detector, now that he knew all of her scents. She loved him and desired him as much as she did last night. Why was she deliberately pushing him away? Did the aging thing truly bother her so much that she would put on this show for him?

"You can stop now; it's not working." The rich timbre of his voice held a silken thread of warning.

"What'd you mean?" She raised an eyebrow when he didn't answer.

Sy didn't take his eyes off her as he moved closer, raking his fingers through a swathe of waxen hair tucking it behind his ear. "Don't even try to play this game with me, Zaza," he stated. "You love me."

"I'm not playing games." Tensing, she took a step back. "Also, I didn't mean it when I said it." He watched her tongue as it darted across her lips nervously.

"Don't do this, Za." He scowled, his eyes shadowed dangerously. "I will not allow you to run from your feelings."

"If you truly love me you will end this, now...please," she begged.

He saw she was blinking rapidly as if to prevent new tears from brimming over in her eyes. He cupped her face in his hands. "I will not. I cannot and, if you love me at all, you won't ask it of me."

"Sy, I made it clear from the beginning." She worried her bottom lip. "I don't do relationships."

"That was before me." Smiling from ear to ear, he ran a fingertip caressingly along her jaw, tilting up her chin for a brief kiss.

Sy looked directly in her eyes. His stare was full of open vulnerability. She shook her head. "You know how arrogant that sounds."

"Why, because I can be as blunt as you just were?" He chuckled. "You should go into the field of acting. I almost believed you. *Almost*, but not quite."

"Sy, please don't. You must let me go."

"I will not. I am exactly what you need in your life. Trust me. I of all people know what it feels like to need to be in control. I promise, Za, I'm not trying to take your independence from you, but you must respect that I protect the people I love and there is a threat to your well-being."

Releasing a whoosh of exasperation, Za moved to the other side of the room, her arms wrapped protectively over her breasts.

"If you truly understand this about me, why can't you understand that we need to put a stop to this before it gets out of hand? Before one or both of us ends up hurt or dead."

"Dead?" Sylus scowled. "Has this person on the phone actually said they would kill you?"

He closed the space between them and felt her tense as his arms went around her waist. He ignored her mild protest and pulled her against his naked body.

"I don't want to discuss this anymore. I'm starving. We never ate dinner and it's probably dried out in the warmer."

"Then I'll take you out for the biggest and best breakfast you've ever had, but we are resolving this right now," Sy argued.

"*Damn it, Sylus!*"

"Okay, enough." Sylus said sternly. "If you can look me in the eye and truly tell me that my loving you, and you loving me, is not something you wish to explore, I will let you go." He softly, traced a path along her neck, his hand slipping inside the toga-styled bed sheet to massage her bare abdomen.

Za made a little whimpering sound of distress. Or was it her giving in? She arched her neck back against his shoulder to allow full access of his exploring fingers.

"You get under my skin, woman; making me speak romantic emotional foolishness," he murmured and languidly caressed the side of one of her breasts.

He felt the moment she gave over to his touch. She only remained standing because of his hand between her thighs, the other at her breast, and his body, which pressed cleverly against the back of her sheet-clad buttocks kept her from buckling.

"Can you really walk away from this feeling?" He nuzzled her neck and nibbled a line from ear to shoulder, and then back again. "I don't give a damn about your beauty," he confided.

She moaned as she spoke. "Of course you do. All men do."

"No, baby," he whispered hotly against the shell of her ear. "I have seen and slept with many beautiful women. Yet I found you and your untamed hair, your face streaked with tears the most beautiful of all. I knew at that moment I wanted share my life with you and replace all the memories that frightened with happier ones, full of love and laughter."

His hand massaged against her slick and thick labia.

Za licked her lips slowly. "I can't think clearly with you touching me like this...mmm."

"I believe you trust me Za, or you wouldn't have chanced my anger the way you have this

morning.” Sy spoke softly between nibbling the side of her neck.

He heard her breath hitch in the back of her throat as he continued to stroke her with heartfelt tenderness. He swallowed hard, trying to manage his own overeager libido. He started touching her to make a point, but because of his own painful erection, she wasn’t the only one that could no longer think clearly.

Reluctantly, he removed his wondering hands from her body with a heavy sigh and took a step away. “As much as I want to make love to you, I can’t do so in good conscience, knowing there is a chance I’m wrong, and you really don’t love me.”

Za swore softly in frustration. She turned to look at him askance.

Sy felt vulnerable and exposed under her stare. He saw her eyes taking in his blood-darkened erection. She was the one wasting their time together by fighting destiny. No he would stand firm until she was willing to give him her heart, body, and soul or it wasn’t worth all that he was willing to give up to be with her. He knew Za physically desired him, but he wanted more from her.

As she looked up into his face, her eyes grew wide.

“What is it?” He inquired.

“I can see by looking at your penis, you want me too, so why did you stop?” She reached out and touched his face.

“Because sex isn’t enough. I need you to love me Zaza,” he confessed. With all the emotions he was feeling, Sy turned his lips into her hand and closed his eyes, placing a kiss to her opened palm. He sensed the moment she gave in.

“Okay, let’s get all this other business out of the way, then we can concentrate on *our future*, together.” Za whispered to him. He opened his eyes and saw a love there that matched his own. Silently, he shook his head in agreement; it was a beginning.

“You get ready to go out for breakfast and I will arrange for a driver today. I thought about it and decided to move the meeting with Selby’s supposed mother, Vivian Samuels, to a private dining room at Shanghai 1930 Restaurant over on Steuart Street. That is if it’s alright with you.”

“I think that will be a great idea.” She shook her head. “You think she will even agree to meet us?”

Sylus took Za’s hands in his. “It depends on if she is indeed the woman Darius was searching for and if she is...is she interested in finding the child she gave away?”

“We mustn’t let on about who her daughter is. I want to see if this bitch would want to meet her daughter even if she wasn’t a big star.” She shot him a glare. “We have to think about what’s

best for Selby and her career.”

“I agree.” He had to smile at that. Through all the vulnerable times he had spent with her lately, he forgot that she was also a savvy businesswoman, a fighter, and very protective of her friendship with Selby.

She lifted an eyebrow in question. “Why are you grinning at me like that?”

“I’m smiling mainly because you said ‘we’ and, you know what? I like it.” His heart tightened and with deep emotion, “Is that how you really see us or are you just trying to appease me for the moment?”

“Yes,” she nodded and returned his smile. “To both.” Her honest frankness was most welcomed after the scare she just gave him. He thought he had lost her before they started.

“How about afterwards? If you like, we can stay at the restaurant a bit and I can introduce you to some of my friends. They are exceptional jazz musicians.” He released the hold on one of her hands and started walking towards the bed.

“I think we should come back here and get ready to return home before Selby--”

“Come on,” he interrupted. “Zaza Draper, music executive extraordinaire. You can’t tell me meeting some of this city’s best musicians doesn’t intrigue you?” He teased. “I will even let you bring along some of those fancy business card of yours as long as you give them out strictly for business.”

“*Let me?*” she repeated. “You must be crazy.” She smacked her lips and rolled her eyes.

Sylus chuckled and bent to place a quick peck to her mouth. Sylus walked towards the bedroom door.

“Where are we going?” She asked. Her gaze tender and curious. He halted at the door; his thumb traced the fullness of her lips. “*We* aren’t going anywhere. You’re going to hustle your sweet sexy ass across the hall and get dressed before we spend another day put this woman off.”

Wrapping both arms around her waist, he tugged her against his hard body and sighed as she nuzzled her face against his chest. Her arms wrapped around his waist and his heart thundered loudly in his ears; he could only imagine what she was hearing pressed against him.

He groaned. “By the gods, I don’t want to let you out of my sight for a moment.”

“I don’t know about you but even though I’m hungry I could use some more sleep.” She tilted her head back and he became loss in the smoldering look of her eyes; her wide slow smile hit him straight in the groin and he groaned once more. “Don’t send me away. Sleep with me...just a couple of hours?”

He leaned his head to the side. “I can’t. I want you too badly and it will defeat the purpose of

going back to bed to...*sleep*."

She looked at him from beneath sweeping lashes, "I want you, too, and I know I'm ready for anything, now."

He shook his head. "Not until I know that you accept my terms. We all stay together until the threat has subsided, then we discuss our future."

Sy saw the sadness in her eyes and suspected she was about to say something he didn't want to hear. He placed a hand over her mouth to stop her from speaking.

"Don't think I didn't notice that you threw me a bone, but you didn't agree to let me keep you safe. I can't love you only under your limited conditions. I want you to want more from me and I deserve more than you're offering."

"I love you and I want to make love to you. Nothing else matters," she said passionately. She reached up and tried to bring his face to hers for a kiss. He didn't budge.

"No, Za, it matters...to me. Can you tell me that you let me care for you to the best of my abilities? No, don't say anything right now. I noticed you never say anything you don't mean; that is, until this morning. This morning, you hurt me like no one else is capable of."

"I don't mean to hurt you, Sy."

"Still, that's exactly what you did and if I had let you get away with it, you wouldn't be inviting me to return to bed right now. You would have been walking out of my life." He paused looking her straight in the eyes.

"Sweetheart, take this time I'm giving you, to reflect deeply because I'm going to declare my devotion to you once again. When I do, if you snub my love and my desire to protect you once more, I will not stick around to make you see reason. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Bleakly she nodded. He dipped his head and kissed her passionately, before easing her out the door and closing it.

"I hope I don't regret this," he mumbled making his way across the bedroom towards the dressing room. He needed a shower...a very cold one.

Shanghai 1930 Restaurant

Za smile up at Sy as he placed his warm hand on the small of her back. With ease, he ushered her through a vivid entryway, down some stairs, opening into a world that seemed as if it was stuck in the past.

The live sounds of jazz quickly put her in the mood for dancing. She couldn't help but sway to the irresistible tempo of the music as they waited for the hostess. As if he couldn't resist the urge

to touch her, she felt Sy pressing against her back; his hands rested on her hips as he leaned down to whisper in her ear.

“Did I tell you how lovely that white dress you’re wearing, looks against your skin?”

“Only about fifty times since I stepped out of the bedroom,” she answered his question.

His laugh was deep, warm and catching. “I must be slipping; you deserved at least fifty more before we reached our destination.”

Za wasn’t listening she was too busy eyeing the woman seated at the long blue bar. Now just weeks ago she would have noticed the woman as a potential lover, but today she lifted a questioning brow wondering why she was eyeballin’ her man a little bit too openly.

In all fairness, when she opened her bedroom door and saw Sylus standing there in navy pinstriped trousers tailored to fit his tight derriere to perfection, a white silk shirt tucked in, with a thin silver buckled belt and a solid navy blue blazer. All she could think was he looked good enough to lick.

His platinum-colored hair was brushed off his forehead into a loose braid and from his ears hung petite white gold hoops.

To her surprise he remembered her mentioning him piercing his ears and she suspected he reopened his piercing himself.

Even though she cringed at the thought, he looked as roguishly sexy as she knew he would. Her kiss told him how much she had appreciated his efforts to please her. She was going to have to watch her comments around him in the future because he obviously was making it his life’s mission to grant her every wish.

Hell, yeah, he’s fine, and he’s all mine, bitch. She thought giving the woman one of her most evil looks before leaning against Sy’s chest to look up at him smelling the faint, spicy scent of his after-shave. She pretended to wipe something from his chin so she could touch him and let the other woman see her.

“Za, what are you up too?” Sy asked leaning down to nip at her bottom lip with his teeth.

When he pulled back this time she had a real reason to touch him as she wiped her lipstick from his lower lip.

“Nothing, just marking my territory for all these predatory women up in here, that can’t take their eyes off of you,” she answered honestly.

His eyes grew wide at her confession. Then he laughed quietly.

Za wasn’t laughing. She was a bit stunned by her own jealous thoughts. Considering she had never experienced jealousy over anyone except Selby.

A few times she went out with her gorgeous male buddies just so she could seduce the beautiful women they reeled towards the table. There was nothing like making out with a straight woman who was enjoying her first female on female experience.

Never before has she been troubled over who was looking at her male friends but this was something completely different. These new emotions were definitely going to take some getting use to.

As if reading her confused thoughts Sy gave her a slow, sexy wink before stepping forward with a smile and exchanged firm handshakes with an attractive Asian gentleman who rushed forward to greet them.

“Welcome...welcome...Sylus, it’s been awhile. I hope you plan on sitting in with the jazz trio tonight.”

“We’ll see.” Sylus turned and brought Za forward. “George Chen, I want you to meet *the* special woman in my life, Zaza Draper...George Chen.”

“Lovely. You are most welcomed, Ms. Draper.”

Za smiled and thanked him as he bended over her hand a couple of time with a flourished bow.

“Your usual private dining room is ready, Sy. This way, please.” Chen beamed.

Sy reached out and clutched at her hand as they moved through the flow of bodies. Za took in the old Shanghai elegance of the restaurant area while Sy and George discussed their respective restaurant businesses, lapsing between English and Chinese with the ease of longtime friends.

Red high-back dining chairs, white cloth-covered tables heavy with fine china, sparkling wine glasses, silverware, and delicate tea candles in crystal holders added to the intimacy of the surroundings.

George stopped at the golden draperies holding them aside allowing Sy and Za to precede him into the secluded dining area.

“I understand there will be another party joining you. Will we be seeing Darius this evening too?”

“No, as you may know, Darius is in the midst of wedding plans in Las Vegas. We are, however, expecting a Mrs. Vivian Samuels to join us; if you would look out for her, it would be appreciated.”

“Of course...of course.” George assured him with a pat on his shoulder. “I did received my wedding invitation and offered my assistance. Darius wasn’t hearing it of course.”

Sylus nodded and chuckled. “My friend has waited a long time for this and I couldn’t be

happier with his choice. Selby is a wonderful woman, wait until you meet her.”

George leaned towards Sy and whispered loudly because Za could hear him perfectly, “You’ve never escorted a woman here to meet us before. Dare I say this is serious?”

Za held her breath waiting for Sy’s answer. She didn’t have to wait long.

“Definitely, if I have any say in the matter,” Sy replied glancing at Za, bringing her knuckles to his lips for a kiss.

“Okay, gentlemen, I believe we are getting ahead of ourselves. After all this is only our official first date, kind of.” She grinned, even though the satisfaction at hearing his answer to George Chen flowed from her heart down to her toes.

Silently she prayed that somehow the prospect of an actual future together would be a probability. She could only be hopeful considering the verbal threats, the aging issue, and Quintan possible opposition of the union. The accumulative odds definitely were against them.

She took a seat in the chair Sy was holding out for her. She was feeling a bit nervous about meeting Selby’s “mother”, but she was ready to get it over with one way or the other.

“We will wait a bit on taking your order. Would you like to pick out a wine choice out of our Wine Room? I know how picky you are about your wines, my friend.”

Sy laughed.

Za smiled secretly. Along with finding out Sy was a Satyr, she found out the reason he drank wine frequently and without any aftereffect. For those of his kind, wine was the nectar they needed to sustain life, such as water was necessary for humans.

It still amazed her that this gorgeous man sitting beside her housed such a secret.

“Za, would you like to go and taste the wonderful selections?” Sy asked her, stretching his arm across the back of her seat, his long fingers caressing the nape of her neck.

Za licked her lips, not sure she could speak while he was touching her. She just longed to close her eyes and lean into his calming touch. “Mmm...no, you’re the wine expert, I will let you choose.”

Without taking his eyes from her mouth, “George, why don’t you send in a bottle of 1961 Chateau Latour to start us off and we will await our guest to see if she prefers something else with the meal.”

“Great! Enjoy your evening” George inclined his head to each of them in turn. “If I don’t get the opportunity to speak to the both of you before you leave, it was a pleasure meeting you, Ms. Draper--”

“Za, please,” she interjected, slightly inclining her head. “Nice to meet you also, Mr. Chin.”

“George.” He gave her a warm grin. Turning his attention to Sylus, “Don’t be away so long the next time, my friend. Enjoy!” He sauntered from the private dining room, releasing the curtains to cocoon them in an intimate womb of intimate warmth.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” She enjoyed the way his fingers combed the hair tapered to a point on the back of her neck.

His grin flashed briefly, dazzling to behold. “I was contemplating if I had enough time to crawl beneath the table, tear off your panties, and have desert first.”

Za’s chin nearly hit the floor. Oh, damn. She studied him, as if questioning whether he was serious or not. Either way, she wasn’t sure how to respond and was grateful when she didn’t have to. The curtain parted and a wine server entered through the curtain with their order on ice.

Quietly, she looked at the man she loved as he chatted and joked with the waiter while he filled his glass. Sy sniffed and tested the contents of the bottle before nodding to fill her glass with the dark red wine.

Za looked away from Sy’s questioning eyes. She was astonished at the sense of fulfillment she felt. Being with Sy in a social setting felt like a real date. It was almost as if they were two normal people, without a care in the world.

He made her dream of how the rest of her life could be with him by her side. But she was in a fix. Could she ignore the outside interferences and take a gamble on their future or was tonight leading up to what would be the end of their moment together?

“Za?” He touched her hand. His dark, earnest eyes sought hers. “Where did you go?”

She snapped out of her reverie and realized they were alone again. She tried to smile to reassure him, but she couldn’t. She was torn between wanting a life with him, and yet, not wanting the complications that came with it.

“Can I ask you a question and you be completely honest with me?” She asked.

“Always.” He gave her a smile that sent her pulses racing.

A half-smile crossed her face. “If I were to tell you I wanted to spend the rest of my life with you, how do we get past the issue that I’ll grow old and you won’t? Because when the years start to show on my face, and they will,” she sighed. “We won’t be able to come back here or anywhere else in public that we had frequented as a young couple, would we?”

“I wish I could tell you no one would notice, but that would be a lie.” The look on his face mingled tenderness and sadness.

“Darius and I have lost many mortal friends we’d come to care for. When they started to age and we start hearing comments about how we were managing to stay so youthful, you know it’s time

to move on.”

“You never looked back?” She frowned.

“Of course we do, sweetheart.” He squeezed her hand. “Usually after 30 years or so, we can reappear as our own sons or grandsons. It works. With time memories fade and--“

He halted and she knew what he was going to say. “People die,” she finished for him.

Sy bristled. “What if there might be a chance that I could become mortal? Would that make a difference in how you’re feeling?”

Za’s eyes grew wide. “Really? How?” She caught herself. “Wait, that means you will be giving up your chance of having a long life. Sy, I can’t let you do that. Not for me.”

“It’s my choice to make, Za, not yours,” he said bluntly.

Za was about to argue the point when the curtain parted again and at first glance she thought it was the beautiful and elegant jazz singer Nancy Wilson, before she realized it must be Vivian Samuels. If Za had any doubt, she lost it looking into the woman’s soulful brown eyes. They were Selby’s eyes.

Za watched as Sy came to his feet with a smile and an outstretched hand. “Mrs. Samuels, I’m happy you could join us.”

Vivian Samuels looked at his hand with a lifted brow, ignoring his greeting and his hand. She moved into the room followed by a tall, handsome, and impressively suited black man. Her shrewd eyes moved to Za, and she scowled.

“Just what I thought, Walter, another con job. This woman is not my daughter.”

“No, I ‘m not.” Za spoke for the first time. She stood. “Hello, I’m Zaza Draper, a friend of the woman I suspect is your daughter, and this is my companion Sylus de Gauls, whom you rudely ignored.” Her brow lifted and a smile came to her lips.

“Now, if you will introduce the gentleman, who we were not expecting, maybe we can start this meeting over.” Sy suggested.

The woman at least had the decency to look abashed. “I apologize, Mr. de Gauls.”

“Call me Sy, please.” he smiled. “It’s understandable that you would be cautious about such a private matter.”

The older woman nodded in agreement managing a half smile.

“Hello, I am Mrs. Samuels, attorney. Walter Gray.”

Za looked away from the man towering over Vivian and about a head shorter than Sy, as he locked his appraising gray eyes on her. Sylus moved in front of her as if blocking the man’s view.

“Sylus de Gauls...Zaza Draper,” Sy made the introduction once again. Shaking the lawyers

hands a bit longer than necessary to be considered friendly, by Za's estimation.

"Mrs. Samuels, gentleman, maybe we should sit down and look over the menus," Za suggested as the silent tension grew. It took all her will not to fidget under the woman's intent glare.

Why is she looking at me like that? She wondered.

"I will have them set up another plate setting for our... unexpected guest." Sy gave Walter a dirty look as he spoke the words.

"Sylus, why don't you that, *right now?*" He looked at her and she gave him a narrowed warning look. He snorted out a laugh and winked, opening the curtains letting them fall behind him as he stepped out.

Za let out a long sigh open with Sylus gone it would relieve some of the tension long enough for everyone to settle down. When Walter spoke she realized she was wrong.

"Interesting...boyfriend...uh...friend you have there, *my sista*." Walter Gray was the next to speak, causing Za to glance his way.

He wore a black expensive suit with a black and baby blues paisley silk tie that matched his pale blue shirt to perfection. His black hair tapered neatly above his collar with pointed-edged sideburns and goatee emphasized his sexy full lips and square jaw line. He smiled at her and a deep dimple appeared beside his mouth.

She would admit the man is fine, but he wasn't Sy. "He is a very interesting man, Mr. Gray." Za gave him a breathtaking smile. "That's why I love him...*my brotha*."

He shrugged his broad shoulders in mock resignation and smirked. "It's like that for you?"

"Enough, Walter, this is not why we are here." Vivian Samuels spoke up without looking up from her menu.

Sy returned and she knew by staring at the loving and tender look on his face, he had heard what she said to Gray. She feared he was about to kiss her right there as he took his seat beside her, placing his arm on the back of her chair. She didn't think she could handle a kiss from him without making a fool of her self by desiring more.

Za was amazed that Sy had become so important to her so fast. She could feel her face flushing and the warmth raced across her bare shoulders in her strapless dress. She lifted her menu and hid her face behind it as she felt Sy's fingers casually ease her dress up her thigh beneath the table. The silky material felt wonderfully sinful against her hot, sensitive skin.

She was grateful for the distraction of the waiter setting up a place setting for Walter Gray. It gave her the chance to pinch the top of Sy's hand under the table. He smiled and continued to look at the waiter and added helpful suggestions of things to try on the menu. Za wondered how he could be

so cool. Sexy-ass bastard, she would make him pay for this later.

Once the waiter left with their order in hand, the silence between them didn't last long.

"Ms. Draper, before I have my attorney call the police and have the both of you arrested for this extortion plot, I want to know what kind of woman are you to go along with such a scheme."

"Mrs. Samuels--" Sylus intervene the anger evident in his tone.

"I'm not talking to you at the moment, Mr. de Gauls. I'm speaking to this young lady, who claims to be friends with my supposed "daughter" whom she thinks I gave away at birth."

"Are you saying you *didn't* have a child over thirty years ago that you *didn't* give a damn about and ditched her in an orphanage while living in Alabama?" Za asked bluntly, feeling there was no more need for civility. Vivian had taken her gloves off first.

"Well, obviously, young lady, you already know I had a baby during my stay in Alabama all those years ago or you wouldn't have come up with this blackmail scheme." Vivian accused. "What? Did you found out I'm, on the city council and several prestigious boards and that I come from a wealthy family; not to mention I'm the widow of an honorable surgeon! Do you genuinely believe you can extort money from me to keep my personal business private and I not fight back?"

"Now wait one damn minute, old woman, you are *so* wrong." Za leaned towards her, her eyes cold. "We haven't asked you for any money, so you haven't been extorted! We also didn't threaten you to bring your uppity ass down here; we asked you to meet with us. Hell, if we were trying to get money from you would we treat you to this fancy restaurant?"

"Za..." Sylus grasped her arm and she yanked it away. There was no stopping her now.

"Look, you didn't have to come and you don't have to stay and for the record, I have a seven figure bank account and this man," Za pointed at Sylus. "That you and your lawyer friend have done nothing but disrespected, could probably buy your dead husband a *couple* of hospitals!"

Za hadn't realized she was standing and towering over the table yelling at the woman until Sy put a comforting hand on her back and stood. "Baby, calm down, it's okay." He kissed her brow and helped her back into her chair, turning his unreadable gaze on Vivian Samuels. He spoke in a calm, apologetic voice.

"I'm sorry we have bothered you, Mrs. Samuels; if you didn't give away the daughter you had years ago, then obviously we made a grievous mistake. I would hope that we can let this past and at least enjoy dinner together, since we all are here."

To Za's stunned disbelief and sudden embarrassment, Vivian's eyes watered and tears fell silently over her cheeks, leaving streaks in her perfectly powdered face.

"I only wished I had given her away. Then I'd know there was a chance she was still alive,"

she admitted. "That baby was all I had left of my first love. Jefferson was killed in Vietnam...he didn't even know I was pregnant; it must have happened during our first and last time together." She smiled sadly. "Against my father's wishes, I accepted his proposal and after Jefferson died I had no choice but to do my father's bidding. I had no skills, no money of my own. So, he sent me to my great-aunt's farm in Alabama, so I wouldn't disgrace to my family's name. "

"Your baby?" Za asked softly.

"I carried my baby full term, and back then it wasn't unusual for the doctor to come to your home. I must've fainted or it could have been the shot the shot gave me to help the pain. All I know, is I woke up asking for my baby. They told me it was a girl and she was stillborn," Vivian sobbed.

Za put a hand over hers resting on the table, while Sylus offered her a glass of wine and handed her a cloth table napkin.

Amazing enough Walter, remained quiet during the entire incident, but now he patted her back softly yet appeared to be feeling awkward about the entire situation. None of them felt they had words that could ease the older woman's pain.

Za had felt so sure this woman was Selby's mother after looking in her eyes, and the look she had when she was angry also reminded her of Selby. How is it possible if the woman's child was born dead?

"Mrs. Samuels, Vivian, I am so sorry. Sylus and I had not intended to hurt you in any way. It's just my friend is about to marry the love of her life and her fiancée wanted to surprise her. To unite her with her birth mother. Obviously, his investigator has made a big mistake and I apologize for the way I spoke to you and for putting through this entire ordeal."

"Thank...thank you." The older woman sniffled. "You don't know how much I wished it was me, when you called about this, but it's just not possible."

"It must have been so hard to see your unmoving child after carrying it full term. That has to be horrible." Za empathized.

"I didn't." Vivian said dabbling the tears away with the napkin.

"Didn't what?" Za asked lightly frowning in confusion.

"I didn't get to see her. When I regained conscious, everything had been handled. They didn't want it to be harder on any more than necessary. I became hysterical, because I wanted to see her. I should have had the right to count her finger and toes. To see if she looked like me or Jefferson, or maybe a bit of us both."

Vivian released a shuddering sigh. "They finally had to sedate me because I was grieving so. Even now, I can barely remember the small graveside service with my aunt and my parents. The

next thing I knew, I was home again and everyone was pretending like it never happened, like she never existed.”

“What did you name your baby?”

“I called her Baby Jefferson after her father while I was pregnant. I thought I was having a boy ‘cause old folks said I was carrying high.” She chuckled as if remembering happier times.

“The headstone says Baby Jefferson. I was just seventeen, in shock over losing the man I loved, and the only thing I had that was a part of him. I just wanted to die with them.” She looked down at her hands she had moved in her lap, twisting the napkin.

“I know this isn’t easy, you don’t have to...”

“I’ve been married three times,” Vivian said looking Za in the eyes. “You know, none of them has ever felt right. I don’t know if Jefferson was the love of my life, but no matter how many times I marry, I’ve never felt completed. My last husband was older and worshiped me, that was enough.”

Za glanced up at Sy and noticed his guarded expression. She wondered if Vivian’s feelings had something to do with the Nymph thing Sy tried to explain to her. It would stand to reason that if Selby were a descendent, her mother would be, too. Yet, that wouldn’t apply to Vivian, seeing how Selby wasn’t her daughter...but what if...no, it couldn’t be. Could Vivian’s family have been that cruel?

Za had to ask; it just didn’t seem right to not give a new mother the chance to see her own child and say goodbye.

“Vivian,” Za hesitated. “Where in Alabama was your daughter born?”

“A small nowhere town, population about three hundred people.” She smiled sadly, sniffing. “Oh, you’ve probably never even heard of it. It’s such a God awful backwoods place called Selby...Selby, Alabama.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Za looked over to Sy. "Baby, why don't you take Mr. Gray to the wine room and let him choose us a white wine to compliment the Peking duck?"

"Any wine will do, I'm sure," Walter piped in.

"Gray, either you're simply playing obtuse, or you can't take a hint." Sy sighed and shook his head at the lawyer. "That was Za's polite way of asking us to get lost so she can speak woman to woman with Mrs. Samuels."

Za saw Walter Gray had the decency to appear abashed, but he still wasn't moving.

"I don't answer to you or her. I..."

"You, answer to me, Walter. Leave me and Ms. Draper alone for a moment, please." Vivian Samuels turned her red-rimmed eyes on her lawyer.

"Mrs. Samuels, I must advise against this," Walter said stoically, rising from his seat.

"I have been advised," Vivian replied. "Now, go."

Sylus grinned and put his arm around Walter's shoulder. "Gray, this will give me a chance to tell you what happened to this guy I knew who pushed up on another man's woman while he was out of the room--"

"Sy, behave," Za called out and rolled her eyes at Vivian. "Men can be such boys sometimes."

"You telling me?" The older woman chuckled, causing Za's grin to turn into laughter.

"Mrs. Samuels--"

"Vivian, please." She narrowed her eyes reflectively. "I'm sorry. I know I have been staring at you, but I keep thinking we might have met before. Are you kin to the Drapers of Georgia?"

Za lashes fluttered in surprise. "Uh, no, I don't believe so."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, actually, no." Za answered truthfully. "You see, I lost my parents at an early age and I was put into a county orphanage. It's where I met...Selby Maison."

Vivian hit the table. "That's it!" She laughed out. "Now I know why you look so familiar to me."

"Huh?" Za was completely confused, her heart beating ninety to nothing. Did this woman have a clue as to what she was trying to lead up to? Obviously not.

"Two years ago, Atlanta Georgia." Vivian smiled. "It was at the Black Business Women of America Convention luncheon. We didn't actually meet, of course, but I sit on the West Coast

Branch Board and you were one of our guest speakers. One of your most known clients, Selby Maison, did us the honor by performing. Such a lovely and talented woman; both of you are.”

“Thank you.”

“My, what a small world,” Vivian interrupted; her face now had a wistful smile on her lips. “I apologize for my earlier accusations, if I hadn’t been so upset by your call and the situation, bringing up all the old memories. I would have known who you were right away and realized this wasn’t a hoax.”

“I’m sorry, but there just was no good way to approach such a thing.” Leaned over and placed a comforting hand over the older woman’s hand. “Vivian, I understand how this may be hard to believe and, of course, test would need to be done...”

Za saw the smile drift from her mouth, her eyes widening as if she already knew what she was leading up to. “Zaza, what are you trying to say? I figured we’re alone for a reason, so please, be blunt.”

Za licked her dry lips. “I believe that my best friend and client Selby Maison, is your biological daughter.”

Vivian pulled her hand from beneath Za’s hand. “Please, don’t say such things. I know my daughter is dead.”

“Vivian, I have reason to believe the doctor, and your family lied to you. Maybe because they felt they were doing the right thing since your baby’s father was no longer alive. My God, who knows why? You said so yourself, you never got to hold or see your baby. So doesn’t that leave the possibility?”

“Do...do you have proof...real proof? Because you are slandering my father’s good name with this...this--” Vivian’s voice blustered and faded into a sob.

“Sylus has a file from the investigator. There is a trail that leads us to you. Still I can’t be sure until a DNA test has been performed.”

Za poured some more of the chilled wine into Vivian’s glass and encouraged her to drink, helping her to hold the glass since her hands were shaking so badly.

“Vivian, I started to believe there was a possibility that we were wrong and you weren’t the woman we’ve been looking for, but you have to admit it’s a bit odd that my friend would have the name of the town your baby was born in.”

“This is madness.”

“I know it must seem that way Vivian, but what if the orphanage they placed your baby girl in as an infant named her after the place in which she was born?”

Za paused and when the other woman remained quiet, she continued. "You got to at least be curious to know if this is a possibility."

"I don't know what to think at this moment." The tears began to flow once more and Vivian dabbed with the napkin she still held clutched in her fingers. "If this is true, it changes everything I thought was real about my family...my life...Oh, God!"

"I understand and truly I'm not trying to turn your world upside down. We haven't even told Selby yet, because we want to be true and to know why her mother gave her up before Darius sprung this on her."

"So how are we going to do this and keep her from knowing? I wouldn't dare want the poor girl to go through what I'm going through," she cried. "To...to have all these feelings of hope...and what if it is true...I would have to explain it to my children."

"Selby's fiancé, Darius has already taken care of it. They went to a doctor, who is a friend of Darius managed to get what was necessary during her regular checkup." Za explained.

Vivian nodded and released a long resolved sigh. "Here is my private number." She reached in her purse and removed one of her personal business cards, handing it to her. "Call me and tell me when and where and I'll be there."

Za quietly wondered at Sylus's perfect timing as he and Walter walked back into the private dining room. Was it luck or his Satyr senses?

Seeing Vivian was still visibly upset, Walter rushed forward. "Are you alright?"

"We will discuss everything later, Walter." Vivian pushed herself away from the table. "If everyone would excuse me, I need to use the ladies' room to freshen up."

"Of course," Sy leaned out the curtain and waved a waiter over to their private room. "Please show Mrs. Samuels to the ladies' room and upon her return we will be ready to be served."

"Excuse me, I think I will do the same," Walter mumbled, following on the heels of Vivian and the waiter.

Seeking the warmth of his comfort, Za leaned over and wrapped her arms around Sy's neck as soon as he sat back down in his seat. "Oh, baby, that was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do."

"I know, sweetheart." He crooned against her ear. She loved the feel of his big warm hands stroking up and down her back. Already she was beginning to relax in his sweet embrace. "It had to be done. But my instincts tell me we have found Selby's mother."

"Yes, I believe that, too, but you know it has to be confirmed. We can't afford to be wrong about this."

"I agree. I'll go ahead and make arrangements for the test so that I can carry the results back to Darius. The rest will be left to him. We have done our part, my love." He leaned in and kissed her lips.

Za pulled back, but he intertwined her fingers with his, not letting her put too much space between them.

"So I guess we can start packing to return home when we get back to the hotel and knowing you it won't take long to get her tested and the results in hand," Za smiled a closed lip smile. She wasn't sure she was ready to return to the real world yet. She knew Sy was still waiting on her answer about their moving in together.

"I will phone Darius tonight and tell him we will return on Monday so that will give us a few more days alone together. Would you like that?"

"Can we really? I don't know how much longer I can put Selby off," Za giggled. "She said the wedding planner was about to drive her crazy and she needed me to put her in check."

"Well, I'm sure a couple of days won't make a big difference, it's going into the weekend. I don't see why we can't return on Monday," he coaxed

This time she leaned in and kissed his lips. "I would love to spend the weekend with you, as long as your promise I can wait until we get home answer your question. Give me the weekend to pretend we are just two everyday people in love."

He grinned and as usual, his smile stole her breath away. "Aren't we?"

She snorted with raised brow. "I don't...think...so, mister." Za kissed him between each word.

"I'm starving," he announced.

"I am, too even though we did have a late big breakfast." Za said taking a sip of wine.

"Silly woman, I wasn't talking about food." Sy wiggled his brows and nibbled at the side of her throat and she moaned softly. A blush of embarrassment spread across her cheeks in a happy glow as Vivian came in with a serene understanding and knowing smile on her lips, her makeup beautifully reapplied. She was alone.

Sylus stood and moved to hold Vivian's chair out as she took her seat and thanked him. A server strolled up with a cart laden with food and began to place the contents on the table.

Za couldn't believe the feast they had ordered. All this for four people? Along with Peking duck, there was a wonderful fish dish embedded in a crunchy pastry covered in sweet red wine sauce. The potent aroma of thinly sliced smoked prawns with peppers and scallions in a red-pepper sauce, looked tasty but the pot stickers were really calling her name.

“Goodness me, everything smells so wonderful. I guess we can begin once Mr. Gray returns,” Za announced, taking another sip of wine after the server topped off fresh glasses with a new bottle of white wine before quietly exiting.

“Did I hear my name? Please, call me Walter. There is obviously no need for me to play lawyer anymore this evening and we can just enjoy our meal as friends,” he said with a friendly and open grin altering his face from attractive to drop-dead gorgeous.

Za’s chin dropped at the change and she glanced over at Sy, who was politely offering and serving Vivian before he smiled and said, “No worries, Walt. A man who knows his wines is a good man, in my book,” Sy complimented him with a nod. “You had me worried when you said any wine would do, earlier.”

“Well, no reason to let you know all my gifts from the get go,” Walter said raising his glass of the chosen white wine in salute, sniffing the contents, before sipping and rolling it around on his tongues, as Za had seen Sy do.

I can’t believe this. She thought. Walter Grey is being nice?

“Baby, hand me your plate so I can give you some of this excellent duck.” Sy interrupted her thoughts.

From that defining moment on, the remainder of the dinner was very pleasant. However, a few times Za had some eyebrow-raising moments of disbelief over how well Sy and Walter continued to get along, and how much they seemed to have in common.

As the meal was completed and the dishes cleared, they remained at the table enjoying the comfortable atmosphere and finished the wine that seemed to keep coming. Za finally had to place her hand over her glass to remind Sy she couldn’t handle the stuff as well as he could.

Wine was another reminder to her of their unusual differences, and it made her wonder about the future. When her thoughts turned melancholy, Sy appeared to sense her thought and massage the back of her neck. She decided to set aside all negative thoughts for now and wallow in the sureness of his love.

Za and Vivian laughed as the two men heatedly debated over who were considered the best jazz musicians. She looked at Vivian and shrugged, wishing she had been a fly on the wall when Sy and Walter went to the wine room. That must have been one man-to-man talk they had.

“Enough, gentlemen, it has been a long day for me. Albeit, a wonderful evening, but I need to call it a night.” Vivian moved to stand and Walter was out of his chair quickly, assisting.

Sy stood and took Za’s hand in his aiding her to stand, using it as an excuse to kiss her fingers and keep her hand nestled in his. “Za and I intended to go to the bar and enjoy a little jazz

music. Are you sure you wouldn't like to stay just a tad longer?"

"Please, do stay, Vivian...Walter." Za added her input. "Maybe you two can help me persuade Sy play for us tonight."

Sylus grinned at her. "I didn't bring any of my instruments, sweetheart."

"Instruments?" Vivian repeated, her head leaning to the side, intrigued.

"A couple," he stated.

"Sy's being modest, trust me. He plays at least three that I know of," Za lovingly bragged.

"When you look up at me with those beautiful eyes, how can I deny you anything." His smile was as intimate as a kiss.

"Aw, baby." Za stood up on her tiptoes to brush a kiss to his lips. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." His voice echoed her longings.

"I don't know, maybe we should go, it appears as if four is a crowd." Walter cleared his throat.

Za managed to tear her gaze from Sy's visual embrace to gaze at Walter and Vivian. "No, please, we would love to have you both stay for at least one song. I don't want to sit at the table alone. Please, say you'll stay."

Vivian chuckled. "Well, I'm intrigued to here this young man's talent for myself after that build-up."

"Now I'm going to have to work extra hard to impress everyone." Sylus moaned.

"You better impress me, man, because I'll definitely be the first to heckle you from the audience." Walter laughingly held the curtain back for everyone to exit.

On their way to the bar, Za took the chance to speak softly with Sy. "Well, handsome, that must have been some trip to the wine room. Walter has done a complete turnabout from when he first arrived."

"It's difficult for a man to hold a grudge with someone who just retained his services," he answered with quiet emphasis.

"Why? I would imagine you already have more than enough lawyers on retainers."

"I do, sweetheart, but business tends to give men a common bond, and it's a good place to start. Now he doesn't have to feel he has to save you from the big bad white man."

"You're so foolish." Za laughingly squeezed his hand in hers as they strolled along. "I don't care what he or anyone else thinks about us and you shouldn't either."

"I don't. However, I can understand the man being upset that someone as sophisticated and lovely as you are, is taken away before he even had the chance to know you existed. I think he would

have felt the same towards me, being the competition, even if I had been a black man,” Sy reasoned.

“So he understood, just like that?” Za asked, her eyes narrowing in doubt.

“Not really,” Sy paused and stepped aside, protectively gathering her to his side, to allow a group of others in more of a hurry to pass into the lounge.

He continued as they moved forward. “I spoke the truth, man to man. Walter is aware that you aren’t just any woman I’m passing the time with. I explained that you were *the only woman for me*. He recognized my sincerity. He was making sure that I wasn’t just trying to make a *black woman* my next conquest.”

“I appreciate the brotha looking out for me like that,” Za nodded with a grateful gaze behind her at Walter.

“I understood his reasoning but I told him to back off, because you didn’t need him looking after you. You are mine, Za, and I look after what’s mine.” Sylus stated before stepping to let Vivian and Walter enter the dark intimate lounge first. “You will never need another man to protect you. So after that I release his collar and hired him.”

“Sy, you had the man by the collar?” She asked following as the waitress ushered Vivian and Walter to a reserved table close to the small platform.

“He was understanding once I gave him a check to retain his services,” he said in an off-handed manner.

“Hold up a sec.” Za stopped in the middle of the floor tugging on his hand to halt him.

He groaned rolling his eyes. “I know what you’re going to say...” Sy bowed his head and sighed.

She could see he was bracing his shoulder for her anger at his Neanderthal tactics, but not this time. Sy’s abrasive protectiveness was a part of him and she loved him for who he was.

“So, Mister, you think you got me all figured out?” Za teasingly said backing Sy up against the first empty wall space she could find, which happen to be a wide column in the center of the room.

Of course he was indulging her otherwise, she wouldn’t have been able to budge his solid frame. She leaned into him, her face tilted towards his.

“I think that I could know you for a lifetime and still have much to discover, sweetheart,” he responded openly. “Za, one of the reasons I love you is because I’m never bored and I can depend on you to speak your mind, so let me have it.”

The smoldering flame she saw in his eyes urged her to be as bold as she was feeling.

“I’ll let you have it all right,” She threatened while wrapping her arms around his neck; her

hands splayed wide behind his head as she drew him down to press her lips enthusiastically against hers.

He moaned.

She moaned, too; she couldn't help herself as she felt her feet leaving the ground, dangling, as Sy lifted her flushed against his tall frame.

Za became lost in the texture of his open mouth under hers but somewhere in the kiss, she'd lost the initial advantage and he was now the aggressor with each assault of his tongue. She buried her fingers in his hair and extended the kiss.

Sounds of hooting encouragements and laughter erupted around them. Za laughed and buried her burning face in his jacket as he eased her back onto her trembling legs. She prayed she could make it over to the table that George had held for Sy and his party upon arrival.

"You two kids know how to make an entrance." Vivian was the first to speak.

"Yeah, get a room, you two," Walter teased as Za took the seat Sy pulled out for her.

"Don't be crass, Walter," Vivian said patting Za's hand with a motherly smile. "I know sometimes you just can't help yourself, can you dear? I always wished for a love like that."

Before Sy could take a seat, a waitress came up to take their order and give Sy a message from the trio. He nodded his pale head.

Za took his jacket as he shrugged out of it. The muscles of his body rippling beneath the material causing her already overheated senses to go into fantasy overload. She couldn't wait to get him back home this evening for more bed play.

"It's show time," he mumbled softly against her ear and gave her a quick peck on the mouth.

Sylus stepped up to the piano and took a seat. He adjusted the microphone and closed his eyes feeling the anticipation in the room. Reaching further to hear Zaza's breathing, then her heartbeat. The tempo was set.

Opening his eyes he spoke into the microphone. "As some of you may have noticed upon my entrance, there is a very special woman that I have been blessed to have met." He glanced where Za was sitting. He could see her smiling looking thoroughly embarrassed.

"The reason I love her is because I'm an ass and she still loves me," he mused. "You can't imagine how many lifetimes I lived waiting on this woman."

The audience chuckled collectively not realizing he was serious.

Za blew him a kiss and placed a hand over her heart. He was happy; as long as she knew he spoke the truth he didn't care if others thought he was joking.

“Even though I told her how I feel, I don’t think there are words that could express my love for her better than music.”

He looked down at the piano keys, not because it was necessary, but because he didn’t want to make a complete emotional fool of himself as he felt tears well within his eyes. Who knew this love stuff could be energizing one moment and draining the next?

‘Fore the gods, I want to feel this way for the rest of my life. Don’t take her from me, please. He said a silent prayer.

Sy cleared his throat; leaning to the side of the mic, he gave the trio: a base player, a drummer, and tenor saxophonist instructions.

“Key of G, fellas. I’ll play the first eight bars; go with the flow and jump in when you feel it.” He smiled and nodded his thanks.

Returning to the mic. “While she was sleeping last night I worked this song up in my head. I call it, *Susan’s Soulful Sonata*.”

“Who’s Susan?” Walter asked Zaza in confusion.

“A little girl I once knew,” Za spoke softly. Tears glistened in her eyes as she turned her attention back to Sylus as he started to play.

A hush grew over the lounge. The listeners became enthralled as if they were discovering something new, or at the very least, hearing something unmatched.

The energy in the lounge became something tangible. Sy’s fingers on the piano keys caressed, soothed, and nurtured something deep in every soul within hearing distance. Eight minutes later, there wasn’t a dry eye in the place when the last note struck and lingered.

Dead silence, except for a few loud snuffles.

Sylus felt as if he had run a split-second mile. He was spent; all the emotions and vulnerability he felt since meeting Zaza came out in the music.

He released Za’s tragic childhood, the newness of being in love for the first time, the anxiety of what the fates held for them, his worry about losing her, his phobia over losing his immortal bond with Darius, if he were to become mortal. He needed this release and he honed it all into his recital performance.

As if cued, the place erupted into unanimous applause and calls as individuals came to their feet. None of that was as important as him seeing Za making her way to him. She stepped up on the platform and stopped a few feet away from the piano bench, tears streaking down her face.

Neither could speak and it wasn’t necessary because they both already knew what the other was feeling, as if they were one soul.

Sy reached out and clasped her hand yanking her to him he wrapped his arms around her waist and held on as Za cradled his head against her breast. He was overwhelmingly happy, at least for a moment.

“Little brother, I’m here in San Francisco. Meet me at the corporate offices. We must discuss this grave impossibility of your being in love with a human female. I should have heard this nonsense from you!”

Sylus tensed as his brother’s stern voice touched his mind.

“Pray once we go before the council they don’t have me slay you on the spot for this madness! One hour, Sylus, not a minute later, and come alone!”

Sylus forcibly shut out the mental interruption of his older brother and held on tighter to Za. The fight begins.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Thoughtfully, Za pitched aside the demanding work her assistant express-mailed her. She wondered what kind of *business* would have caused Sylus to leave her alone and ruin the rest of their evening together.

What she had hoped would be a late night with Sy in bed was turning into an early evening with her reading over some *stupid* contracts! Za smiled remembering not to long ago business was her life and now that she had Sy, everything she thought was important seemed trivial.

Za scooted down in the bed and stretched her arms over her head. Kicking her feet against the mattress like an excited kid. Being in love really did feel wonderful.

Her body felt like liquid fire from the touch of his parting kiss. Oh God, the music he wrote for her healed her heart in ways no words ever could. He couldn't have chosen anything better to put her doubts to ease.

Za decided, as soon as he came back home, she hoped to show him how much she appreciated his talents with a few of her own. So far Sy had been doing all the giving emotionally and sexually. She was selfish, self-centered, and callous when it came to her relationships.

For once she desired to share her dreams with someone and she wanted to make him happy. She probably would have never known what this feeling was if it wasn't for Sylus.

He made her feel adored and fearless. She hadn't needed any pills to stave off the panic attacks. Maybe for once and all she would never need to take them again.

Za looked at the clock silently praying he would return soon or call. She couldn't wait to make him her lover in every way.

Once she and Sy consummate their love completely she would know for sure if she had conquered her fears, at least conquered it enough to be able to have a complete relationship. Once again, Za had a nagging feeling that whatever business he called Sy away from her side, had to do with her. Had Quintan finally arrived in town?

With a restless groan, Za threw off the cashmere throw she had over her legs and rolled off the bed.

Making her way across the bedroom, she entered the adjoining lavishly decorated bathroom, bare feet slapping noisily across the cool marble floor. Za turned on the faucets and poured lavender-scented bath salts under the running water.

As the bathtub filled she peeled off her robe and placed it across the vanity before stepping with awareness of the heated temperature into the bath. With a deep contented sigh she welcomed

the wet cocoon of warmth.

Za leaned back against the bath pillow and shut her eyes. Minutes later she jumped, sitting up in the tub, startled, she glance about her. Looking for what she didn't know, she just felt as if she was being watched.

With a resolved sigh blaming her feelings on being tired, she scooted down in the bath and leaned back once more, closing her eyes.

Za didn't know why at that moment she remembered the "guessing game" she used to play with her mom when she was a kid. She had told her to shut her eyes and block out everything around her, accept her mother's voice until her own breathing became loud in her ears. Eventually she could see with her eyes closed everything she saw with her eyes opened.

What do you see?

Za grinned, she hadn't thought about this or the many happier times she spent alone with her loving mother, for years. Maybe, she was truly starting to heal and accept the things she couldn't change.

What do you see? A ghostly voice continued whispering in her head.

Breathing in deeply and blowing out long slow breaths, Za played the game. Suddenly, as if her eyes were opened, she was looking about her and she perceived the woman standing next to the bathtub.

"How did you get up here into this suite without my seeing you?" Za asked before opening her eyes to see she indeed had been correct. If she hadn't been, no one would have been there to hear her talking foolishly to herself.

Marie's perfectly shaped ruby red lips parted in surprise. "Maybe because your eyes were closed when I entered."

"No, I felt you watching me for some time before I actually saw you." Za pointed out with a half-cocked eyebrow.

"Yet you aren't shy about your nakedness, I see," Marie crossed her arms across her breast, openly eyeing her water-submerged nudity.

"Trust me you aren't the first woman I've been naked in front of. As I'm sure you know everything there is to know about me by now. Can you leave so that I may take my bath in peace?"

Marie ignored her question by asking one of her own. "Tell me, how did you know I was here, *chérie*? Usually when I don't want to be seen, I'm not."

Za shrugged. "I don't know, dumb luck I suppose. It's just something I could do sometimes when I was a kid. My mother would hide stuff from me, like toys when I was bad but I would

always find them.” She confided. “Sometimes, my mother would start putting me through these little test. I would see them behind my closed eyes and go right to it.”

“Was your mother gifted like you?” Marie asked with a thoughtful gaze on her face. “Maybe, you’re clairvoyant. Have you considered the possibility?”

“I...I don’t think so.” Za’s face dropped in sadness. “If I was, wouldn’t I’ve been able to now what was going to happen to my mother?”

“Not if neither one of you truly accepted your gifts. Everyone has some limited type of insight. Some cultivate it and learn to utilize it, while others choose to live in ignorance.” Marie pointed out. “Take me for instant, much of what I can do now, I could do before I became a vampire, it’s just easier for me to willingly accept my gifts and take it to its limit.”

Za looked at her and shook her head at the older woman. “Interesting, but doubtful. I think I would have noticed if I had any special abilities before now don’t you?”

“Haven’t you?”

“Why are you here Marie? I doubt you choosing to visit while Sylus was out, is an error on your part.”

“See, you are perceptive.” Marie’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully at her exposed body in open admiration.

Za suppressed an erotic shiver. The woman reeked sex and she was curious about what it would be like to have sex with a several-centuries-old vampire. Still, lust was nil compared to the feelings she had for Sylus. With him she could positively know love and lust. She finally found everything she could ever want. She just prayed there was a way they could be together.

“Most people would be afraid of me, with all the falsehoods about Vampires over time. I suppose you know I would never cause undue injury to Sylus’s chosen mate,” Marie said, one corner of her mouth twisted upward.

Za returned her smile. “Sy told me how you helped me in the situation with my ex-fiancée, Peter Worth. I still haven’t had the chance to personally thank you.”

“Would you like to know how you could thank me?” Marie purred, her expression intense, but secretive. She sat on the side of the elegant bath and swirled with her fingers in her bath water. “Do you know I have the ability to make you come and not even touch you?”

Za began to feel a tingling sensation all over and bit her bottom lip to keep from moaning. She narrowed a warning gaze at Marie.

Marie chuckled removing her fingers from the water with a resigned sigh. “Have it your way, *chérie*, but you have no idea what you’re missing.”

Za's eyes nearly crossed from the erotic sensations. A sigh of relief escaped her parted lips as Marie released her from whatever hold she had on her. It took her another moment before she could speak.

"I would appreciate if you wouldn't do that to me again. So unless you made a special trip up here to test my loyalty to Sylus by trying to seduce me," Za accused moistening her dry lips with the tip of her tongue. "Tell me why you're here or leave me in peace."

The other woman shook her head. "I know you aren't a offspring of a Nymph, but I'm beginning to think there is something significant about you, Zaza. The question is what is it?"

Za's eyebrows rose a fraction in question. "When you find out, let me know, because as far as I 'm concern, I'm going to wakeup and find out that this entire trip has been a fever induced illusion."

"I assure you, everything is real, including Sylus's love for you." Marie stood and walked over to the vanity and took a seat on the velvet stool. Smoothing out the tailored cut red colored trousers.

"I won't say I'm disappointed by the fact, after all having Sy a part of my life is a bonus." Za smiled a closed lip smile.

"That is why I believe you should know what you're up against. I know Sylus is trying to protect you from the realism of your options. Now that you are privy to some of the darkest secrets of the *Darkworld Society*, life, as you understand it is about to change drastically. I'm here to make sure you are aware of how serious this particular matter is amongst our kind."

"Are you saying they could hurt Sy for telling me?" Za's voice grew rough with building anxiety.

"If he is lucky, that's all they would do," she answered in a tense, clipped voice that forbade any questions.

Za plunged on carelessly. Her mind tumbled with questions. "Would they *kill* him over something this minor? I would never betray Sy's trust...never!"

"I believe you, but you see, Zaza, we haven't lived amongst your kind this long by leaving things to chance. This is minor to you, but it's not to us because we have enemies that could torture or mesmerize you into revealing what you hold sacred. Because of it, we don't take risks."

Za paled. "I don't care about myself, but I do worry about what happens to Sylus." She spoke and the words seemed loud in the confined space of the marbled bathroom, like an empty tomb.

"Tonight before the council he said the same about you," Marie confided.

“So that was the ‘*business*’ emergency he had to attend to this evening? Why didn’t he tell me? So, where is he now? Is he all right?” Za set up abruptly causing the perfumed water to splash over the sides of the tub. “Tell me, Marie, have they harmed Sy because of me?”

“Calm down, child. There is no reason for hysterics,” Marie chastised crossing one leg over the other. “Sylus is well. Currently, he is with Quintan trying to figure out how they can get the both of you out of this mess unscathed.”

Za let out a long, audible breath and fell back against the bath pillow. “Tell me what I can do to help him.”

“The best option is if I were to take you right now and make you into a Vampire.” Marie said abruptly.

Za gasped and her hand went to her throat while movies of creatures of the night ripped out the throats of their prey flashed through her thoughts. She didn’t dare voice her fears aloud for dread of insulting Marie.

“I know you may not like the thought of being like me, but it would bring an immediate end to your current dilemma.” Marie spoke with light bitterness.

“If that’s what it takes to be with Sylus, I’m willing to do it.” Za waited, challenging her to go through with it.

“I can hear your heart fluttering like a bird’s, you’re so scared by the very thought.” The heavy lashes that shadowed Marie’s ghostly pale cheeks flew up. “Yet, I can tell you are really serious, aren’t you? You love him that much.”

“I admit the thought terrifies me, but hell, yeah, I’d rather change to be with Sy, than for him to lose his life or give up his immortality to be with me.”

Marie chuckled. “You’re talking about the *myth* of immortals being made into mortals.”

She gazed warily at Marie wondering what she found laughable about the possibility. “Yes.”

“Well, forget it. Sy found out this evening from the *Ancients*, that it’s not possible for him. He is a born Satyr, he wasn’t cursed like his first ancestor.”

“*Ancients?*”

“They are the closest things we have to your God. I’m sure you have heard of them, mythically speaking, of course. *The Olympians?*”

Za shook her head.

“*Mon dieu.*” Marie threw her hands up. “Of course you have, *ma chérie*. Zeus, Hera, Athena--”

“Oh, damn, are you telling me they are real too and have the ability to come to San Francisco

in the flesh?" Za's voice came out in a shriek.

"They still live in Olympus, but severe matters such as this take them where they are needed." Marie explained.

"Because of me, they are here to come down on Sylus." A war of emotions waged within her. "What have I done?"

"Well, per se the gods, you have done what is not possible. *Satyrs* do not fall in love with women who aren't their deemed mates and women of pure human blood are not an option at all."

"Marie, did..." Za licked her drying lips. "Do they know how it's possible that Sy has fallen in love with me? Is this some hormonal cruel joke on both of us and they're going to wave some magical wand and make him stop loving me? Is that why they've come? To take him away from me?"

"No," Marie answered. Her voice was calm, her gaze steady.

Za released the breath she hadn't realize she'd been holding, until Marie took away her hopes just as quickly with her next words.

"They don't have a magical wand, but, yes, with a simple thought they can force him and you to forget that you've even met."

"What if they did this and I see Sylus at Selby's wedding...why are you shaking your head?"

"Because Selby is an ancestor of the Nymphs she belongs to us, she and Darius will be forced to forget also. Za, you want remember ever having Selby as your friend."

"No," she wailed in bewilderment. Her honey-colored eyes showed the tortured dullness of disbelief. In dazed exasperation, she pushed herself up out of the bath and reached for the bath sheet Marie stood and held out to her.

"Is this what they decided to do tonight?" Za asked wrapping the towel around her wet chilled body. She crossed her arms across her chest and pointedly looked away; not wanting Marie to see the burning tears pooling in her eyes.

"It's still being discussed...but I'm sure it will be soon."

Za shot Marie a penetrating look before turning to walk numbly across the bathroom floor into the bedroom. She dropped into the overstuffed lounge chair next to the fireplace, and hit the remote. On the remote resting on the arm. The fire flared up. Za leaned forward with outstretched hands, hoping some of its warmth would seep into her chilled heart.

"We are supposed to be in Selby's wedding." She broke the silence.

Marie sat next to her in the matching chair. "After meeting them, you may convince them to allow you to participate in the affair before the enchantment takes place."

Za snorted bitterly. "That's would be mighty nice of them."

"I know you can't see it now but, yes, it would be very nice of them; considering the alternative. They could kill you both. There was a time in the old days; they did so without hesitation or a council hearing. They have mellowed over the years." Marie grinned. There was also derision and sympathy mingled in her glance.

"I'm going to be all alone." Za cried.

"Look at the good points, *chère*, they can arrange for you to have different memories, happier ones. Besides, you are grieving now, but you won't grieve over losing something you never knew you had, *ma petite*."

Za nodded her head in understanding, but it didn't make it easier to accept. Tears fell earnestly over the hill of her cheeks rolling down her face. "Could I ask you for a favor?"

"Ask."

"Can you see if Sy and I can have at least twenty-four hours alone together before I have to face your council? Just in case they don't allow me to be a part of the wedding." Her voice caught. Fear and anger knotted inside her; just thinking about losing Sy and her best friend at the same time, stabbed at her until her stomach clenched tight. "Oh, no...no..." she gasped, panting in terror. "Not now...not now..." her lips quivered as a chill ripped through her body.

Marie jumped up quickly, wrapping her arms around her to catch her as she tumbled out of the chair headfirst. Za became crippled by her attack. Under normal conditions, she'd be in awe of Marie's profound strength as she lifted her in her arms and carried her like an infant to the bed.

Placing her down gently, Marie removed the damp towel. The papers and laptop slid aside as she flipped back the sheets while holding Za braced against her and the bed. Momentarily helpless Za welcomed the warmth of the covers over her shivering frame.

Marie set on the edge of the bed and stroked her wayward bangs from her clammy feverish brow. "All will be well, child. I will make sure you and Sy have the time you asked for. Now sleep as if you have no worries."

Za found Marie's husky voice hypnotic and soothing, persuading her to give in to the gentle compulsion. She welcomed the mindless darkness and her final waking thoughts she called his name like a chant. "*Sylus...Sylus...*"

"Sylus!"

Sy stared blankly at his brother as the wave of fearful apprehension swept through him. He got this overwhelming need to be with Za. He shrugged off the sudden chill, and he asked, spacing

the words evenly, "Are you finished with me? I have something I need to take care of."

Quintan cursed aloud. "You aren't even hearing me. I need you to focus on what I am saying. This is serious."

"You mean my standing here with my heart at my feet is not taking things seriously?" he bellowed.

"You think I don't feel your pain, brother. I do, but it is a pain of your own choosing." His tone was coolly disapproving. "You know the laws--."

"Curse the laws. They were laws written by the same ones that said it is impossible for me to fall in love with a human female. They are the ones who dangled the myth of having a choice between being what we are and humanity, just to give us hope where they knew there is none! Go to hell, Quintan, and you can take the gods with you."

"Be angry if you will, little brother, but heed your words, for the gods are always listening, and you can end up with their brother Hades quicker than you can take your next breath. Also, you shall show me respect, as the head of this family." A silken thread of warning in his baritone voice hung thickly in the silence of the private office. "I have earned that much from you."

Sylus shoved his fist into his trouser pockets and, like a petulant child, he turned, away from Quintan and looked out the window. The dense, cottony fog rolled in off the bay, blanketing the lower view of the city into a smoky haze from the bay. Perfect for the way he was feeling and perfect for the unfilled turn his evening had taken.

"I know you can't see the positive in this situation--"

"No shit."

"However," Quintan emphasized. "You were fortunate this is not the old days. The Ancients would not have hesitated to strike you down for your insolent behavior moments ago in their chambers. After all these centuries of looking at the curse they laid upon my face, you chanced to question Zeus in front of others? You are truly a fool!"

Sylus remained silent; he could see his older brother's reflection in the blackened window where one can see out but none could see in as he came up behind him. Quintan was the dark to his fair. The only similarities between them were the dark brown "bedroom eyes," they'd inherited from their father

Yet, along with inheriting their father's raven black hair, Quintan's hair had a white path down the center, like a skunk, no hair dye, or prayers could remove the brand Zeus had placed upon him centuries ago for defying him. As if that wasn't enough a jagged "Z" shaped scar dominated the entire right side of his face. The right eye that once matched the dark brown of the left was now

white as snow around a dark pupil, giving him the outward appearance of blindness. However, with that eye came the gift of amazing sight. Quintan could see into the souls of men, he was a walking lie detector. The kings of centuries past used his skills to decide if other their enemies were sincere about peace between their countries and now, the gods utilized his gifts to judge the sincerity of the treason accused citizens of the Darkworld.

In his youth Sy found lying to Quintan had been impossible. He and Roman didn't get away with much and the little they did get away with was because their older brother was feeling generous at the moment. He prayed it was one of those rare moments. He needed Quin on his and Za's side.

Yes, Zeus had marked him for his insolence as a young Satyr, and killed the two people his brother coveted the most, his male and female mates, but that was centuries ago, and now Zeus relied on Quintan's wisdom.

Now that Sy had found the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, it saddened him that Quin walked the world alone, he was no longer bound to take a descendent of the Nymphs and could choose any species as his bride. However his cursed looks, ill temperament, and vow of chastity halted any chance of him having female companionship.

"I apologize." Sy turned to look at his brother. "You're right. I should have learned by your suffering. Forgive me."

Quin waved his words aside. "Sy, we will get through this, but you must remain clear-headed. Let me meet the woman, before she comes before the council. Maybe there is something about her that no one else can sense. She may not be a descendent, but there are no telling how many species roaming this earth, she doesn't necessarily have to be completely human."

Sy felt a beam of hope. "Thanks for offering, Quin. I know you don't leave your villa because of your appearance. This trip must have been hard on you."

"I've looked like this for centuries, I stay in my villa because I like it there and my disfigurement is harder on others than me. Yet, above all else, you are my younger brother. I will always be on your side and my discomforts are of no concern. I know you would do the same for me"

A sense of strength came to him as he looked at his older brother as if he parted the Red Sea. His despair lessened. "Brother, I have never felt like this." They shared a smile. "It's the best thing I have ever felt in all my life and you know that is saying much. For the gods, she makes me feel so...so--."

"Alive," Quintan supplied.

"Exactly."

“That was how I felt when I found Ramona.” His voice faded and a moment of mournful silence passed between them.

“If they take the memory of me from her, it would be as if I was never a part of her life. It will also seem like life is more meaningless, than I suspected.” Sylus voice deepened. “I can’t image passing Za on the street one day and see her with another man, have her look at me in passing and not know what we’ve shared.”

“Sy, if you wish it, they can remove your memories of her. It will make things easier on you.” Quin suggested.

Sylus raised an arrogant eyebrow at him. “Years ago they offered to do remove the memories of Julius and Ramona after two hundred years of suffering the loss, you didn’t accept the offer to forget. Why not?”

“They offer to remove my memories but not this *brand of shame*.” He held his hand up to the right side of his face. “If I allowed them to erase the only time in my life, I have been happy, I would just see an unhappy scarred man in the mirror. At least I have my pride knowing I avenged those I love and it makes this face more bearable.”

Sylus nodded his head in understanding, putting a comforting hand on his brother’s shoulder, he asked, “Knowing what you know now, would you go against the god’s and do it again?”

“In a heartbeat.” Quin gave him a long hard stare. “Half-brother of Zeus or not, the bastard killed my Satyr mate, Julius. The only thing I regret is my wife, Ramona’s, foolishness. She gave up her life to save mine.” He hung his head. “Bringing her into this world I would change if I could go back and change anything about my life.”

He could feel the guilt that lay buried in Quintan’s chest. The sadness on his face said it all.

Sylus stirred from one foot to the other with restlessness.

His brother visibly shook himself and rolled his shoulders releasing a deep sigh. His proud stance became more erect. He smiled, the scar pulled taut against his mouth. “Go to her. I will see you tomorrow, before we meet the Ancients at midnight.”

Standing face to face with Quin, Sy’s nose came to his chin. “I know you don’t come out ‘til nightfall, but we can come to see you early in the day and have lunch in your suite if you’d like,” Sylus offered.

“No, enjoy the time you have together just in case...things don’t go in our favor.” He put an arm around his shoulder and walked him to the elevator of *DW Transport Exports*, one of the many corporate office buildings owned by *Darkworld Incorporated*. “You can meet me here at the offices at least two hours before the meeting. I am anxious to meet this woman. We haven’t had such an

uproar in the council since....”

“You? Or Roman?”

Quintan threw back his head and laughed. “Yeah, why is it our always someone in our family?”

“In our genes I suppose. Brother, tell me before I leave, have you spoken to our baby brother. He is supposed to be singing at Darius’s wedding, but no one has been able to get in touch with him.”

“I am Roman, the inspiration of my good friend, William Shakespeare’s, *Romeo*...” Quintan shook his head mimicking his youngest brother’s tirade of his own virtues.

“In search of my Juliet!” Sy and Quinn finished in unison and laughed at the family joke, for everyone knew there was no greater ego, or a Satyr so vain, as their baby brother, Roman de Gauls.

“Never fear, Sylus, they have found him, he is already in Las Vegas rehearsing a duet with Selby. My advice to you is to link back with your mate Darius and check on him.”

Sylus groaned aloud, his brow puckered in a frown. “Darius will kill him, if he tries to come on to Selby.”

“Why of course, my good man.” Quin smiled, not looking too concerned. “Oh, and your favorite person in the world did make it to the private council meeting earlier today.”

“Of course,” Sylus sneered. “Justus is probably really enjoying this mess I find myself in.” He ran a hand over his hair.

“*You*, the quote, *Mr. Pompous Ass*, unquote, in love and with a human female?” Quintan nodded his head, his eyes twinkling. “Oh, yeah, he’s enjoying a joke or two at your expense.”

“Well, I can’t expect to any support from that wolf’s ass,” Sy mumbled.

“Oh contraire, Baby Brother, he was serious during the meeting and he spoke with understanding on your behalf.”

Sy came up short, shocked. “Huh? Do tell?”

Quin shoved his hands in the front pockets of his gray trousers and shrugged. “Who knows why the change of heart. He and Darius are cousins after all and I suppose finding his mate, and her being pregnant with twins, due on Darius’s wedding day, I might add...has mellowed him.”

“Damn.” Sy shook his head. “Sera babies are due on the day of the wedding? Then how does she suppose to be in the wedding party?”

“Exactly. They are having a time of it and Selby is in tears every hour or so wishing her friend Zaza was there. So, no matter the outcome we need to get this settled for everyone’s sake.”

“I’ll get in touch with Darius; he’s probably anxious for an update. This is not the kind of

pre-wedding plans I had hoped for him. Admittedly, I haven't been a great best man, thus far."

Quin head cocked to the side in question. "I'm sure your constant *mental* support has help Darius...why are you shaking your head?"

"When, I got here and started dealing with these crazy emotions, I didn't need--"

"Oh, man."

"Yeah," Sy agreed with his brother's sentiment.

"I don't know how I raised such a selfish ass, this is probably the last great thing you could do for your partner before he embarks into his life with a family of his own and you aren't there for him." Quintan fussed earnestly. "Roman is a dead man for sure."

Sy moaned and gave his brother a narrow glinting glance. "Oh, Darius's will be kind to Roman, while saving up his anger for *me* and it's no less then I deserve for abandoning him. Maybe he will have his hands full filling Selby in on all that we've been keeping from her."

"As a matter of fact, Sylus, why *are* you here in San Francisco instead of by Darius side?" Quintan interrupted.

"A long story, but let's just say, we may have added some more descendents of the Nymphs to the registrar."

Quin nodded. "That's a good thing."

"Yes, it is for someone."

"What are you going to do if one of these descendents...if there are any, of course... is *your* eternal mate?"

Sylus's mouth dropped wide and he got a sick feeling in his stomach. He hadn't thought about it. Surely matters couldn't get worse. Or could it?

"I don't even want to think about it," Sylus said between gritted teeth.

He stepped onto the fifteenth-floor elevator. The door closed on his brother's grinning face. He removed his cell phone from his jacket pocket; first, he would check in with Darius. Then he would plan to make this a night Za would never forget.

He paused. His heart ached as he whispered, "At least it will be a night *I* won't ever forget."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Zaza sat up in the bed, naked, the sheet clutched tightly against her breast. A cold sweat matted her hair against her scalp. She washed her hands over her face, waiting for the racing of her heart to ease. She'd had a nightmare. Someone tore her from Sy's arms. He was in his Satyr state, fighting to get to her, but they had him chained by the throat like a wild dog.

The nagging in the back of her mind refused to ease; her misgivings increased by the minute. She lowered her feet to the floor and sat slumped over with a worried expression. Za sighed, clasped her slender hands together, and stared at the clock beside the bed; it felt much later than it was. She had only been sleeping a couple of hours and it was almost half past ten.

At least now, she knew where things stand. She loved Sy for wanting to shelter her from the negatives of the situation, but she wasn't a child. She knew that loving each other wasn't going to be all smooth sailing. What relationship is? Still, this one was fraught with obstacles that are more impossible than the norm.

It would be simple if they were just a regular couple facing the fears of joining two households or the interracial aspect, was problems she could tackle. This was new territory she was stepping in. She had to deal with a different-species situation and it felt crazy to even think upon what had been so impossible only days before. All of it was true, she was in love with a creature that was half-man and half-beast, changing at will. She'd spent the evening alone with a female vampire, old enough to have literally dined with Christ himself, and still she wanted to belong to this crazy world and family of Sylus.

Za placed a startled hand across her breasts as the phone beside the bed shrilled. She quickly picked it up hoping it was Sy. "Hello?"

"Hey, sleeping beauty, are you ready to start our evening?" She got her wish.

She gloried from the warmth of the glow that spread through her just from the deep, lyrical sweetness of his voice. "Hey, handsome, where are you? When are you coming home?"

"I could get used to hearing your sexy, sleep-filled voice, asking me that question?"

Tears came to her eyes and she swallowed deeply. For the moment, she pretended to still not know the outcome of his meeting. Knowing that she would be loosing all these wonderful memories and feelings of being with Sylus soon, she wanted to make what time they had left memorable for him to carry for the both of them.

"Mmm, I can't wait to spend the rest of my life asking you." She said biting down on her teeth to keep from sobbing aloud.

The line went silent before she heard him clear his throat and spoke in a husky emotional tone. She could tell his laugh was forced as he teased her. “While you’ve been lazy, I have been making plans. I looked in on you, but you were sleeping. I’ve already showered, and changed so we all you have to do is get ready and we can finish what we started earlier. After all that seducing with you with music I expect to reap the benefits.”

She smiled sadly. “Why didn’t you wake me?”

“Because, beautiful, I need you well-rested for what I have planned tonight.”

“Oh, really?” She felt as if her wits had renewed themselves. Her features became more animated and her heart became light. “Can I ask what you have planned?”

“You can ask, but I’m not telling,” he said sternly. “I need you to not ask any questions just obey the--”

“Whoa, *obey*?” She repeated, her voice rising and she heard him chuckle.

“Don’t go getting your thong--”

“I’m not wearing any underwear,” she teasingly interrupted.

“Damn, Zaza, how do you expect me to remember what I was about to say? Now, I want to come home and join you in bed and say to hell with the plans.”

The sound of his voice deepening in arousal sent a wave of excitement through her. “If you come to me now, I’ll already be ready and wet for you by the time you get in here.”

“I’m on my way! No, wait...no,” he cursed. “I really do have big plans for us tonight and I’m not going to let you distract me from getting everything I want. I promise I will not forget this offer and I’m cashing in on it at the end of the night.”

Za giggled. “Okay...okay, tell me baby, how do I dress for this surprise. I want you to note... I don’t like surprises.”

“Sorry no promises, because I love surprises, and you will love this one.”

She heard his usual pompous stubbornness that meant she needed go with the program, which she intended to all along, but he would have suspected something if she had been to easy.

“Are you listening to me? I was saying, before I was pleasantly distracted, if you *obey* the rules I have set forth, we can begin.

“I’m still not cool on that ‘*obey*’ word, but I’m listening. Go ahead.”

He released a groan. “Tonight we are going to act like two people in love--”

“I don’t have to act that part, I am in love,” she grinned sheepishly into the phone, crossing one leg over the other. The line went silent and she wondered if he got frustrated and hung up on her.

“Sy, you still there?”

“By the gods, you're going to drive me crazy, but I love you, so I welcome the madness. Za, you would let me, finish saying what I have to say, the sooner we can be together.”

Za felt caught up in his enthusiasm. “Forget the surprise, I want you right now and you can surprise me later.”

“Hush, woman! I'm on a clock here.” Sy fussed. “Savor this moment or else...”

“I'm sorry, I get chatty when I'm excited.” She stuck up her middle finger at the phone and childishly licked her tongue at him wishing he could see her. “Ass,” she mumbled for good measures.

Sylus chuckled. “If you're finished, sweetheart, I want you to go to the elevator and push the button.”

Za listened intently; his warm and compelling voice built up the anticipation already bubbling inside her. She waited for him to elaborate, not wanting to be accused of interrupting once more. The phone was dead.

“Sy, hello? What the hell --” Za shook her head as the dial tone sounded against her ear. She placed the phone back on its charger and pulled her silk robe off the foot of the bed as she stood. With the building excitement in the pit of her stomach, a delicious shudder of anticipation heated her body. Was he waiting naked in the elevator? That would be exciting, but not surprising.

She shoved her arms in her robe and tied the sash at her waist while making her way down the hallway from her room to the suite elevator. Za's quick steps turned into a skip, she was giddy with excitement and curiosity. She actually had to pause and take a deep breath before pushing the elevator button.

The doors separated. At the base of her throat, a pulse beat and swelled as though her heart had risen from its usual place. “Oh, Sy,” she exclaimed with intense pleasure, her eyes took in the surprise before her. “You beautiful, crazy, romantic fool.”

The elevator floor was a carpet of flowers. Shades of red, white, yellow, peach, purple and pink rose petals. In the center of the bed of flowers propped up against the back wall of the elevator was a large flat box decorated in gold leaf paper with a white bow so large it nearly covered the entire front of the box.

Za was like an excited child as she walked into the elevator, her bare feet crushing the delicate softness of the rose petals. The aroma was sweet and overwhelming, yet a wonderful smell that would linger in her nostrils for the rest of the evening. She stood there lingering in the awe of the moment. .

Dropping to her knees on the soft bed of flowers, she set the gift box flat. She pulled and

shook the top until it separated from the bottom and set it aside. Her smile broadened in approval from what she could see of the white dress in the box. With trembling hands and a heart full of emotions, Za lift the envelope lying on top of the dress, removing its card to read the elegant penmanship.

My Dearest Love,

Unlike Cinderella, your night will begin at the stroke of midnight. Enclosed you will find everything you need, all supplied by your Satyr godfather; I'm by no means a fairy. Your coach will be waiting for you out front, at midnight. Don't be late. This will be a night to unite two souls for an eternity. No matter what the future brings. Now, go to the patio terrace; the 'Pan', not Satyr, pissing fountain holds your second surprise.

Eternally yours,

Sylus

She gloried briefly in the moment, rereading the letter, smelling his cologne coming from the card. It was hard to appreciate it with the powerful rose scent dominating the suite. Knowing midnight would arrive before she knew it, Za lifted the box with both hands and held it against her chest as she peeked to the side to see where she was going. She placed the box down on the sofa before going to the patio door. Pushing a button on the remote, the automatic blackout curtains retracted and Za released a gasp.

"Oh damn," she exhaled a long sigh. "What..." She slid open the glass door and stepped out onto a terrace bathed in candlelight. The flames danced and waved at her in the subtle late-night breeze. There had to be at least a hundred candles. She twirled this way and that in a fit of giggles, hugging herself in glee.

Za's jaw was already aching from grinning so much; she couldn't imagine what else could happen that could make her any happier than she was at that moment. She moved over to the Pan statue fountain, it was full of floating rose-shaped candles and beneath the pissing statue was a bottle bobbing in the water. Za lifted the transparent red heart-shaped bottle, and she could see it had a rolled paper inside.

She couldn't believe it. She had never received a letter in a bottle. Her eyes watered with emotion. She removed the cork top and with two fingers tugged the paper from the bottle.

My Only Love,

Look into the breach in the arm of the statue, for it holds the memories of our past, present, and future. See you soon, Sy.

Za put the bottle down and leaned closer; she saw a small flat black letter case wedged

between the opening bend of the statue elbow. She wiggled it from its resting place and slowly opened it. Lying on a bed of red velvet were three perfect teardrop diamond pendants, connected and hanging from a delicate gold chain. Each flawless diamond was larger than the next, with the future being the largest.

Matching earrings lay flatly on each side. She couldn't contain the tears any longer. Her happiness was a huge, bittersweet knot inside her stomach. She looked up into the star-filled night sky.

"God, I now know what love truly is. Please don't give me this most precious gift only to take it from me. I'm so happy it scares me to death." She placed both her notes in the box with her precious gifts and took all her items to the bedroom to prepare for whatever glimpses of happiness Sy has in store for her.

Ten minutes before the stroke of midnight Zaza took one last look in the mirror. She had no idea how he had chosen the perfect sizes for everything, but it could have been customized just for her. The white empire-waist gown with its cowl neckline, front and back, a simple sweeping trail, and beaded shoulder straps made her feel graceful and elegant.

Sylus hadn't missed a thing, not even the opportunity to choose a sinfully delicate white lace cup bra and underwear with attached garters and white silk stockings. She was sure he had planned to see her in the sexy lingerie she had on, showing him.

Za felt like a princess from the sparkling diamond combs in her hair behind each ear to the crystal-inlaid open-toed heels on her feet. She cursed and picked up her pearl-encrusted matching evening bag and made her way to the elevator. She smiled while stepping onto the carpet of flower petals.

Her coach awaited in the form of a white chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce limousine. Za snuggled into the luxury of the leather interior with a crystal glass of champagne in her hand. She sipped quietly. When the sweet, loving melody of the song Sylus had composed for her flooded the car, it took everything she had left not to break down. She didn't want Sylus to assume these were tears of sorrow, for she was blissfully happy and fully alive.

Thirty-five minutes into the ride, the limo came to a standstill. Za could see out of the tinted glass window the private airstrip they had come in on at the beginning of the week. She understood now why this place was further out from the city. If they had been closer, the fog coming off the bay it would have made visibility a concern.

Her heart was racing anticipation of the evening to come. She promised Sylus, they would be lovers out to share a memorable night together, she refused to actively allow thoughts of what

was to come tomorrow at the Darkworld assembly to ruin what could possibly be her last night with Sylus.

With that thought in mind, she vowed silently to make him as happy as he made her, without regrets or sadness. The automobile door opened, and she slipped her fingers into the leather-clad hand of the driver. She inclined her head in gratitude to the driver.

Zaza looked up from straightening her gown and saw Sylus with abrupt clarity. She couldn't take her eyes off him. He was breathtakingly gorgeous. Without an effort he put every man she's ever met to shame, including the two standing next to him in uniform at the bottom of the private plane's folded out steps. His tall form towered over them and his pale skin and hair stood out like a beacon of light.

Za openly admired the object of all her hopes and dreams. She couldn't believe he was hers, and he loved her enough to willingly give up everything if it had been possible. She wouldn't ask it of him, but for a woman to know that her man found nothing more important than her in his life was the most secure feeling any woman could have. With this knowledge, it was easy to be just as giving and do what was necessary for his welfare. Even if it meant letting him go so he could move on with his life with someone else.

She looked up at the powerful set of shoulders as he stood there, devilishly handsome. His stance emphasized the force of his thighs and the slimness of his hips. As he spoke, his movements were full of grace and virility. His profile spoke of ageless strength and worldly knowledge. She could only imagine the parts of his mind she had yet to discover. The interesting places he must've been, not the mention all that he had survived through the centuries.

As if sensing her stare, he casually glanced up and did a double take. His eyes locked on hers. She smiled timidly, feeling silly for being caught staring. His generous mouth parted in a dazzling display of white teeth, and she knew he knew the impact he had on her. The cad had the nerve to wink and she felt the heat of his admiration across the pavement.

Za felt the urge to run forward and throw her aroused self against him, but her legs were trembling so badly, she didn't think she would be able to move without making a fool of herself. She was thankful when he made the initiative and walked towards her.

Why am I so nervous? Look at the man, foolish woman, you know why you're scared. He is a walking dream, and you're frightened you might wake up.

The two men stepped aside as he pushed his way between them and headed towards her. Recognizing they were no longer needed, they quietly disappeared up the steps into the aircraft.

If Za thought Sy was sexy just standing there, watching him make his way towards her was

about to send her into sweet palpitations. *Damn*. She was grateful for the gentle breeze caressing her hot skin.

The rich tailored cut of the black tuxedo molded his well-proportioned body beautifully. Instead of a tie he had opted for a black onyx tiepin surrounded by small diamonds to hold his starched white shirt collar closed. He wore his hair swept back off his broad brow and contained in a tight braid and banded at the end.

For the first time ever, she noticed he wore two small gold loops in each of his ears and her brow lifted; she found it terribly sexy. She could never get enough of his face. His features, so symmetrical and refined...he had that *Old Hollywood* male beauty, like Lawrence Olivier and Stuart Townsend.

Za shook her head. She couldn't believe the whimsical stuff that crossed her mind since meeting this man.

He walked forward, stopping in front of her, looking down at her intensely. "I find it difficult to breath, when you are near me. You are so beautiful."

Za's face felt the heat spread over her face, even if you couldn't see it. She basked in admiration. "You clean up pretty good yourself," she complimented. "I want to thank you for all my gifts." A heartfelt grin spread across her face. "I loved the little treasure hunt you sent me on."

"Oh, my darling, the night is only beginning."

Za swallowed deeply and licked her lips. "May I ask where we are going?"

"Yes, you may, but it doesn't mean I'm going to tell you." He was staring at her lips. "Do you have any more of that glossy stuff you put on your lips?"

She blinked a few times wondering if he was trying to distract her from asking more questions. Her eyebrows arched high. "Yes, I do. Would you like to use some...pretty boy?" she teased.

"No, *smart-ass*, I plan on messing up yours, and wanted to make sure you had backup," Sy countered.

With a deliberately casual movement on his part, she felt herself being spun around and swung into the circle of his arms. Za leaned against the taut smoothness of his shoulder as he held her snugly with one hand pressed against the small of her back, her soft curves molding to the contours of his lean body. Her head fit perfectly in the palm of his hand as he dipped her and covered her mouth with his.

Raising his mouth from hers, he gazed into her eyes. "Now, what do you have to say?"

"I...I think you missed a spot. A second try should do the job of removing all the lip-gloss."

“I must agree, because you're still able to speak. I must be losing my touch.” His long moist tongue traced the soft fullness of her lips, before he pressed his mouth against hers, his lips gliding with a feather’s touch with tantalizing persuasion, to part her lips and allow him full entrance.

Sy smothered her lips with demanding mastery, forcing her mouth wider with each thrust and roll of his tongue against hers. Sweetly, he broke away long enough to thumb her kiss swollen lips and look at his handy work before swooping in again. Za felt her knees give way and threw one arm around his neck and the other one around his waist. Her hands fisted in the material of his jacket, and she held on.

There was a dream quality to their kiss now. She pulled back, panting. Neither one of them were able to speak. Somewhere in their playfulness, the kissing became serious. She drew his face to hers in a renewed embrace. This time they both came together with mouths moist and open, tongues poised for action.

Blood pounded in her brain, leapt from her vagina, and just when she could feel his hand moving to her bottom, praying he would lift her up against his lengthening erection, the kiss ended.

She groaned her disappointment.

“Damn,” he said hoarsely.

“Damn,” she agreed.

“Damn.” They both heard it and broke apart like guilty children, brushing and straightening their clothing. The driver was staring with a smug smile. “Sorry, boss, just checking to see what time you want me to pick you and the lady up.”

“I will call you from the jet about an hour before our scheduled return landing.”

“Yes sir.” With a parting grin and a wink, he added, “Don't do anything I wouldn't do.”

Sy brushed a gentle kiss to her temple as he held her to his side, sheltered by his shoulder, he guided her towards the plane. “Don't listen to him; we're going to do *things* he can't even imagine, before this night is over with.”

Za giggled, her eyes staring up at him adoringly. Her lips still tingled from the passion of their kiss. “You know, I was thinking about gaining my membership to the *mile high club*. Do you consider that a possibility?”

Sy cocked his head in question. “What is this “mile high club”? I'm sure with both our credentials, we could obtain a membership.”

Za threw back her head and laughed. Sy gathered and held the train of her gown for her, as they made their way up the drop-steps into the jet. Once they reached the landing, Za leaned into his chest and looked deeply into his eyes.

“Baby, this club is not your average country club. The only way you can become a member of this club is that you have to take me into the aircraft bathroom and....” She pulled his head down to hers and whispered the rest in his ear. Zaza screamed out in laughter as Sy lifted her up in his arms and carried her onboard. “Wait, I meant on the way back!”

A lone figure watched in hatred the embracing couple on the runway before they disappeared into the airplane across from theirs. It was an unforeseen coincidence that their object of desire was at the same private airport about to board a plane to elsewhere.

After Zaza seemed to have been ignored the phone threats, it was time to put the threats into action, if it wasn't already too late. “Why wasn't I informed that Zaza Draper and Sylus de Gauls would be leaving this evening? Isn't that what I'm paying you all this money for?”

“You're paying me to keep my mouth shut and to arrange the phone calls to harass her,” the hired Detective stated. “It must be fated that you would be here waiting to disembark, at the same time they arrived here. Now you can see how far things have progressed between them for yourself.”

“How soon before we know their itinerary.”

“Since they are boarding, we should be getting a call any minute now.” He glanced at his employer. “Are we going to follow?”

“I will decide once we find out if it's necessary. If they are coming back here, then I will stay here and wait.”

“Where will you be?”

“At the hotel she is staying in, of course. I believe it's time to put my plan into action. Obviously, he has made her feel well protected in his company, and she's not taking the threatening calls seriously. She has always been too stubborn for her damn good.”

“I don't understand why someone who has spent their life building themselves up would put everything at risk, and over a woman. *Especially* you.” The Detective shook his head.

“You don't have to understand. I pay you well to not think at all. Just do as you are told and stick to the plan.”

The Detective sighed deeply, shook his head once more, and looked from the window remember the look on his employer's face while watching the couple going at it hot and heavy moments ago. “*There's nothing more reckless than a jealous fool,*” he thought. This situation was proof of it and now he was knee deep in the middle of the shit.

“Fuck.” He let out a low whistle. “You do got it bad for this Zaza woman, don't you?” He

put the unlit cigarette in the corner of his mouth and mumbled, "Where do we go from here?"

"Don't light that thing in here."

"I'm trying to kick. I just like the taste of it in my mouth. Tell me what you want me to do next?"

"Depends on where they are going. If they are returning to San Francisco, I need you to make sure everything goes smoothly. Do you have the lake house ready and is the room set to my specifications?"

"Yup," he answered, and then pushed the envelope with the next statement. "I don't know how you think you are going to be able to pull this off. I strongly believe you really should reconsider what will happen to everything you have built if this goes wrong."

"You are assuming it *can* go wrong." The employer looked at him. "Trust me, once Zaza realizes I am what's best for her, she will come around eventually."

"And if she doesn't?"

"She will. That is, if she cares at all about this man, she wouldn't want anything to happen to him. But if for some reason I can't sway her...well, if I can't have Za, neither will Sylus de Gauls."

The detective looked back out the window just in time to see the man lifting the Draper woman up in his arms. The smile on the young couples face was something magical to behold; it made him regretful. He envied a man finding that kind of happiness in another person and obviously his client did, too.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

“Oh please, Sy, I can’t possible handle another one,” Za moaned. “Can I remove the blindfold now?”

“Sweetheart, please,” Sylus pleaded. “Just one more and you’ll be finished. Did I tell you how much I loved your mouth? You give me so much pleasure watching you savor each bite as if it’s the best thing in the entire world.”

“Mmm, that’s because it is,” she whispered.

Sy followed the tip of her tongue as it moved across her bottom lip erasing any signs of chocolate.

“I promise this will be the last one. Just reach out in front of you and search the box with your fingers. You will see there is only one left because I ate the remainder, but I saved the last one for you,” Sylus admitted, a secretive smile on his lips.

His dark eyes twinkled as he picked up and threw the last piece of French chocolate candy in his mouth. He pushed the small round box towards her searching fingers in the candy box.

“This better be the last one, or I will be waddling off this plane to whatever secret destination you’re taking me to.” Za stated.

“Actually, I have two destinations in mind.” He watched her as he spoke and added, “Which one we go to will depend on you.”

They sat on the burgundy leather sofa, both of them turned towards each other with a consumed box of chocolates housed between them. Sylus enjoyed having her blindfolded. It allowed him to take in the beauty of her every expression, without her feeling embarrassed and looking away. He couldn’t take his eyes off her. She practically glowed with her happiness and his goal this evening was to make her blissfully happy.

Not only happy, he’d never seen her more beautiful. The gown he had picked out was perfect. Good thing he loved a woman who was a clothing hog. She hadn’t even missed the gown he had the suite butler sneak from her closet earlier in the week, so the hotel boutique seamstress could create the perfectly fitting one-of-a-kind gown.

He’d planned to do this after everything had been resolved, but seeing how this might, be their last night together with her being aware of who he really was and loving him in spite of it, he decided now was the time.

Her fingers stalled just short of the box. “Sy, I know you’re still here. Why have you grown so quiet?” She interrupted his thoughts.

He saw she was about to remove the blindfold. “Wait!” He stilled her hand and guided it to the last piece. “You have to pick up the last chocolate first, then you can decide our destination.”

Za mouth spread into a sheepish smile. “I had hoped you had forgotten about that last piece of chocolate. If I get pimples--”

“I will still love you, pimples and all, besides, this piece is magical and it has no calories at all.”

“Well, by all means let me have it!” She giggled and opened her mouth waiting for him to feed the last piece of chocolate to her.

Sylus chuckled and shook his head. “This isn’t going as I had planned. You were suppose to pick up the damned ring box while you were picking up chocolates, and I swear somehow you managed to pick up the candy and never touch the box.

He reached over and removed the blindfold before continuing.

Za’s lashes fluttered and she stared down at the small round red leather box in stunned silence.

“Zaza, I don’t know what is going to happen tomorrow. All I know is I want to walk into the assembly tomorrow night, knowing you are my wife, the eternal mate, of *my* choosing, not theirs. Regardless of our future I want all of them to know that for the remainder of my life *you* are it for me. If they take you from me, then I shall spend the rest of my life alone. No matter what in my heart, you shall remain so.”

“Oh Sy,” Here eyes misted and burned. She took his face into her shaking hands and held it gently. “I love you, with all that I am. I would love nothing more then to marry you tonight.”

Sy lips brushed against hers as he spoke, “Thank you...thank you. I’m so pleased--”

She pulled back. “Wait, let me finish.” She looked away and he felt a feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach as he silently waited. “Promise me that if someday you come across your true life mate you will not fight it.”

“Za--”

“No, I need to know. I know your kind doesn’t know much about death. But for humans it’s a reality we face on a daily basis--”

He interrupted, feeling his chest tightening. “What are you saying?”

“What I’m trying to say...” She released a sigh. “If you were human and my husband, and I were to die--”

“Don’t--” She placed her fingers over his lips and he swallowed his protest. He could barely tolerate the thought of having to let her go. How could he bear not having her around at all, so he

could look at her from afar and keep up with her life at a distance...’fore the gods, it was incomprehensible.

“Sy let me say this.” He nodded his head and she removed her fingers. “If I could no longer be with you, I would want you to go on.” A tear rolled down his face and he closed his eyes as he felt her fingers wiping it away. He loved her touch.

“You must promise me you will accept and love your chosen mate, not because you are destined to, but be open to her. Give her a chance and have your Satyr-born sons, and love again. You are such an incredible and loving person, with so much to give. I can’t imagine you not sharing that with someone for the rest of your life.”

“I don’t know if I can, Za,” he said with deep sadness. His hands soothingly caressed her back.

“You can,” she said forcefully and her voice softened. “You will.”

“And if I can’t.”

“Then you ask them to make you forget your love for me.”

“Za, don’t ask this of me,” he pleaded.

“Then don’t ask me to marry you. I need to know you will go on without me as I know I will once they take my memories of you.”

Reluctantly, Sy agreed and asked once more, “Will you marry me?”

Tenderly she kissed his lips and he held her face to his, extending their intimacy until he was ready to break apart.

“Yes, baby,” she whispered. “I will marry you.”

“I love you,” he managed to choke out over the lump of emotions in his throat. He wasn’t going to stop now. “Zaza, no matter what, *you* are my first wife, the first woman I have ever loved. No one can take that from you.” He picked up the jewelry box and removed the princess-cut emerald with tiny pearls surrounding it. It was simple and heavier than jewelry of today, for the gold was solid and pure. “I know it’s not like the rings of today, but its elegant in design, considering the period in which my father had it commissioned in the sixteenth century, I hope you like it, it belong to my mother.”

She held out her hand and allowed him to slide the ring on her finger; it was a little loose, but not enough to be concerned she would lose it.

“If it is too old fashioned for you, an old and dear friend of mine will be willing to open his jeweler’s vault and you may choose something more modern. I will understand.”

“Oh, no, Sy, it’s exquisite,” she cried.

He preened under her satisfaction. In his heart, he knew Za would appreciate the sentiment more than the fact it was ancient and once belong to someone else.

“This ring, is one of the few items my parents manage to hide before the...they lost their lives during a siege of our castle home. We were all abroad in another war, seemed to always be a war or one kind or another,” he snorted with disgust. “We were always so busy being slaves to other men's wars, we couldn't save our own parents.”

“I'm sorry, for your loss, baby. I can't imagine a greater gift. I cherish this, just because it belonged to the woman who gave birth to you.”

Sy was touched. He couldn't even manage the to speak the words his heart felt. He just cradled her against him, savoring the feel of her tiny warm and moist kisses to his face. Her breath smelled of chocolate and her lips tasted as sweet.

She brushed a gentle kiss against his temple as he reached to pick up the phone resting on the table next to the empty ring box. Sy pressed the button to the cockpit. “Las Vegas is our destination.”

Zaza Draper and Sylus de Gauls exchanged their wedding vows in the *Little White Wedding Chapel*. They chose an intimate chapel with white pulpits and seating, lit with candlelight and an array of flower adorning the small chapel room. Two other guests waiting to marry stood in as witnesses. It was simple, quiet, and quick. Of course, they would have liked to have Selby and Darius by their sides and under normal conditions, they would have called them.

The chapel limousine dropped them off at the Bellagio Hotel, where the honeymoon corner suite awaited. Za giggled and kicked her feet as Sylus carried her across the threshold. She lingered in the circle of his arms as he lowered her to her feet and stole another kiss before she twirled out of his reach to take in her surroundings.

Za wanted to savor every moment, memorize every tiny thing in some hopes that no matter what they did, that someday like a person with amnesia, it would all come flooding back into her memory.

The suite was European with a heavy dark antique wood furnishings and original art pieces. Two powder rooms with his-and-hers bathrobes. They had a pick of the large shower stall or the huge whirlpool tub. Both modes of bathing were big enough for two. The bed was so large she wondered if couples where meant to make love or get away from each other in it.

Either way, she was making sure there wasn't a spot left unscrewed upon before she left that suite. With that thought in her head, she felt Sylus wrap his arms around her midriff as he came up

behind her.

“What wicked things are you thinking about? I saw how you are staring at that bed, *Wife*,” he whispered, breathing hotly against her ear. “You aren’t frightened of what’s to come, are you?”

She turned in his arms and saw the worried frown on his face. “No, I’m not afraid at all.”

His features smoothed out, and he smiled down at her. Her breath caught in her throat. He truly was a beautiful man. No matter how many times she looked at him, his features astounded her.

“Then you were thinking wicked thoughts.” He wiggled his eyebrows and winked.

Her mouth spread into a wide smile. “I’m not telling, but I will show you in a minute.”

Za pulled back, causing him to release his hold as she reached for his hand. She held it up to the bright light, looking at the wide gold band on his finger; it gave her a deep thrill. She didn’t know when he found the time, and it surprised her that he would go ahead and do it, considering he didn’t know if she would say yes.

Inside their wedding bands it read, “*Za & Sy, Eternally.*” As she continued to admire his hand, she thought there was something terribly sexy about it...beautiful, callused, long-fingered, a musician’s hand. She loved the masculine outline of green veins underneath his pale skin, well-kept nails and light sprinkle of hair. This was a man’s hand. Sy had a hand of unimaginable strength, yet, capable of great tenderness.

Such a short time ago, a hand like this touching her would have struck fear in her heart. She had seen hands such as these cause abuse and kill. She would never have to worry about being frightened anymore. She was no longer a helpless child in the body of a woman, running from her own shadow, playing it safe by taking women as her lovers. She would not be a victim of anyone’s, ever again.

She turned his hand over and placed a whisper of a kiss against his palm. She felt as if she was paying Sy’s hand some kind of homage for the comfort it had given her and the pleasure she knew was to come.

“Thank you for not giving up on me.” Za raised her head and looked up into his dark eyes. “Thank you for teaching me that all men aren’t cruel and, most of all, thank you for loving me and making me your wife.”

She closed her eyes with a contented sigh as the large hand she had been admiring took her face and held it tenderly. Her skin tingled where he touched her. First, he kissed the tip of her nose, then her eyes, and finally, he pleasingly kissed her soft mouth.

While she’d been savoring his kisses, he’d been busy. She gazed down as her gown whispering softly to the floor, landing on the top of her heeled feet. She stood before him in the

white lace lingerie and garters he had purchased for her.

The look of hunger on his face as he stared at her half-exposed breasts was all the encouragement, she needed. Za stepped out of her dress and leaned into him. She slid the jacket off his broad shoulders. It landed in a heap on the floor. Next, she removed the onyx and diamond tie-pin from his shirt, leaving it in the collar fastened to one side. Slowly she released each button, exposing naked skin, where she breathed kisses against his skin and felt him shudder.

She took hold of his hand and led him to the bed. Silently, she pushed him onto the bed and fell on top of him. She reached between them and began to tug his shirt out of his pants as she sat up, straddling his thighs. He helped and undid his cuff links, throwing them to the floor. He sat up, ravaging her mouth. Sy shrugged his shoulders and shook his arms free as his shirt fell away. Za reached for and tossed the shirt back over her shoulder. She had no idea where it landed and didn't care.

Sylus unfastened his pants as she unhooked her bra and cast it aside. She stilled his hands to his side. She wanted to take a moment to gaze upon his fair skin bathed in the soft glow of the bedside lamps. She liked what she saw.

A defined chest covered with a light spray of silky brown hair. Her fingertips traced his ribcage and his narrow waist. Za leaned forward, her lips traveled over his jaw and down his throat. He closed his eyes and his head fell back, allowing her more access.

"I need to touch you," he moaned.

"Not yet, if you touch me now I'll probably shatter into a thousand pieces, and I want to enjoy touching you, tasting you, and loving you, as you have done to me." She flickered across the small buds of his sensitive nipples, and he bucked against her.

Deliberately, she grazed her breast against his lower stomach, while her tongue lapped at his chest, like a kitten savoring catnip. The taste of his skin was like a drug, and she couldn't get enough of it. In the aroused state she was in, a mixture of intense emotions and sexual deprivation pushed her to be forward in her desire to please him.

Za progressed off his lap, dragging the remainder of his clothing from his hips, pausing while he eased out of his dress shoes and socks. She kicked off her shoes as he sat up on the edge of the four-poster bed. She stared in wonder that he could appear so unhurried and calm, when she could sense the eagerness of his hands vibrating against her thighs as he released her silk stockings from the garter belt.

Her stomach fluttered as he nibbled tiny kisses to her abdomen and outer thighs while rolling her stockings downward. She lifted her foot and allowed him to ease the stockings over each heel

and off her toes. Curving his thumbs into the waistband of her underwear, he guided them down. With the garter belt until she stood before him completely naked.

“Za.” He whispered her name in a guttural blend of yearning and want as his own appraisal began. “Do you have any idea how long it seems since I last saw you this way and touched you like this?”

He cupped her breasts from underneath, weighing them in his hands. The rough padding of his thumbs strumming over her erect nipples.

“Ohhh...yes,” she practically purred. “It's seemed as if it's been too long.” Reflexively, she arched herself against his searching hands.

Sy smiled with utter male contentment. He kneaded her breast with his entire hands. He leaned forward, licking a dusky brown nipple with the abrasive flatness of his tongue before flickering and tugging it into his parted lips. He suckled until she moaned loudly causing him to release her nipple and move to the other, looking very dry and neglected in comparison. The nipple hardened immediately from his wet administration.

Her arms encircled his head and cradled him to her breast as if he was an infant. She smelled very good and tasted even better. His need was intensifying, and he could feel the beast in him clamoring to be free. His teeth grazed back and forth, his arms tightened around her waist, and he pulled her on top of him as he fell back on the bed.

Za moaned his name. Her curved hips thrashed against his erection, its silken head pressed into the crevice of his navel. “I'm burning up,” she confessed. Steadily she rubbed his body against his.

He wanted nothing more than to sate his lust and bury his cock deep within her warmth, but a part of him was frightened by what would happen if he completely shifted while making love to her. What would happen if she panicked? She could withdraw into a dark place and maybe this time she wouldn't snap out of it. Sy realized this was a lousy time to be thinking reasonably.

No matter how the night would continue, he had to regain control of himself right now or his plans of a slow seduction would dissipate in one blinding orgasm.

Sylus rolled with Za in his arms, careful of his weight and strength until they ended up in the center of the large bed with her on the bottom and he between her spread thighs. He wasn't so sure if this was a good idea either. Both of them looked at each other in stunned silence. Then, in union, they began to laugh. It felt wonderful to let go of some of the sexual tension that threatened to overwhelm what was to be a long and satisfying night for both of them.

“What the hell?” She laughed up at him. “Are you trying to make me motion-sick?”

He took in her luscious mouth. The natural color of her lips inflamed from his passionate kisses, made them more desirable than any lipstick or lip-gloss ever could. He removed the dislodged diamond-studded hair combs from her short hair and tossed them on the floor.

Silently Sy admired the way the necklace and earrings sparkled brilliantly against her dark naked skin. Yet, nothing shone as brightly as the golden flecks in her eyes as she looked intently into his eyes with open love and trust. His passion-filled eyes grew misty.

He swallowed deeply then said, "The extent of my love for you, *Mrs. De Gauls*, scares me."

She wrapped her arms around his neck and drew him closer until his face was barely a breath from hers. "The extent of your loves gives me strength to endure all else, *Husband*. Take back from me whatever you need to not fear what feels...so right."

Sylus grinned, "I do believe with all this kissing, I've passed over to you my poetic tongue."

"It ain't nothing but a thang," she said in southern slang, causing him to laugh aloud. "See, I believe I need some more kissing."

"Indeed, you do." He murmured settling his lips on hers. She moved her mouth beneath his, darting out her tongue to roll wetly against his. His erection felt heavy and his balls weighted, as he ached to thrust his cock inside her. As if she read his mind, she spread her legs wider to accommodate him.

He didn't move.

"Fuck me," she urged. "It's what I want."

"Za, as much as it pains me to say this for I'm dying to bury myself so deep in you it would take the gods to pry us apart; I want to prolong this time with you as much as I can. We may not get the opportunity to be like this again."

"Is that the truth, or you're afraid I will have a panic attack?"

"A bit of both."

She placed her fingers over his lips. "I won't, not with you. I'm not afraid of you Sylus. Let's not spoil this moment, kiss me again and let's purposely ignore the rest of the world exists."

Za rubbed her lips across his until she opened his mouth wider and thrust her tongue inside; she deepened the kiss until he had no choice but to give in to the hot-blooded need that drove him beyond rational thinking. He closed his eyes tightly, wishing he could be like any other man.

All Sy wanted was to love Za as passionately and freely as any other man loved his wife. He could feel the muscles in his calves tighten and his horns unfurl. It was a gentle reminder that he wasn't like any other man, he was a Satyr, and with what he was, came the duties to his gods, the council, and his family. Now, Za was his family too.

Za gasped and he opened his eyes looking down at her flushed face. "Is it still okay?"

"After I put a kiss on you like that one, everything should get hard, including you horns," she teased. Her hands reached up and touched them. Her dark eyebrows arched in amazement as his eyes closed and a deep manly moan came from his lips.

Sy removed his weight off both his arms and rolled over to lie beside her, his head braced on one elbow as he gazed at her and traced her lips with his free hand.

Za groan in frustration. "You're determined to draw this out."

"I am, so you might as well relax."

"I see." She smiled and he saw the sly look in her eyes. She was up to something.

"What happens to you when I do this to you horns?" Her warm fingers wrapped around his horns and stroked.

"Oh...oh, Za." The breath slammed out of his lungs. "Baby, you have to stop--"

"And if I don't?" Her hands began a twisting motion.

"Ahhh...ah...ah..." Sy's eyes rolled and he began to pant as he fell over on to his back. Za straddled his waist, continuing to stimulate him using his horns. "St...stop...or I'm going to...to...ejaculate."

"That's okay," she murmured. "This is amazing. Your horns are as sensitive as my nipples. I adore looking at your face while I'm doing this, it makes me so hot." Her voice was throaty. She began to rub her sensitive clit across the washboard of his abs. The heated flesh of his penis smoothed up between the separated cheeks of her buttocks as she humped against him. Her senses were reeling from the many sensations.

With a grunt and a hell of a lot of self-control, Sy reached up and caught her wrists in both his hands and eased them away from his horns. "I don't want to come this way." He sat up; causing her bottom to sit in his lap with her thighs straddled his waist as they sat face to face.

He cupped both cheeks of her ass in his hands and held her against him. Obliging, Za wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned forward to take his mouth in a deep, soulful kiss.

Sy was the first to break the kiss. "Why are you so in a hurry, sweetheart, for there is much left for you to learn about your husband, woman. One, I'm a very patient man when it comes to making love. The other is, you are fortunate to be married to the one person who taught *Giacomo Casanova* everything he knew about the art of fucking."

Za giggled, and she rolled her eyes heavenward. "You're so full of shit."

Sy didn't see the humor. He arched his right brow in his usual arrogant and affronted way.

"Oh, my God," she spaced her words evenly. "You're serious, aren't you?"

“Telling you I’m serious is meaningless boastings. Showing you, however, is the only way you can know I speak the truth.”

Za jaw dropped in surprise. Her tongue darted across her lips in anticipation of what was to come. “Hum, what do I need to do?”

Sy ran his nose down the bridge of her nose and up again. In a soft, caressing voice he whispered, “The art of being on the receiving end of a good lover is you don’t have to do anything...” He kissed one corner of her mouth. “But...” He kissed the other side. “Concentrate on the sensations of your arousal.”

She shivered as he softly bit on her bottom lip and suckled before releasing it with a wet ‘pop’. He nuzzled the side of her face as he hugged her closely. Her naked breasts flattened against his hard chest. “*Je t’aime tellement. Tu es l’amour de ma vie.*”

“Mmm...what did you say?”

“I love you so much. You are the love of my life,” he translated.

“Oh, *baby*.” She ran the pad of her thumb over his kiss-swollen lips and caught his sigh in her mouth as she placed her parted lips over his.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“Close your eyes.” Sylus whispered, breathing hot air into her ear. “It doesn't matter where my fingers may touch you, where my tongue may caress you, or how excited and anxious you may feel...don't open your eyes...don't touch me.”

Za felt her pulse racing in anticipation.

“Don't speak in words, for your body will tell me all I need to know. Allow yourself to relax completely and trust me to anticipate your needs...your every desire.”

With eyes closed, she still felt as if she was looking upon his face. His features were so clear in her mind.

“Feel my heart.” He lifted her hand and held her palm flat over his heart. “Allow the pounding rhythmic beat to be your musical rhythm. The rhythm of motion you will experience when I bury myself deep inside your warmth.”

Za inhaled sharply as she pictured what his spoken words were making her imagine.

“Feel the rise of my chest as I breath in...out...now, match my breathing. We are sharing one heart...one breath...that's it...breathe in...breathe out.” She felt his lips brushing like a brush against hers. “I'm going to lean forward, you will be lying with your back to the mattress, and I will be kneeling between your spread legs so keep them wide for me.”

For a moment she felt as if she was falling until she felt the softness of the mattress at her back. Her legs spread wider to accommodate Sy, as he instructed. She waited. She was already dripping wet from the prolonged foreplay of the entire evening, starting with her surprises. Now with the happiness that she was married to this special man in her mind, she was going into sensual overload.

She was desperate for a some form of sexual relief. So much so, it took all that she had not to reach between her legs and masturbate herself.

“You're tensing up.” Startled, she jumped and gasped. “It's okay, my love. I'm here. You're safe.” He placed her hand against his powerful chest again. “Ease your breathing to mine...that's it, baby...relax.”

Za's body relaxed, her eyes remained close, her breathing matched Sy's and she didn't think she'd ever felt closer to him. Not even in their previous most intimate coupling, had she felt this complete oneness with him as she did at this very moment.

In her aware state of arousal she would remember her first step closer to Heaven began with a delicate caress along the bone underneath her eyes, across the cheek bone, and, like an artist, he

sculpted and memorized her face.

“Za, I know this is a very intense way of making love, but I want you to experience all that I can give to you. Let me love you...let me love you--”

He moved from the hollows of her temple and jaw, to the column of her throat. She felt treasured, and special. Gently, he squeezed on her earlobes and slid his fingers around the entire edge of ear, onward he continued, making sure no part of her ears were missed.

She sighed.

His hands caressed against the sides of her neck and smoothed slow circles over her shoulders around her breasts without touching her navel. His loving hands revered every part of her body except the ones begging to be touched.

Sy's touches were so exquisite and tender tears seeped through the crack of her closed eyes. It had been so long since someone *touched* her. Not sexually, but really touched her as if her feelings really mattered. He made her feel she was unique, adored, cherished, and most of all, loved.

The last time she felt this safe, happy, and treasured, she was a child. Her mother would crawl in the bed with her on the nights her father didn't come home, wrap her in her arms and cradle her. She would massage her scalp, caress her face, arms and tell her she was the most loved little girl in the world because she had prayed for a daughter just like her.

Some time later, Sy's touch changed from nurturing to erotic; her body's passion began to rebuild as if she was on slow burn. She was beyond ready; she could feel her pussy weeping for satisfaction. Her inner muscles clutching to hold something long and hard and his penis fit the bill.

She never thought she would ever actually crave to have a man's penis inside her, but she did, and at this moment, she wanted Sy bad enough to break all of his rules of seduction. She longed to open her eyes, push him on his back, impale herself on his cock and ride him until they both couldn't walk.

No, I can't be thinking this way. What is he doing to me? He is trying to kill me. If he keeps bringing me to the brink of release and stopping, I swear I'm going to hang him by his nuts.

Za gritted her teeth and continued repeating in her head, “*Keep your mouth shut, your eyes closed, and enjoy your arousal.*”

After what felt like hours in this said “state of arousal,” Za opened an eye and peeped. She couldn't believe Sy was able to continue. She saw his erection had grown an angry reddish-purple, standing rigidly against his navel. She wondered if he hurt as much as she did.

One could never tell by looking at his face. He seemed to be in awe of her body as if he had never seen a naked woman before. She would swear there wasn't a mole, stretch mark, scar, or

birthmark that he didn't worship with his fingers or tongue. Everything had been except her nipples and her clitoris. These two were feeling sorely neglected.

Za twisted the bedding in her hands and planted her feet into the mattress as she arched high and tried to place her needy clit under his wandering tongue as he came close to it. For the third time he ignored it completely. She whimpered in frustration. *Fuck it!*

"I can't take any more." Za's voice echoed her longing. She stared at him lounging between her legs sucking and tugging the top of her mons. His dark eyes looked up into hers, but he didn't stop sucking and nipping her lower abdomen and the top of her high-setting pussy.

"Sy." She scowled like a petulant child. "You can lick my clit, fuck me, or let me touch myself. I don't care which, but I got to get some relief."

Sy looked at her with a smug smile. "Tell me you believe that I am the world's greatest lover."

Za shook her head in disbelief, her smoldering eyes narrowed into slits. "You are going to make me hurt you." Za had never felt so close to wanting to commit violence during lovemaking as she did at that moment.

"Mmm...sweetheart, is that a promise?" His long tongue darted out and he administered several series of tongue strokes along the entirety of each outer blood-thickened vulva lip and then the inner lips.

When he tongued her clitoris and drew it between her lips, Za pushed his long hair aside so she could watch him. Panting heavily and whimpering, her hand grabbed a hand full of his hair. She bucked her hips off the mattress, shoving her pussy hard against his mouth. He cupped her bottom in his hand and held her against his face as she cried out her first long-awaited orgasm. As the waves of ecstasy eased, Za went limp. Her eyes closed involuntarily. Never had she experienced such an overall orgasm, she felt as if her entire body was coming from every orifice she possessed.

Butterfly wings turned several somersaults in her stomach. She couldn't do anything but lie there as Sy untangled his hair from her finger and shook his head, brushing his fingers through it to release some of the snarls she had wrought with her hands.

He swept the tresses to the side and leaned down to lick up her vaginal juices. When his tongue flickered over her clitoris once more, Za's eyes flew wide, and she dug in her heels pushing herself away from his mouth until she felt the headboard of the bed at her back. Her clit was so tender now, she was not sure, if she could stand for him to touch it again.

Sy sat back on his hunches and looked at her thoughtfully before speaking. "You are so beautiful. Your hair is sticking up like you've been in an electrical storm, your eyes are dilated

almost as dark as my own, and your skin is all flushed and glowing from where my face, teeth, and sucking have braised you.”

“Sounds like I look a mess.” Za blew out long sigh to slow down the racing of her heart. She lifted a hand to smooth down her hair.

His head cocked to the side. “I can’t seem to get enough of you. Every time I thought I had discovered every single thing about your body, I would see a mole I missed, or sample a part of you that was so much sweeter than the last taste.”

Za giggled and blushed. “You’re crazy.”

“For you,” he said. “The entire time I was touching you, all I could think was, *I can’t believe she’s mine.*”

“Are you always like this?” Her eyes burned and misted. She stared at his handsome face through blurred eyes.

A wide white grin spread across his handsome face. “What? Greedy, you mean?”

“I mean,” she hesitated, not sure she really wanted to know the answer. “Are you always such an amorous and attentive lover, even with other women? With Darius?”

Sy smiled eased as he regarded her with a speculative gaze. “I won’t apologize for being a skilled lover. Entertaining the female Vampires of the Darkworld was our life purpose. We were gifts from the gods because wars would take their males away from them for years at a time. We could pleasure them, but we could not give them children. When their race started to die out, we became warriors instead of lovers. The male Vampires remained with their mates to repopulate their race. We Satyrs fought and died in their place. We are the few that survived those dark times.”

She saw the pained expression on his face and her heart reached out to him, but what could she have said that would have made a difference?

Za opted to say, “I see.” Even though she didn’t understand. This world was so far removed from anything she had led. She lowered her eyes from his, feeling guilty for her thoughts, and after, he just gave her so much of himself. This was just something else that reminded her of their differences.

“No, Za, you don’t.” He shook his head. “You couldn’t possibly understand because you do not live in our world.”

Za smiled sadly. “You’re right, I don’t.” She agreed. “So is that why you took a man as your lover, because you didn’t want to be alone?”

Sy’s full smile returned as he fondly thought about his and Darius’s relationship. He hesitated as if searching for the right words. “Darius is my *male mate*.” He said it as if it summed up

everything. Then, he added. "We all have a male counterpart to help ease the loneliness of the centuries it may take before our female mates are born. If he or I had found our female mates before finding each other, we would have never been lovers. I do not regret my time with Darius, nor the place he has in my heart. The relationship between us would have been different, but the love just as strong."

"What about Selby...you...and Darius? I'm not sure I understand how that works. Selby had given me the impression that I could join in, even though I am human."

"It is not unusual for a Satyr and his mate to open their bed to the individuals they love. Satyrs hate to see anyone unhappy in their presence, it is our nature to ease and please others' grief and loneliness. Mostly, our being together is about showing one unconditional love, appreciation, and all the joys of being alive. Everyone needs to be loved, Za. Like what I expressed to you today."

Za grew quiet.

"What is it, sweetheart?"

"I suppose that is why you always see to my needs and have no real concern for your own. You are taught to please, and you don't really need me to do the same for you." She had to conquer her involuntary reactions to that gentle, loving look of his. She sat up and leaned back against the bed's wooden headboard, pulling the pillow over her nakedness. Her feelings towards him were growing cloudy with confusion.

"Za, what are you getting at?" He stared at her, baffled.

She nervously played with her wedding rings. "Sy, I believe I may have figured out why you strongly think you are in love with me, when it isn't supposed to be possible for you to love a *human* female"

His mind refused to register the significance of her words. "There is no need for reasoning this to death anymore, my love. I don't *think* I'm in love with you. I *know* I am; it's why I married you only hours ago."

She shook her head. A wave of apprehension swept through her. She didn't know why she didn't think to ask these questions before. Then, she admitted to herself that wasn't true. She had wanted to ask, but was afraid of the answers.

"Since we met, Sy, I have been an emotional mess, living with all these lies and secrets I have kept buried for so long. Because of this, I wasn't happy, and no matter how many women I took to my bed, I could never accept their love for me because I didn't think I deserved love. I feel that you perceived my unhappiness, and you became driven to make me happy." Za looked away before continuing.

“Sy, I think you want to give me the things I so desperately craved, such as freedom from the fear of sexual contact with men and of falling in love.”

“Let me get this straight.” Sylus rolled to his side and propped his head up on his hand using his elbow as a brace. “You’re saying I love you because it is in my genetic makeup to want to please?”

Her eyes returned to his. “What else can it be?” The silence lengthened between them, making her uncomfortable. “I know you may not want to face the possibility, nor do I, but we both know what’s going to happen tomorrow evening. There is not going to be any last minute-miracles to turn this into more than what it is.”

“What do you think *this* is?”

“I believe you’re trying to make sure I’m at my happiest, and yes, you’ve done your job. In these past twenty-four hours has been the most secure and contented that I have felt in my entire life.” She sought to erect a wall of defense against him for the same reason she assumed he was taking his sweet time before making her his completely. “You’re frightened that if you make love to me, come inside me, it will only be harder on us to part tomorrow night.”

A look of tired sadness came over her face. “Out of all the things you have said to me, this has to be the most asinine thing I’ve ever heard coming from you,” he ground out between clenched teeth as if holding a raw emotion in check.

“Don’t do this!” Za placed her hands over her face and shook her head. “I don’t want to know what happiness feels like! Don’t you see what you’ve done? You’ve shown me all that I’ve been missing and I feel as if my entire life has been a waste of time.”

Sylus came up on his hands and knees and crawled up towards her, closing the space between them. He reached out, withdrew her hands from her face, and held them in his. “Baby, look at me.”

She stared with sad longing at him.

His gaze traveled over her face and searched her eyes. “You speaking as if tomorrow is already upon us! I don’t knot about you, but I’m not willing to give up on us so easily.” He bent his head and stole a kiss from her lips. “Don’t get me wrong, I have only been slow to consummate my love for you because I want this moment to last as long as possible.”

She tried to pull away, but he wasn’t allowing it. “Sy, please don’t say this. Don’t give me hope.”

“Hope is all we have, Za.” His eyes clung to hers, analyzing her reaction. “Look at my body, it craves to be with you in every way. It’s not pity or a Satyr’s intuition that caused me to

make you my bride. If I just wanted to pleasure you, I didn't have to marry you. Yes, your happiness is important to me, but so is my own. Look at me; I'm still hard for you. Do I look like a man that has intentions of not consummating our union? I disappointed in you. It sounds as if you are giving up while I continue to have hope, in my heart, that we will be able to remain together...as husband and wife."

Za's lids slipped down over eyes as she took in his chest, moving further to his full erection heavy and thick. She licked her lips. "I don't wish to disappoint you. I was trying to make a point and face the harsh truth of our situation."

"I believe you've made your point, I just don't happen to agree, and as you can see, I got a point to make, and it's poking me in the stomach. Now enough talking. Kiss me, damsel." He nibbled at the corner of her mouth, and she sighed. "You seemed to be enjoying everything I was doing, until you had an orgasm like never before. Are you saying now that you gotten yours you no longer have a desire for me?" He crooked a finger beneath her chin and licked her lower lip. "You're being damned selfish, aren't you?"

Za moaned and turned her head. "Not selfish, just scared, since I don't want to lose you, ever." Tears welled up in her eyes. "I don't know if I can keep up this pretense that we are two normal happy go lucky people on their wedding night because we aren't."

She didn't give him the chance to distract her again as she held him at bay with her hands against his naked chest.

Za continued her ranting. "I know not going back to face them is foolish thinking because you can't defy your people any more then you've already have without jeopardizing your life." She paused long enough to take a deep breath. "I wouldn't let you, anyway, because I don't want you to die because of me, and as much as I hate the thought of what is going to happen, I don't want to die either."

"Za--"

"Yeah...yeah, I know what you're going to say. It's a stupid idea and I shouldn't even be considering it, but I can't think of anything else that will allow us to remain together," she rambled on. "I don't want to lose you, and what I'm considering will mean giving up all that I am to stay by your side"

Sy stared at her in silence.

"Am I making any sense to you?" She ran a hand through her mussed hair. "Because I don't know if what I'm thinking is a possibility or just fictional stuff that I've read..."

"Sweetheart, I just have one question. Are we making love tonight or not?" he asked with a

significant lifting of his brow.

Her mouth opened in surprise and she bit her bottom lip to keep from grinning. “I’m trying to be serious here, Sylus, there is something important we need to discuss.”

Sylus touched his erection. “I’m serious, too, and from what I heard over the centuries, nobody spends this much time talking on their wedding night.”

This time she smiled and giggled. “Okay, I’m just going to say what I’ve been trying to say and get it over with.”

“Which is?”

Za cleared her throat and said clearly. “I’m going to ask Marie to turn me into a vampire.”

Sylus’s mouth dropped wide in surprise. Za waited; her heart sped up as she paused for him to make a comment.

His expression stilled and grew serious. “You would do that to be with me?”

“I would do anything to be with you like this, forever,” she said without hesitation.

Sylus felt humbled by her love. “I appreciate the sacrifice; though, it may not be an option, sweetheart.” He cupped the side of her face with his hand, his thumb caressing the swell of her cheek.

“Marie said she would help, so what better thing to ask her to do for us? It would be a perfect solution to our problem.”

“It will not be left up to Marie alone. In order to keep order to what could become a chaotic situation, the Vampires can’t change anyone without council permission.”

Za stretched her legs out in front of her and sighed deeply. “It seems we have to contend with them one way or the other, don’t we?”

“I’m afraid so.” His knuckles brushed her breasts, rubbing gently. Her dark nipples hardened beneath his touch. “Za, you don’t know how much your offer means to me. I can’t even begin to express what I’m feeling at this moment.” His fingers kneaded her breasts.

Za moaned, leaned into his palms, pushed nearer. “Show me.” She wound her arms around his neck and held him to her.

His lips burned a trail of moist heat as he nibbled her throat, then moved lower. His tongue twirled along her skin, tasting the natural flavor of her skin. Za gasped when his mouth advanced over her breast. Her fingers tangled in his hair.

His tongue snaked around her nipples as he blew hot air again onto her breasts. His hands cupped each one, as he pressed them together. Hot moisture pooled between her thighs as he suckled and blew on her nipples.

Za boldly reached for his cock. Hot satin smoothness surrounded him, held him. Involuntarily, he gasped as she began stroking him forcing him to release her breast from his mouth. The sensation her touch was arousing rushed through his body straight to his penis causing his testicles to feel heavy.

He was able to catch his breath as she removed her hands and placed them on his shoulders to press him back against the mattress. "It's my turn," Za murmured. He reveled in her wickedly breathtaking smile that caused his heart to skip a beat. "Being married to me, you're going to have to learn that I like giving pleasure as much as I like receiving it. I demand equal partnership in and out of the bed."

Her hands cradled the thick length of him, her fingertips committed to memory the texture and silhouette of his erection with mind-blowing slowness. Her teeth nipped his belly. His body tensed. Her tongue tasted his skin, causing a dense fire to burn through his senses. She lowered her mouth over his cock, gripping the base snugly in her fist and her head bobbed as she sucked and stroked him.

His subconscious need to fulfill his deepest longing, to claim Za completely, awakened the creature. He felt his horns and his ears lengthening. "Zaza." He whispered her name in a husky blend of excitement and need, his fingers in her hair, his slender hips propelling with zeal.

"Oh, shit," Sy groaned again, shook his head to clear the erotic display of dancing lights, and shadows behind his eyes as they rolled heavenward and closed against his will. At least his legs hadn't shifted yet; he could still feel human toes curling. His free hand gripped the comforter and twisted to give him a distraction from the intense sensation gathering in his penis. "Za, no more." He tugged at her hair to get her attention.

She lifted her head, her lips swollen and wet, and her exotic liquid honeyed colored eyes darkened with desire, as she looked him over seductively. "Shit, I don't think I've ever been this wet," she admitted boldly and didn't stop there. "I think I could have an orgasm just by sucking on your sweet big dick."

Sy grinned at her coarse words. "I see my sweetheart likes to talk dirty in bed? So lets say I savor more of your pussy nectar before we go for the big bang."

His eyes locked with hers and the intent of his gaze was obvious, even if he hadn't spoken the words. He pulled her roughly, almost violently, to him and rolled over, placing her spread-eagled beneath him. His full erection was poised at her thick moistened pussy lips, but he wanted to savor her sweetness once more before he put an end to their long-awaited joining.

Za felt his mouth moving behind her ear and along her throat in feverish abandonment. The

rhythm of her heart pumped rapidly as he moved lowered. She was thankful; he wasn't wasting too much time getting to the core of her aching with need.

Za closed her eyes; the pleasure was so intense it hurt. She lavished in each lap of Sy's long tongue while he stroked and savored until he brought her body to a slow hum. Her thighs trembled as he placed her legs over his shoulders, lifting her hips completely off the mattress. She a pillow being shove beneath the small of her back, her fingers clawed and clutched the comforter, anticipating what was to come.

He was insanely adoring and thorough. His finger pushed deep into her so that her muscles tightened around him, while he sucked on her clit and hummed deep from his throat, causing a vibrating sensation against her core.

"Oh shit, fuck! Fuck! Sy!" She clutched the bedding, her hands balling into fists, tears streamed down the sides of her face, Za she cried out in gratification. The muscles in her legs jerked causing her legs to slide from his sweaty shoulders. "Oh damn, what the hell was that?" She laughed, moaned, and cried at the same time as she rode the convulsions of her orgasm.

Before she could catch her breath, Sylus's had fastened his mouth to hers. It was obvious he wasn't in the mood for talking, the purposeful look on his face told her; the last orgasm was just a sign of the intense gratification to occur. She didn't know if she would survive the night of becoming Sy's lover, but it was a viable risk she was willing to take.

She had become his erotic slave, a puppet to handle and pull her strings, like no other has ever been able to do before. She openly offered to him her heart, her body, and her soul. Once again she gripped the comforter to brace herself as Sy lifted the pillow beneath her bottom, poised his erection and surged forward, burying his hardness deep into her.

Za cried out, and he stilled. She couldn't believe it. Her entire body shuddered with pleasure as she came once more. This has never happened to her before...ever. She reached up and wrapped her arms tightly around his neck, pulling his skin flush with hers. Her legs wrapped around his flanks, so she could savor the sudden emotional freedom and joy, she felt at having him inside her. There was no fear.

In Za's hot-blooded haze all she could do was see, smell, and feel Sylus. He masterfully distracted her to the point of madness and now they were truly one.

"I did it," she sobbed into the side of his throat. He came up on his elbows and cupped her face; spraying baby-soft kisses to her temple, her nose, cheeks, and chin before he moved his mouth over hers. His tears of joy mingled with hers. "I had an orgasm with you inside me."

"Yes, you did sweetheart." He sprayed her face with kisses. "I'm so proud of you. Are you

sure you're okay?" His eyes were drinking in the surprised look on her face.

"Oh, you feel so good. It's hard, yet soft, thick, yet long." She grinned. "Okay, I'm about to say something real corny that I read in one of those romance novels. You feel like *velvet steel*."

He regarded her with amusement, his mouth quirked with humor before he snorted out a laugh and buried his face into the side of her neck.

Za punched him in the shoulder. She couldn't be too upset because as his body shook with laughter, his cock would tap the upper inner walls of her pussy, and she felt on the verge of something very intense about to happen. She couldn't resist the urge to push upwards with her hips, as if she could somehow keep his penis hitting that spot.

It didn't take Sy long to get serious once he felt her vaginal walls clenching around him. "Za, you feel so much better than I could ever have imagined." His voice was rough, bordering on a growl. He found a perfect rhythm, surging deep, pulling shallow, rotating and thrusting repeatedly.

Za heard him moan as if he was in pain. A sheen of sweat dripped off his brow. His horns extended, his ears pointed and his eyes blackened with contained passion. It was a reminder that the Satyr existed. Yet, the rest of him was all man.

Za dug her fingernails into his broad shoulders as she felt her body respond to his deep stroking. He tilted her hips bringing him even deeper, even though it didn't seem possible. She welcomed the feel of his weight holding her down, for her head was swimming and a ringing hollowness came to her ears as the blood roared through her veins.

She knew it would be a wonderful connection between them, but the reality was so much more. She felt as though they were on the verge of something gloriously infinite and ancient, like the beginning of time. It was as if her heart beat the same pattern as his, her ribcage fit perfectly beneath his; when he breathed out, she swallowed it in.

"Oh, Sy...I...I--" she whimpered as he sent her body into another earth-shattering orgasm.

"I know. Me, too." His body shuddered. Sy closed his eyes tightly as agony and pleasure gripped him. He could feel his erection swelling even more as he fought off the urge to shift with his pending release.

"Sy," Za was placing loving kisses to his moist face. "I can feel your penis jerking, I know you want to come. Come inside me, please."

Sylus stilled against her, shaking his head. "I can't, Za. No Satyr has ever released his *nectar* inside a human female. Your body may not be able to take it, and it could kill you." He tried to withdraw so he could obtain relief.

Za locked her ankles in the small of his back. "It's a chance I'm willing to take. This may be

our last night together. I am your wife. Do not deny me this wish.”

“You don't know what you are asking.” His voice roughened. He cleared his throat. “You don't know--”

“I know that if you truly love me, you will allow me to decide for myself. I'm not frightened of the Satyr. He is a part of you. If it is my fate to die from this, then I rather die, tonight in your arms, then made to forget tomorrow that I ever loved you. Please, don't deliver me from my fears only to give me new ones. I believe we were meant to be and I know you won't hurt me in any way.”

He heard her words gently beating in his heart and his soul. The beast clamored for the privilege to claim what was rightfully his. There was no turning back. The love of his life beckoned him, and he had no will but to do her bidding. His only thought was to make her happy and to please her at all cost.

Za experienced a sudden surge of adrenalin in her bloodstream, as power seemed to emanate from the pores of his skin. She was aware of muscles tightening and rippling beneath his skin. She looked into his eyes and held the dark pit of his stare. Silently she willed all the love she had inside toward him. If this moment was indeed to be her last breath, she wanted to die with him knowing he was everything to her.

She stared in fascination as he shifted. From the feel of his muscular bottom covered now in silky long hair, it felt like she was rocking her hips against a rabbit-fur blanket. His penis felt thicker inside her, and she pulled her thighs upwards towards her breasts to accommodate and meet his rapid, demanding thrust.

It was crazy, it was wild, it was sinfully decadent, and there was nothing like it. She felt alive, strong, and powerful. As she screamed out her orgasm, she felt as if she floated off the bed as she bucked wildly against him. His hair curtained around them and stood on ends from the flow of strength that emanated from his magical form.

She felt his body tightening, gathering until he seemed to give off an almost unbearable heat. He seemed to swell even more inside her. She didn't think she could break the link between them, even if she had wanted him to pull out of her. She felt bonded to him, and then he seemed to explode inside her. She could feel him shooting his essence, thick and hot against her womb.

She clawed at her skin and bit into his shoulder. She cried out from the intensity of the heat ripping through her body. Sy's husky growls followed by an inhuman wail tore raw from his throat as ecstasy ripped through him into her, their juices blending.

It was too much, too intense. She closed her eyes and welcomed the liberation of darkness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Sylus pulled Za's sleeping form to him, pillowing her head on his shoulder. Never had he experienced such intense lovemaking. His new bride was everything and so much more than he could have hoped for in a mate.

He was horrified when she became still and lifeless in his arms. They were in unfamiliar territory, leaving them no one to clearly speak to about such matters. He kissed her forehead and closed his eyes with a deep sigh. He felt completely drained.

"Sylus? What is the matter with you and don't say nothing. I haven't felt you in such a weakened state since you were wounded during the Napoleonic Wars."

Sy's heart jumped, startled by the sudden mental invasion, it was unnerving to know his self-imposed barriers were down because of his current vulnerability.

"Darius, I am well. Better than well, my friend. I am happy." Sy smiled as Za nuzzled against him, throwing her leg over his, her knee extremely close to his very sensitive dangling jewels.

"I can feel that, too."

"So you contacted me more from curiosity than concern?"

"Well, yes, but specifically because Selby gave me no choice. I told Selby about her mother and that you and Za were together in San Francisco."

"How is she taking it?"

"She will not give me sex until I find out how Zaza is faring through all of this. You must help me, I'm starving for affection," Darius pleaded.

The old friends laughed and teased, both of them amazed that they could have been so fortunate to find love after all this time of thinking it would never happen. Still, Sylus couldn't celebrate his newfound love. Even though he allowed Za her hope, he already knew the council would not allow this union. He couldn't celebrate. He definitely wasn't confessing his marriage news to his dearest companion; it would only give Darius something new to keep from Selby.

Suddenly, Darius became quiet as if sensing something wasn't right. *"Sy, Za is well, isn't she?"*

"She seems to be fine, however--"

"What? Please don't give me more news to have to tell Selby; she is already moments away from canceling the wedding. She didn't appreciate how I managed to hide my thoughts from her."

"You know how we were told, if a Satyr mates with a human female in Satyr form, the nectar

could kill her."

"What have you done, Sylus?"

Sy could hear the growing anger in Darius's voice, but it was too late to do anything about it now. It was all over.

"I made love to Za," he paused. "I released... the nectar of the gods."

"Damn you, Sylus!" Darius raged. "Why? Why did you do this?"

"I love her. I know there will be no other mate for me," Sylus declared.

Darius said in a calmer voice, *"Okay, I understand how you could want to show Zaza the extent of your feelings for her. Nevertheless, you could have done so without releasing the nectar. Why did you allow the release? How could you?"*

"I...know. She hasn't yet awakened, but she didn't die," he said softly. "If they were wrong about humans and Satyrs. What if they're wrong about Za being my true mate?"

Darius cursed. *"Sylus, even if you hadn't released your essence inside Za, you know what it means to release it when you aren't with your eternal mate. You have given up your only chance to make your 'true' mate immortal. Without your mate, you can't have sons!"*

Sylus closed his burning eyes. *"I know all of this, Darius. It is my choice. Not yours."*

"As your male mate, it gives me the right to talk some sense into your stubborn head," Darius bellowed. *"I should have never allowed you to handle these emotions on your own."*

Sylus had no idea how much time passed in silence, but he knew Darius was still there, waiting, for him to explain. There was only one explanation. His fingers glided over the soft skin of Za's shoulder, the swell of her breast pressed into his chest, and he could hear her heart beat. Steady, strong, and pure. He had no regrets.

"What do you want me to say? It is simple; I love her, Darius. I made the decision to not go on without her. She need not know this before they make her forget. Please, do not say anything to Selby," he said sadly.

"It is not my secret to share, Sy."

"I can't believe how special this woman is. She was willing to become a Vampire for me." Sylus shook his head in amazement. *"Za was willing to die for me, to give up the mortal world, just because she loves me. No one but you and my brothers have been willing to die for me."*

"The Ancients have not allowed a human conversion for centuries. They will deny her request." Darius stated in his usual matter-of-fact way.

"I know, and told her as much, still she hopes."

"Sylus, I can't believe this is happening. How could you be so fucking selfish? What we do

as a people to survive isn't about what we want. The existence of our entire race depends on the few of us that remain, and you have just shot it all to hell because--"

"Because I want to be free to love who I want to love." Sylus interrupted. "Tell me Darius, knowing how you feel about Selby, would you feel the need to go on without her?"

"It's not the same."

"It is for me."

"So, you desired death. You know the law; the Ancients will not forgive you for what you have done this time. You have gone too far. There is no worse betrayal than this, Sy. You have bound my hands and broken my heart with this decision you've made. Quintan won't even be able to talk you out of this one."

"Yes, I'd rather die, than know Za is alive, finding love with someone else, and I can't have her for myself."

"Well, good for you," Darius ground out sharply, before his voice softened. "What will I do without you, my friend?"

Sylus could feel Darius's sorrow like a huge, painful knot inside his gut. A forlorn tear trailed down his face. *"Darius, I need you to be there for the assembly at midnight tonight. Za will need you and Selby. She will sleep for at least twenty-four hours afterwards, and I need to know she will be with people who will care for her until she awakens."*

"Of course," Darius reassured him.

"Thank you for having my back all those times, even though--" his voice cracked. "Even though you knew I was in the wrong. I love you."

"And I you, Sylus. Until tonight."

Darius's voice faded from his mind and he almost reached for him again. Their time was so short, but he decided against it. Darius had got used to the loss. It will be hard on him at first, but in time with Selby's help, he will let go of the grief. His sons will help him through the remaining years.

Za moaned against him and in her sleep she smiled. It was the most enchanting smile he had ever seen; only a close second to the rapture he saw on her face while they made love. He would take both with him into the netherworld, where he would watch over her in spirit. He held her tightly to his heart and silently wept.

"Wake up, sleepyhead. I know you would like to while your day away in bed, but I have allowed you to sleep as long as I can without going mad."

Za stirred, her lush body stretched leisurely and her lashes fluttered open. A slight breeze drifted through the open balcony door. It appeared to be a beautiful day, but not half as beautiful as the man leaning over her. His silken platinum hair that she had wallowed in and felt caressing over her body like tiny feather-covered fingers was contained once more in its familiar braid.

“Hello, gorgeous husband.” She giggled foolishly. Her entire body had a delicious, thoroughly fucked feeling. It was wonderful!

“Hello to you, beautiful wife.” He gently kissed her forehead and each cheek before moving to her mouth. She turned her face away.

“*Aaack!* I need to brush my teeth first,” she mumbled from the corner of her mouth and heard him laugh aloud.

He grabbed her by the chin, turned her face to meet his, and planted a thorough kiss on her. He pulled back and looked her in the eyes. “Your kiss is as sweet as the chocolate we had on the plane.”

“Liar,” she chastised. “But I love you for it.”

“I love you, too.” He kissed her once more. “How about taking a bath with me in the big Grecian marbled tub and then we have breakfast on the terrace?”

“Shouldn’t we be getting back?” She sat up. The silk sheets fell from her breasts and immediately caught his eyes.

Sy reached out and fingered a passion mark. “I got a bit carried away last night. Are you feeling okay?”

“I feel so alive,” Za, admitted. Her eyes closed involuntarily as he thumbed both of her nipples. She licked her dry lips. “I adored every moment of it.” She looked up at him. “Even when you released the Satyr.”

Immediately, she saw his eyes darken. “Come, before our bath gets cold.” She released a throaty laugh as he lifted her out of the bed. She wrapped her arms around his neck and enjoyed lying against his chest like an adored infant.

The water in the oversized tub was the perfect temperature to soothe her aching muscles as the jet streams created a steady flow against her skin. She slid lower and dunked her head, pushing her hair back off her brow.

“You are getting in, aren’t you?”

“In a minute.”

She smiled as he dropped the white terry cloth bathrobe he was wearing on the floor. She loved his body. As a man, he had the body of a runner, but as a Satyr, his body between her legs had

felt as muscular as Goliath. She shivered with pleasure from the thought.

She continued to watch him as he walked around the powder room lighting candles and dimming the chandelier that hung above the bath. He lifted up a remote and a fire appeared in the fireplace at the foot of the bath along with the soft flow of music in the room. She wished she had thought to bring their song out of the limo, but the hotel choice of music was a soothing and relaxing choice of instrumentals.

Za licked her lips, took in a mouthful of lavender-scented water, and rinsed her mouth out. She didn't care what he said; morning breath is a *bad thing*. Next time, she would have to wake up before him in time to brush her teeth. Internally, she released a deep sigh, remembering there was a possibility there would be no next time.

She swept up a hand of water and splashed it over her face to hide the tears that gathered in her eyes. She didn't want to ruin their hours together with thoughts of what was to come. Now was all that mattered.

Sy stepped over into the tub and sat behind her, drawing her body against his chest. He gathered her against him and they sat in silence allowing the quiet jest streams to work it's magic over aching bruised flesh and muscles. He leaned her forward and moved a wet wash cloth in circles over her shoulders; her head fell forward, chin pressed against her chest savoring the long, deft strokes up and down from the nape of her neck to the small of her back.

She couldn't imagine ever forgetting Sylus, not even with his gods' sorcery. She didn't want to alarm him but she felt different. Everything seemed louder and colors more vibrant. Her flesh felt sensitive. Maybe it was the exceptional lovemaking that had her keyed up. Even with the soft music playing, she would swear she could hear his heart beating as if she had a stethoscope to his chest.

"Sy, you haven't said anything about Darius calling; is Selby all right?"

She felt his hand pause. "What makes you think Darius called here?"

"I heard you speaking with him." She chuckled. "He was talking so loud it felt like he was standing in my head."

"Really?" Sy frowned.

"Hmm, that feels so good." Za moaned as he massaged the shampoo in her hair. His fingers kneaded her scalp.

"Za, what exactly did you hear Darius say?"

She shrugged. "Not much. It was one of those half sleep-half awake moments. I remember him saying he told Selby about her mother, and she wasn't giving him any loving in bed," Za

chuckled. "He sounded upset, that's why I wondered if Selby was okay? Is she hurt by us going behind her back?"

"I...I can't believe you heard that," Sy said, slightly distracted.

She sunk deeper into the water all of her weight braced against his strength. She didn't see the stunned disbelief on his face.

"Like I said, he was yelling into the freakin' phone. Tell me is Selby all right, because if she isn't I want to see her before we go back to California."

"Darius told her everything. She is upset, of course, but she is handling it well, considering."

Za stilled. "He told her about us?"

"Yes."

"I wished he hadn't until we knew for sure if I can be converted into a Vampire." She reached out and soaped the top of his long thighs that encompassed her hips. She felt his erection pressing into her back and a thrill of excitement coursed through her body.

"My love, I told you not to get your hopes up."

She felt the bathing cloth brushed over her head as he rinsed her hair. Za released a sigh of contentment. "I know, but I need to cling to something. I simply can't believe you were placed in my life by some miracle of fate and this be all there is to us."

"I can only hope that is true. I asked Darius to come tonight and to bring Selby. You will need their support."

Za caught the catch in his voice and turned her torso, looking up at his handsome stubborn-set jaw, in deep need of a shave. Still, it didn't take away from his angelic attractiveness.

"What's the matter? I sense there is something you're not telling me." Her brow crinkled with worry.

He dazzled her with a disarming smile, it sent her heart into an erratic skitter.

"Za, nothing is the matter except that I'm feeling neglected." He reached out, pulling her around to face him. Water sloshed about as he lifted her until she sat astride his lap, his arms wrapping around her waist, the abrasive padding of his fingers strummed along her back and spine. It reminded her of the first time she saw him playing his guitar and how hot he had made her. "Hold me, Zaza. I just need you to hold me."

She wrapped her legs around his waist. She locked her wet, slippery feet in the small of his back, nestling him in her warmth. She cradled his head against the side of her throat, her chin resting on his head. Her breasts pressed flat against his chest she rocked him, her heart nearly breaking as he clung to her.

She took his wet braid and draped it around the back of her neck, wishing it was enough to keep them forever bound together just like this. She felt his wet hands go to her hips. He lifted her and impaled her on his erection without warning. She cried out and shivered against him; fire tore through her body feverishly, desperately pounded into her flesh.

She felt overwhelmed by the desperation she felt emanating from him while they made love. It was as if he was trying to become a part of her. There were times she felt as if she couldn't catch her breath and she couldn't care less. Her man needed her and, may God help her, she desperately needed him to need her.

She cupped his face and gazed deeply into his dark eyes; there was a spark of some indefinable emotion in his eyes. Keeping their eyes wide open, their lips met as they continued to look at each other. The sounds of their heated lovemaking drowned out the music in the room, water waved and splashed carelessly over the sides of the bath.

Sy's horns emerged, his telltale sign that he was beyond reasoning. She welcomed her beast for he was a gentle soul in need of love, a love that he trusted her to give him. There will never be anyone comparable. Tears welled up in her eyes as they rolled heavenward and closed involuntarily as she cried out in ecstasy.

Sy grunted and pumped upward a few more times before he joined her in a sweet rapture, calling out her name. They held on to each other in that position, long after the water became cold. They both knew that once they left their safe haven, life for them would never be the same.

"I love you so much, Za," Sylus thought in his mind as his body shook with the force of his second release.

"I love you more, Sy," she answered aloud with her eyes tightly closed, rocking against him. She didn't see his shocked expression.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

San Francisco, California

“Sun is setting. I’m going to go pick up Quin and bring him back here. Will you be okay alone?” Sylus came up behind Za as she sat at the vanity, placing his hand on her shoulder. He stared at their reflection in the mirror. He always knew they would look good together and he had been right.

Her dark throat and cleavage drew his immediate attention. The cream-colored satin robe clung to her womanly curves as she rubbed baby oil lotion along her shapely legs. He never knew how contented a man could feel just from watching a woman preparing to dress. The urge to touch her was more than he could ignore. He placed a loving kiss to the side of her neck and she smiled at his reflection in the mirror.

“Baby, that’s the third time you’ve asked me that in the past hour. I will be fine.”

“Za, are you sure you’re not experiencing anything unusual?”

She looked at him in amused wonder. “You keep looking at me as if you expect me to sprout horns or something.”

He stared back. A wry but indulgent glint appeared in his eyes.

“Damn.” She giggled. “Where’s your sense of humor this evening?”

“I don’t understand why you aren’t more nervous.”

“I don’t, either,” she shrugged. “I feel wonderful and I feel so happy, I’m giddy with it.”

He exchanged a smile with her and shook his head. “Could it be that entire bottle of wine you finished all by yourself?”

“I did not!”

“Beg your pardon, you most certainly did.” The back of his hand stroked the side of her face and she grabbed it, bringing his palm to her lips. “I opened a fresh bottle of wine, but if I find you lying flat on your ass on the bed, I’m taking full advantage.”

“You don’t have to get me drunk to do that, sexy.” Za scooted around on the satin-covered settee and stood. “But, really, I’ll be okay. Selby and Darius should be arriving soon. Also, I want to go down and speak to Marie.”

“I don’t want you leaving here until I get back.” Sy’s gaze plunged to the opening of her robe; she was naked beneath and he hardened. His brow lifted and he cocked his head in question.

“It’s just downstairs. Why are you being so overprotective? These Ancients of yours aren’t likely to do something to me before the meeting, are they?” She asked, looking down at herself.

“What are you staring at?”

Sy pushed aside her robe, looking at her pubic mound, even though he had seen it numerous times before. She was tugging to close her robe, like a blushing virgin. Sylus saw something that caught his interest and he was determined to take a closer look. He pulled it wider and leaned forward.

“Za, I’ve been all over your body, how did I miss this birthmark?” The lines of concentration deepened along his brows and under his eyes.

“Quit it, boy.” She hit at his hand as his fingers caressed her birthmark. “Don’t start anything you don’t have time to finish.”

“I swear. I didn’t see this last night and, as you well know, I went there several times.” The smile in his eyes contained a sensuous flame.

Resting her chin on her hand, a bemused smile tipped the corners of her mouth. “It’s always been there. When you treated me to the hotel spa, I had them touch up my Brazilian wax. You can’t see it until I’m like this. I inherited it from my mother; she said all the women of her family are born with the mark.”

“I see. It reminds me of something I’ve seen somewhere before. I just can’t recall what or where.”

“Yeah, well that happens when you’re an old man,” she teased. Her smile was eager and alive with affection and delight. All he wished to do was cancel everything else and take her back to bed. He had to tamp down his ardor. After making love in the bed, and again in the shower only moments ago, he could tell by her movements she was tender and sore.

“I wish I could deny it, but yes, I am quite old.”

Za walked up to him with a grin. She cupped his butt cheek in one hand and pulled him against her softness. “Don’t worry, baby, you’re my old man. Now give me a kiss and I’ll walk you to the elevator before you’re late.”

He returned the favor and put his hand on her bottom and she stood on her tiptoes making it easier for him to swoop down and seize her lips. Her lips were full, soft, warm, and moist. The best part is she knew she could kiss and took great pride in showing him each time their lips met.

Sy’s blood pounded in his brain, leapt from his heart, and made his palms moist. He breathed lightly against her face as he tore himself away. “If I don’t go now--”

“I know,” she whispered against his lips. “Me, too.”

He put some space between them and reached out to intertwine her fingers with his, their palms continuing the kiss where they left off. “I will be back soon. Darius has his own elevator

code.”

They strolled side by side to the elevator. Stopping in front of the doors, his fingers cupped her chin and he tilted her face up to his, his eyes searching to make sure she was truly okay. She glowed and he could tell she was happy.

“Drive carefully.” She rubbed her hands over his chest. Za smiled and shook her head as she read the white printed logo on his navy blue t-shirt. “*Don’t ride Harley, ride me.*” Her lips pressed together into a slow, secret smile. “How about riding you on a Harley, mister?”

“We can go do that right now and I will send a car for my brother. Go get dressed. I’ll wait.”

“As glorious as that sounds, I want to be here when Selby gets here. I really need some time alone with her before things get crazy. I owe her an apology for lying about where I was and keeping this entire situation from her.”

“I understand.”

Distracted, she plucked a few stray strands of hair clinging to his t-shirt. “I also want to tell her my impression of her mother. Selby should know her mother didn’t give her up for adoption. I believe it will help her be more receptive to Vivian when she meets her.”

“I will leave the matter of explaining to Vivian that she, too, is a descendent of Nymphs to Darius.” A thoughtful smile curved his mouth. Za was already acting the part of an attentive wife, for she was making sure his t-shirt was lint-free. “I did contact the detective and found out Selby has two half-sisters. One of them is a surgeon and the other a...”

Za’s hands paused their exploration of his shirt, her head cocked to the side in question. “Well, what is she?”

“A personal bodyguard.”

A gleam of interest sparked in her eyes. “Oh, you have a problem with a woman being a bodyguard?”

“Hell, no, you can guard my body anytime you want,” Sy teased. Gently, his hand outlined the circle of her breast. “How about we go back to the bedroom, and you can show me some of your moves?”

Za laughingly grasped his hand before saying, “How about you keeping your mind on getting out of here; besides, I need you to do something for me.”

“Anything.” He said without hesitation. His expression took in the expression of seriousness that came to her features.

“If it should come down to me being forced to forget all of this, could you ask them to give

me a happier childhood?” A shudder passed through her. “I don’t want to return to a life of nightmares, fear, and medications.”

Sy swallowed back the feelings of anguish that threatened to pour forth. She was being so strong for him. Returning the favor was the least he could do for her. “Quintan will be the council on your behalf, for I will not be allowed in the inquisition with you. I will speak with him about your request when I pick him up.”

She nodded her head and Sy stole another kiss. He hated leaving her side for even a moment when their time together was just hours away from ending. Still, he needed to update Quintan before he met Zaza. He didn’t want his brother to hear of his latest betrayal from anyone else. He prayed he would get the chance to speak with Roman before he heard about the matter from someone else.

Reluctantly Sylus released her and stepped into the elevator.

“Oh, yeah. Have I told you that you’re looking mighty fine in those blue jeans, boy?” She eyed him with a calculated inspection from crotch to black-leather-booted toes.

Sylus loved Za’s gentle camaraderie, her subtle wit, and her ability to make him forget everything else. Sy winked at her before the doors slid closed between them.

Zaza pulled on a pair of black jeans, a red sleeveless turtleneck sweater, and a pair of black leather loafers. She was astonished at the sense of fulfillment she felt. She should be worried and petrified, but she wasn’t. She felt empowered, and ready for whatever the Ancients had to throw at her.

She walked over to her briefcase with a secretive smile on her lips; she removed the envelope addressed to her. She wrote the letter like pages in a diary, telling of all the joyful times she spent with Sylus. Even if they weren’t together, Za wanted to never make the mistake of marrying another man.

Sy would always be the husband of her soul. She decided it would be best not to leave the letter lying around. She was going to leave it in her locked briefcase, so she could find it easily. Then she realized they might go through her things just in case they anticipated what she had done. She was sure she wasn’t the only human they made forget something, so she probably wasn’t the first to think of writing down what she didn’t want to forget.

Yes, the best thing to do is to go downstairs right now and put it in the mailbox down at the corner. She didn’t know who in the hotel was part of the secret dark society of misfits; they could be watching her at any time.

Za strolled over to the vanity while tucking the envelope in the back waistband of her pants,

hiding it beneath her sweater. She reached for her hair comb and it came to her hand before she could pick it up. She yelped and dropped the comb, backing away as if it had turned into a snake. Her eyes went around in shock. She stared around the room.

“Marie, is that you?” She tested. *Can Vampires be invisible for real or was that one of those fictional things? Maybe it's a ghost. Oh, God, is ghost a part of this Darkworld group because she wasn't seeing things...that comb literally jump into her hand.*

Za walked over and toed the comb with her shoe. It was a plain plastic comb and it stayed on the carpet where she had dropped it. “This is crazy. No more wine for me,” she mumbled aloud and stooped to pick up the comb.

It happened again. Za gasped and fell back onto her bottom on the carpet, her mouth wide in awe. Releasing a nervous giggle, she held the comb and turned it over in her hand, as if it had become something magical.

“Okay, this is like some *freaky* incident I've seen in a movie. What did the woman do next? The weird background music plays, then she concentrates, staring at the item, and makes it levitate.” Za shook her head and snorted out a laugh as she rose fluidly from the floor with the comb clutched in her hand.

She started to place it back on the vanity and paused. “Oh, hell, this entire adventure has been unreal, so why not try it?” She held her palm out with the comb lying in it and stared at it. She pictured the comb light as a feather and floating. The hair comb lifted off her palm and levitated. Her eyebrows shot up in amazement.

Nearly collapsing into the vanity chair as her knees buckled, the comb dropped to the floor. “What is happening to me?”

If this had happened to her before she found out Satyrs, Vampires, and God only knows what else existed, she would have thought she'd gone mad, but this was as real as Sylus and Marie. She leaned back and closed her eyes. *Could this be some side effect from having sex with a Satyr? Sylus continuously asked after her welfare since they made love. Did he suspect something like this could happen to her? Was this temporary?*

Now she found herself with more questions than answers. She needed to speak with Marie. Maybe she knew what was going on. She hurried over to the bed, removing the letter from her waist. With a sigh, she pitched it back into her briefcase and closed it. First, she would have to trust and confide in Marie and if this meant nothing, then she would follow through with her plans.

She went over to the suite phone beside the bed and pushed the button to the Club Vamp private line. Marie answered on the second ring.

“Sylus?”

“Uh, no...Marie, it's Zaza.”

“*Ma chère*, you sound strange. I hope you aren't too nervous about this evening, I have arranged for the soothsayer to meet with you before the meeting commences to see if you carry a trait--”

“Marie, listen.” Za interrupted. “There is something weird...well, not weird...no, yeah, it's weird for me--”

“Zaza, calm down, *ma petite*. I don't understand. What's happened? Where is Sylus?”

“He's picking up Quintan.” Za responded, taking a deep breath and blowing it out slowly. “Look, can I come down and see you right now? Is there any way you can have that soothsayer to come there to your office? There is something I want you to see and maybe she can help shine some light on what's going on.”

“It's sound serious. Yes, Medusa is already here; she was riding to the assembly with me tonight.”

“Oh God, *Medusa*? We're not talking about snakes on her head, turn people to stone Medusa, are we?”

Marie laughed softly into the phone. “Yes, but she is a shifter just like Sylus, and almost never is she required to show her true form these days.”

“Why would she *ever* be required to show her true form these days?”

Marie grew quiet.

“Sorry, I keep forgetting. I'm the human outsider who is on a need-to-know basis.” Za ran a hand distractedly through her hair and massaged the aching in the back of her neck. “You got to admit, I'm handling this *shit* pretty well, considering.”

“*Too well*, for a human. This is why I believe Medusa's insightful abilities will help us to get a better handle on what's going on here. I know Sylus better than most and I know he would never have given in to any mere attraction to any female, be it human or otherwise. Not to this extent, if it weren't because you are his mate.”

“Then why me?”

“I don't know. I do know that you aren't a descendent of the Nymphs; however, I don't think you are completely human, either.”

An excited light was vivid in Za's eyes. “You truly believe it's possible that I can be part something else and not even know it.”

“*Chère*, you have seen for yourself, in this world, all things are possible,” Marie said with

patience and understanding. “Come down now, and maybe we can go into the assembly tonight armed with a little surprise of our own.”

“I’m on my way!” The excitement suddenly left her eyes. “Marie, when you made love to Sylus, except for him shifting, did anything else strange happen to you afterwards?”

“Strange? Like what?”

“I’m on my way. I think it would be best if I show you.” Za placed the cordless phone back on its charger and made her way to the elevator.

Minutes later, Za found herself arm in arm with Marie, stepping into the gracious foyer leading into Marie’s office. Tall, fluted columns and intricate moldings added to the elegant feminine details of lovely upholstered furnishings in shades of mint, cream, and pink.

“*Chère*, you are practically glowing, considering what lies ahead.” Marie released her hold as Za took a seat on the sofa. “Would you like some wine?”

“Yes, thank you. I seem unable to get enough of the stuff today.” Za laughed and accepted the glass of red wine. She looked at Marie’s glass as she took a sip and she realized it wasn’t red wine. She suppressed a shiver. How did she expect to ask to become a vampire if she couldn’t even stand the thought of drinking blood?

The older woman took a seat beside her on the sofa. “Medusa should be here in a moment. She’s on a call in the other room.” She pointed a finger at Za. “There is something different about you. Even your smell has changed.”

Za’s wide-eyed innocence was merely a smoke screen. “I don’t know what you mean and I’ve showered, so it’s must be my new body wash.”

Marie snorted on a laugh. “Only if Sylus has managed to pass on his scent into a body wash and I don’t think so. So, do tell. You’ve finally become lovers, haven’t you?”

Za blushed and took a deep sip of wine. “If it’s any of your business. Yes.”

Marie took a deep breath and released a long sigh. “Well, it was bound to happen. I’m surprised the two of you have been able to wait this long. I know having him shift and withdraw can be a bit disorienting at first, but--”

“Why should he?” Za lifted her brow in question. “I mean, he wanted to, but I didn’t want him to.” She looked away from Marie.

The smile drifted from Marie’s ivory-colored face, her eyes were sharp and assessing. “Zaza, tell me that Sylus withdrew from your body before he came? Or maybe he used a condom?”

Za could feel a sense of panic. She licked her lips and replied. “Uh, no. Why are you looking at me that way? Should I be worried?”

“You should be dead,” a mild, interested voice said behind her.

Startled, Za nearly spilt her wine. With trembling hands, she placed the crystal wine glass on the table beside her seat and stood up. Her lips parted in surprise. She didn’t know what she had expected from this woman, who struck fear in many at the mention of her name.

For Medusa to be real and not part of some mythological fairytale was another surreal moment for Za. It was hard to believe this exquisite woman standing before her with dreadlocks to her waist could shift into a creature with serpent hair and turn people into stone by looking into her eyes.

She found her pale green eyes a startling contrast against the backdrop of her golden-brown complexion. She wore an ankle-length tan wrapped skirt, olive green caftan, and brown leather flat-heeled sandals on her tall frame.

The woman held out both her long slender hands in a warm welcome. “Hello, Zaza, I am Medusa.” Za placed her hands in Medusa’s proffered hands and stood still as she leaned in and kissed her on one cheek then the other.

A devilish look came into her eyes and it gave them a softer appearance. Her face creased into a sudden smile. “Welcome to our family. You don’t know how long we have searched the world for one such as yourself.”

Za found Medusa to be alive with affection and delight. She felt the woman was being sincere as she continued to hold her hands.

“Nice to meet you, too. I’m so happy you are willing to give me a reading. I hope it isn’t too much of a bother.” Za tilted her brow, looking at her uncertainly. “What did you mean I should be dead and why would you be searching for someone like me? The world is full of women like me.”

“Child, you truly have no idea of what you are, do you?” Medusa’s eyebrows rose in amazement. “You are only half human, Zaza, and you should have come into your powers recently, since Sylus did the forbidden and gave you his essence.”

“That stupid...silly, imbecile!” Marie spoke for the first time since Medusa came into the room.

Medusa chuckled and shook her head. “Ease your ire, Antoinette. Sylus had every right. Unfortunately, I wasn’t called first or this entire affair could have been rectified without the Ancients.”

“Please, all of this is going over my head. You said I was only half human and, if that is true, what the hell else am I?” Za said as she withdrew her hands from Medusa. A glazed look of disbelief came to her face.

"I'm sorry about your dear mother, sweetheart. If she had met her true mate instead of that *miscreant*, she would have come into her powers as you have." Medusa spoke in an odd, yet gentle tone. "What a waste. You may be the last of your kind and our people need you."

Za was stunned. The woman must truly be a soul reader. How else would she have known about her mother? She knew Sy would have never betrayed her confidences. Her voice was fragile and shaking as she said, "I have so much I want to ask you, but first, please tell me you are saying that I'm Sylus's true mate and we can remain together?"

"Oh forgive me. Yes...Za, if you have chosen Sylus the Satyr as your mate you are welcome to have him, but in actuality, you can chose from any of the *Darkworld's* males, including the gods. You may also have as many husbands as you desire. Sylus would not dare deny you your rights."

"I only want Sy," Za piped in, unable to contain the feelings of joy that seized her heart. She couldn't believe her prayers were being answered. She and Sy could be together.

"Medusa, I thought all these centuries her kind was just a myth told by the Ancients." Maria stepped forward in awe, gawking at Za as if she was truly seeing her for the first time.

"It was, because they believed the lineage to be extinct. Yet, we've always hoped that someday we would have this awesome thing happen." Medusa reached out and caressed her face with the back of her hand in reverence.

Za saw her pale eyes grow misty. "My God, what am I?" she asked in a broken whisper.

"Zaza, you are a *Daughter of Isis*, the only species out of us all capable of mating and producing the offspring of any species, including humans. You should have the birthmark of the crown of *Isis*, the base looks like horns with a full moon in the center." Medusa hugged her and released her. "Oh, this is a glorious day. If we had more of your kind, then some of our species wouldn't have become extinct over the years."

"Za, you are half human and half goddess." Marie grinned from ear to ear and clapped her hands together in glee. "Oh, *Ma chérie*, leave it up to Sylus to pick the *crème de la crème*. He has always been full of himself because he is too beautiful for his own good and now he possesses the heart of the one woman most treasured."

"This is almost too much to take in." She let out a long, audible breath and reached down to feel the couch before she dropped in stunned disbelief.

"Tonight what you feared to be a reckoning will become a celebration. Through you and your daughters you will bring us hope for the future." Medusa was barely able to keep the laughter from her voice.

The shock of discovery hit Za full force as Medusa's words continued to sink in slowly.

“Too bad I won’t have daughters. Sylus explained to me that a Satyr could only have three sons with his mate.”

“True, if his mate is a descendent of Nymphs. However, you being a Daughter of Isis, he shall be blessed with sons *and* daughters,” Medusa announced.

“So I won’t grow old and die?”

“Not now. You have mated and received the essence of your mate and immortality and with the coming of your first child you shall come into the powers you were born with,” Medusa explained growing more excited with each statement. “Za, you are a Witch born. You have the ability to move objects by mere thought, you can heal with your touch, you can reach out to others with your thoughts, and control the elements at will. You are nature in its human form.”

Her mouth dropped open. She shook her head in disagreement. “No, I can’t do any of that. Except--” she hesitated before continuing, “Before I came here, I reached for my comb and it came to my fingers. I was able to make it float over my palm.”

A soft gasp escaped Marie as she stared at Medusa and turned her tear-filled gaze back to Zaza. “Oh, *ma petite!*” She cried. “You...you...”

Za eyes grew wide. “Oh, God, what else? I don’t think I can handle any more news.”

“What Antoinette is trying to say, if she wasn’t blubbering so loudly is--” Medusa sat down beside her on the couch and once again enclosed both of her trembling hands in hers. “You and Sylus are going to have a baby.”

Surprise siphoned the blood from Za’s face. She swooned against the couch and fainted.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A genteel smile played around Za's lips as she walked towards the elevator leading back to their suite. She couldn't wait to tell Sylus they were going to have a baby, a son.

Medusa told her to listen to her body's needs. If she craved wine during her pregnancy, it would not harm the babe because it would mean it was a boy, a Satyr like his father. If she felt cravings for figs, her child would be a Daughter of Isis, like her mother.

Za couldn't believe that she was now an immortal with powers. Marie explained to her that the elders would teach her everything she needed to know about her capabilities and how to control them. She felt overwhelmed by it all.

In the matter of a short time, her entire world had turned upside down and re-righted itself into a future full of love, children, and a community of misfits that she could call her family. She brushed away the tears of happiness from the corner of her eye.

"Za?"

Za turned around at the sound of her name.

"Oh, my goodness, it is you." The tall, statuesque model rushed forward, wrapped her arms around Za's neck, slanting her full moist mouth over Za's lips in a kiss.

"Megan, I didn't know you were back from your European photo shoot." Za said as she moved out of Megan's clutch.

"I've been back for a few weeks and I called you, but you changed your numbers." Megan smiled, pushing a strand of her red hair behind the shell of her ear.

"Yeah, I was getting a lot of hang-ups." Za raised an ironic brow at her ex-lover, placing a little space between them.

Megan's tongue flickered over her sexy mouth before she smiled sheepishly. Za still found her beautiful to look at, and so did half of the entire world. She was tall, elegant redhead with come-hither slanted green eyes. Yet, Megan's spoiled-rich-girl attitude and possessiveness were hard for anyone to take in large amounts.

"Sorry about that, love." Megan looked deeply into her eyes. "I just didn't want to believe it was over for us. We were good together and I loved you. I still do, but hey, if you unable to fall in love with anyone because of what happened to you, then you just can't. Right?"

Za looked at the toe of Megan's expensive Sergio Rossi heels and cleared her throat, not sure how to begin. "Megan, a lot has happened since we were together. I'm not that woman anymore."

"I can tell something is different. You look healthy and happy," Megan said as her eyes

trailed with adoration from Za's head to toe. "You look good enough to...eat."

"Look Megan, I--"

"Za, please." Megan interrupted and touched her arm. "I don't need you to love me back. However, what I do need is for you to be in my life."

"Megan, I'm married," Za said bluntly and wished she hadn't done so after seeing the pained expression on the other woman's face. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to just blurt it out, but I didn't want you to think that I was still into you, like...well, you know."

Megan crossed her arms over her chest defensively. "So, uh...did Selby decide she didn't want to marry Darius? I mean, who else can it be? She is the only woman you've ever given a damn about."

"No, Selby is still getting married."

"Well whoever she is, she has to be a hell of a woman to get you, of all people, to make such a commitment. Unlike me." Her self-mocking laughter was soft and bitter.

"Don't do this to yourself Megan. It was I. I was confused about my life. I had no hopes for a future, except to bury myself with work," Za confessed. "I apologize for taking out my unhappiness on you so many times."

Megan shrugged her shoulders. "There is no reason to apologize to me. You are an excellent lover and you never made me feel unappreciated. At least not in bed."

Za took a deep breath and braced herself. She had already told her part of the truth she might as well tell her the rest. "Megan, I married Sylus de Gauls."

Megan stared back at her with tear-filled eyes, her lips pressing thin as she bit back a sob. "You married a *fucking* man! How could you?"

"It's not like I went out looking for one--"

"You, the ball-breaking, cunt lesbian of Vegas, are telling me that I wasn't good enough because you'd rather be with a *goddamn* man," Megan sneered, shaking her head. "You really are a piece of work, Zaza Draper."

Za reached out to place a soothing hand on Megan's arm and she jerked away.

"Fuck you!" Megan turned on her heels and marched down the corridor towards the parking garage.

"Megan! Wait!" Za called out, scurrying after her. She willingly admitted to herself, she had used Megan and discarded her as if she had no feelings, just as she did every other woman she slept with. She couldn't let it end this way. She had to get Megan to understand it had nothing to do with her. Za felt she owed her that much for all the pain she caused her.

Za was in the parking garage standing beside Megan's awaiting limo before she caught up with the leggy model's long stride. She barely glanced at the driver holding open the door as she grasped Megan by the arm before she stepped into the car.

"Please, Megan. I never meant to hurt you. Let me explain--"

"Now! You idiot!" Megan turned a lived face towards the driver.

That was the only warning Za received before a rough hand clapped over her mouth and dragged her backward against his large frame. Reaching up, she scratched at the hand before a sweet, nauseating smell assaulted her senses.

Her body became heavy and sluggish as she lost the ability to move and slumped into semi-consciousness. Her erratic heart rate slowed and tears seeped through her closed eyes. Za felt a sharp prick against the side of her neck and cried out against the muffling hand.

As Za moaned on the floor of the limo in a protective fetal position, she said weakly, "Don't hurt my baby." Her eyes felt weighted as she stared up into Megan's face.

"A baby?" Megan whispered a kiss against her lips. "This man has blinded you, my love. Don't worry. I promise you, after a while you will know what I know. I'm the only one for you, baby. The only one that could truly love you for who you are."

"You don't know who I am." Za could feel drool seeping from the corner of her mouth but she couldn't move to wipe it away. "What kind of shot did he give me? Why can't I move?"

Megan wiped away the spittle from the side of her face with a napkin from the limo bar. "Don't worry, it's only temporary. You should begin to regain sensation in your limbs after about an hour."

In Za's mind she called to her beloved, praying that all Medusa had told her was true. She should be able to make contact with Sylus through her thoughts alone. *Please let this work*, she prayed. *"Sy. Sy, my love, I need you. Megan has kidnapped me. Hear me, please!"*

Sylus's hand slapped on his car horn; his foot slammed down on the brakes, sending him to a screeching halt to avoid the long black limousine tearing its way out of the hotel parking garage.

"Crazy infidel!" Quintan bellowed. "Thank goodness no one was behind us." He looked over at a silent Sylus and a look of concern came to his face. "How do you fare?"

Unease called to Sylus, a portent of a threat he couldn't shake. "Something's wrong. Za needs me."

Quintan leaned against the door in his seat turning his direct stare on him. "You truly believe you and she have developed a telepathic bond shared only amongst those of us who belong to the

Darkworld?”

“As I explained back at your office, Za heard the psychic conversation I had with Darius. That was not a figment of my imagination,” Sylus snapped and grew very still, his head tilted to the side, a fierce scowl on his face as his eyes dilated black. *“Sweetheart, I’m with you. Your heart is beating too fast. I need you to feel my heartbeat and set your rhythm to mine. Can you see your surroundings?”*

“Oh, thank God, Sy, you can hear me,” she cried. *“I don’t know, they have me in a limousine and we are moving. I don’t know where they are taking me.”*

“I can feel you are near and I see a limo ahead. It nearly ran into me exiting the parking garage.” Sylus pressed in on the gas and raced forward spotting the limo as it exit onto the ramp towards the main highway. *“Are you in the car or the trunk of the car?”*

“I’m so tired, I can hardly keep my eyes open.” Za whimpered.

“I know, sweetheart, but I need to you stay awake for me. I need to you work with me, I can’t run the car off the road; I’m afraid I might hurt you. Tell me, are you tied up in the trunk of the car?”

“No, but the driver put this foul- smelling stuff over my nose and it made me drowsy, then he gave me a shot in the side of my neck. I can’t move from my shoulders down.”

Sylus let out a stream of curses.

“For all that is ancient, I heard her that time.” Quin reached forward and braced his hand against the car’s dashboard as he felt Za’s fear and anguish wash over him. “I can’t believe it. How can it be that your human woman is powerful enough to reach through my mental barriers?”

“You see I spoke the truth,” Sylus said. “Quin, I must keep my eye on the limo and the road. You are more powerful than I. Do you think you can link with Za and see what drug is in her? Make sure she is well, for I can’t do so without revealing my true nature and it’s impossible to drive with hooved feet.”

“I will try.” Quin closed his eyes and started to inhale through his flared nostrils while blowing out air between his parted lips.

“Sylus I hear what’s going on. Do you need my help?” Darius intervened in his tumultuous thoughts.

“Stay open to me, my friend. I don’t know what the situation is at this time.”

“I’m here if you need me. Your younger brother Roman and my cousin Justus are already at the assembly. If you need us, just call.”

“I will call to you if you are needed. Thank you.” Sy answered as he weaved in and out of

the busy evening highway traffic. "This fool is going to get everyone in the limo killed the way he is driving."

"Sy, she is well, it isn't a poison, just something that paralyzed her muscles. It should wear off," Quin stated and gasped.

"What! What's happening?"

"Er...nothing, little brother. Keep your eyes on the blasted road, you will be no good to them dead."

"Them?" Sylus bellowed in confusion. He saw the wonder and amazement on his brother's face and his worried state of mind heightened. "What--"

"Sy, are you okay? Don't get too upset; I don't want you to have an accident. I have so much to tell you, baby." He heard Za's soothing and loving voice in his head. Immediately, he felt her happiness reach his heart and even though he was scared to death over her safety, he couldn't help but smile.

"Tell me." He urged her to keep talking with him, having her rambling in his thoughts made him feel as if she was there, safe, beside him.

"I'm your mate. Today I visited with Marie and Medusa. She told me we could be together...forever."

"She is a Daughter of Isis." Quin said aloud. He grinned as Sy gave him a glaring stare. "Hey, don't give me the evil eye." He shrugged. "I'm not deliberately listening in. She is a fledgling and hasn't learned to privately channel. Hell, every member at the assembly is probably listening to your conversation."

"I can't believe it." Sy wasn't sure if the tears in his eyes were from relief or fear of losing her because of the fools that kidnapped her. No, by the gods, he would not lose her now. "I hope all of the bastards are listening. I knew I wasn't going mad."

"Oh, believe it, brother. When I linked with her, I could feel her power. Her captors are fortunate she doesn't know how to use her abilities as of yet. With mere thoughts, she could stop them from breathing."

"I can't believe I wasn't able to pick up on what she was sooner." Sylus shook his head.

Quintan put his hand on his shoulder. "If you had consummated your union sooner, you would have. For the women of Isis, their true nature lays dormant, leaving them in a mortal state of being until they have received the essence of an immortal. You are fortunate to have her. She could have chosen any of us as her mate."

"She can have as many male mates as she so desires." Sylus scowled. "I can't deny her what

is her right.” He heard himself saying the words, but in all honesty, he resented the thought of sharing Za intimately with anyone else.

Quin cut his brother a look out of the corner of his eye. A playful smile deepened the dimples around his wide mouth. “Don’t know why she would want such a pain in the ass libertine in the first place.”

“Don’t worry baby, I only want you.” Za whispered away his concerns.

“Forgive me. You’re the heart that keeps mine beating and I’m only thinking about myself.” Sylus felt his horns unfurling as he sent her feeling of love and warmth.

“There is no need to apologize. Just get me the hell out of here. This woman is crazy. If she kisses me one more time, I’m going to choke on my own vomit. If I don’t pass out first.”

Sy smiled. Now she sounded like the temperamental woman he fell in love with.

“Sy, I know you want to be with your mate in some way, but even in the dark of night, on the highway with all the lights, you don’t want to chance being seen,” Quin reminded him. *“Ease your emotions and retract your horns.”*

“Listen to him, baby. We are both now a part of this secret society and we must protect it at all cost. We don’t need to give them an excuse to be any harder on you than they already are. I am okay just knowing you are near by.”

Sylus withdrew from Za, yet kept his mind open to her, if she should need to seek his comfort. “It seems as if they are heading towards the private airport. We can’t allow them to get Za on a plane. By the time I get my pilot out here and the jet prepared for takeoff, they will be long gone to God only knows where.”

“All we need them to do is safely stop that tub of a car and then we can take care of the rest. While I merged with Za, I saw only two people: a man driving and a woman in the back of the limo. Zaza is lying on the floor of the limo.”

“There have to be three people,” Sylus corrected. “I heard three other heartbeats besides Za. Two heartbeats are very strong and one very faint. Maybe they have kidnapped another, and they’re in the trunk.”

Quintan turned his head and looked out the passenger car window. A secretive smile appeared on his lips. “Yes, that must be the other heartbeat you detected, brother. I assure you this man and woman will not make it to that plane. Zaza is considered precious cargo for all of us, and what sleeps beneath her heart is even more precious for us and our society.”

Sylus was no longer listening to his brother. All of his attention focused in on the limo as it entered through the gate leading out to the runway. Sy stepped on the brakes and eased in into one

of the parking spaces, watching and waiting.

The limo pulled up in front of the lowered steps of small private plane.

Sylus moved to open the door and Quin placed a hand on his arm and he looked at him. His eyes dark with fury that these people would dare take the most precious thing to him in the entire world. “Don’t try and stop me, Quin,” he growled.

“I wouldn’t dream of doing so; however, there are only two and one is a woman. You may take care of the man and I will see to the woman,” Quin instructed.

“I will take care of the bastard, alright.” Sylus moved and opened the car door. Yet, Quin was still holding onto his arm. “What the fuck is it? Let me go.”

“Not until you understand this what I am trying to say, Sy. For just these two humans there is no need to unleash the beast. We will get your woman and proceed to enchant them into forgetting all memories of Za.”

“What? Are you asking me to let these son-of-a-bitches live?” he choked out.

“No, I’m *telling you* what is going to happen,” Quin warned.

Sylus swore softly. “Well at least let me kick his ass, Quin. You got to give me something, here.”

Quin chuckled and released his arm. “I will give you that, but I don’t want the man like he was hit by a train.”

Sy eased out of the car and knotted his braid at the back of his neck so it wouldn’t get in his way. “No problem, I will just leave him the memories that he wrecked that fucking limousine he got my woman in. Don’t forget, after you handle the woman, check the trunk for the other person and make sure you clean their memories. I will take care of this bastard and check out the...”

“Yeah, right...sure, the person in the trunk.” Quin shook his head in wonder that his brother could be so clueless at times. Nevertheless, Zaza’s secret wasn’t his to tell.

With a cheerful spirit and focused determination, Sy stalked his unsuspecting prey.

Za felt the vehicle slow to a stop. She knew Sylus was near. Still, she worried because she had seen a gun in the waistband of the driver’s pants as he placed her in the car. She tried to use her mental abilities to warn Sy, but she was too weak from the effects of the drugs.

She’d used up most of her strength during the first bout of communications with Sy. All of this was so new to her; it would take practice and time to hone her skills. She had tried to make the man’s pistol levitate from his waist and she barely got the hilt of the gun to move. She cursed her stupidity for running after Megan in the first place. Now that she had a baby to think about, she

couldn't allow herself to be so careless in the future.

Za couldn't see anything in her line of vision as she stared out the door opposite of where the plane must have been waiting. She could hear them flying overhead and see them in the distant sky. So she knew they were at an airport. She prayed Sy wouldn't allow them to get her on a plane. She hated this feeling; it reminded her of the days when she had no power over her panic attacks. How could Megan do this to her?

Then she heard gunfire. Her eyes grew round with fear as the driver suddenly appeared at her open door. He pointed the gun at her; a deep sneer disfigured his features.

"No!" she screamed. "I'm pregnant!"

Her disclosure caught him off guard and he paused. It was long enough. Sylus appeared. A menacing crack was loud, even with the sound of the plane's jet engine in close proximity.

Za saw the driver's hand holding the gun go limp and the gun tumbled to the ground. Her eyes took in the bone that had broken through his skin where Sylus had broken his wrist. The man cried out and began to plead for his life. Sylus was beyond seeing reason. His horns unfurled as his fingers tightened around the man's neck, lifting him off his feet.

Za was in awe of his strength and he hadn't even fully shifted. She snapped out of her daze when she heard Quintan yelling for Sylus to back off. He appeared to not heed his brother's warning.

"Za," she heard in her mind. It was Quintan. *"You mustn't let Sylus take a human life. Only you can stop him now. Summon him to you; I have my hands full with this cursed woman, then I must check the plane."*

Za could see the man had turned a gruesome shade of red. "Sy. Please, I need you." He didn't release the man. "Sylus, I love you. Don't do this. Think about our baby. Our son will need his father."

Sylus dropped the man unsympathetically, allowing his insensible body to crumple to the ground. Finally, he turned to look at her, with tears stinging in his eyes he crawled to her lying helplessly on the limo floor. She could move her head but still nothing else as he leaned down and pressed a kiss to her dry lips. She tasted his salty tears on his lips.

"We're having a baby," he whispered softly against her mouth.

She desperately wanted to reach up and touch his beautiful face. "Yes, we can have as many sons and daughters as your heart can handle."

"Woman, I love you so much." He smiled. "Promise me you will always remember how much I love you."

“Oh, my love, we finally have conquered the world and now it’s our time.”

“I can’t believe that bastard actually shot me.” As he coughed, blood came from his mouth and his face went slack as he fell on top of her.

“*Oh, God--oh, God*, Sylus, baby, noooo!” She cried. “Quintan! Somebody please! Help me!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Za felt as if there were not enough air in the suite to breathe and slapped away Selby and Marie's hands as they tried to help her remove her clothing. Her t-shirt and jeans was growing stiff from Sy's drying blood.

She stumbled into the bathroom and kicked the door closed behind her while pulling the shirt over her head and dropping it to the floor. After shedding the rest of her clothing, she turned on the shower and walked numbly into the soothing jet spray, closing the frosted glass door behind her.

It was then, during their ride back home to the suite, that she gave into the onslaught of emotions that threatened to tear her apart. She leaned her head beneath the spray of water and bit down on the back of her teeth to squelch the urge to scream. If she had known the chaos that had awaited their return, she would have demanded they go to the hospital.

Za knew it wasn't possible for anyone from the *Darkworld* to seek healing from a human doctor and she was coming to realize that was just one of many new rules and laws she would have to deal with.

She thought being a Daughter of Isis meant something and maybe it did to some, but to the Ancients she was just another follower and she must say she hadn't made the best first impression.

Finding all the Ancients in her and Sy's suite upon their return was the first sign, that she was about to learn what being part of this new family would mean to the rest of her life.

There were twelve in all and nothing like she had expected. They all were dressed in white like some celestial beings and each appeared to be of a different nationality. They wore their years of wisdom well. None looked to be over the age of fifty, yet they exuded a power that forced you to acknowledge them with the respect of their birthright.

These were the mothers and fathers of all beings that existed in the Darkworld and under normal circumstances; she would have been very impressed. However, with Sy's life hanging by a hair, she didn't give a damn. She wanted to be with her man and these people were standing in her way. Literally.

From the moment they took Sy into his bedroom and pushed her back out and slammed the door in her face, Za fumed. She tried staring at the doorknob, willing the door to unlock. To her surprise, it worked and to her dismay, an Ancient who said his name was Aries stepped outside the door and stood watch.

Za had become angry, causing several items to fly off the corridor tables. Crystal glasses and vases shattered around them. Marie hid a smile behind her fingers, while Selby gaped in open-

mouthed awe at her new abilities.

Big deal, because the dark-skinned Aries wasn't in the least bit impressed. Overgrown bully. Like an insolent child, she resorted to physical violence and kicked the towering six foot six immortal in the shin. The *son-of-a-bitch* had the nerve to throw back his sexy head full of micro-mini braids and laugh at her.

Under normal circumstances, she would have been able to appreciate his masculine dark beauty, but for now, she wanted to knock him flat on his ass. As she drew back her fist to sock him in his classically handsome face, Marie caught her by the arm and with Selby smiling sheepishly at the mirthful god; they escorted her across the hall into her bedroom and shut the door.

Now here she sat, alone in the shower feeling her annoyance and fear run rampant as she waited. Za found that her hands were shaking and did the next best thing to speaking with Sy in person; she tried to reach him with her thoughts.

"Sy, I need you. Can you hear me? I'm so worried and I can feel that you're still alive, but so weak. Please say something so that I know I haven't lost you yet."

The silence yawned and a wave of apprehension swept through her. Za's eyes darkened with pain as she watched his blood wash away from her body and swirl around the drain before disappearing.

"Baby, please say something...anything. A few of the Ancients are with you. I don't know if you can hear them or feel them but they are trying to save you. I don't know what to do, Sy; they won't let me in to see you."

The pain in her heart became a fiery gnawing. She sank to her knees, the water beating down on her backs she leaned against the shower stall wall in a fetal position and started weeping.

"Oh, God...your heartbeat is fading. I can feel you slipping away from me. The fight isn't over yet, my love. I need you to fight to stay with me. Our son needs his father. Fight, damn you! I will never forgive you if you leave me now, Sylus de Gauls!"

"Woman! Stop that insipid lamentation. I'm finding it difficult to concentrate on finding a safe method of removing this bullet. Your mate is alive. We have slowed his heartbeat to save him from further blood loss."

She flinched at the sound of the harsh, deep, and unfamiliar voice in her head. She snapped her mouth shut, stunned by his brusqueness. She had the right to be distressed if she wanted to; she was a pregnant woman. Everyone knew pregnant women were emotional.

"Emotional yes, nevertheless, you are being a pain in my, ah...head," he muttered. *"Instead of all that selfish pity you insist on wallowing in, you need to focus on controlling your mental*

powers to where your cerebral meanderings will go only to the one you direct them to."

"Oh, yeah? Well, if you're such a bad-ass then why don't you shut me out?"

"Mind your tongue. I have eaten several wayward tongues due to disrespectful behavior," he chastised.

Za's face blanched at his admission. She would have taken it as an idle threat if it were from someone other than a member of the Darkworld. With these people, all things were possible. These weren't just Sy's people. They were also her people. She took a deep breath and released it slowly. *"I apologize. It's just that I feel completely useless and I seemed to be taking it out on those around me."*

He ignored her apology and answered her previous question. *"I am Chiron, the sovereign of the Centaurs. I have a gift for the art of healing. Fledgling, I will be your teacher and show you how to utilize your soothing powers."*

She remained motionless for a moment. She swallowed hard and squared her shoulders. *"Can I start now by helping with Sy?"*

"If you take charge of your emotions, I will allow you to begin your lessons by taking part in the healing of your mate."

With a springy bounce, Za was on her feet shutting down the shower. She rushed out of the stall while reaching for her thick terry cloth robe off the hook on the back of the door. She towel-dried her hair as she opened the bathroom door with her free hand.

Throwing the towel to the floor, Za was about to slip her feet into her slippers as Chiron's voice caused her to pause before making her way to her bedroom door, pulling it open.

"Zaza, Medusa has placed her hands upon Sylus and located the bullet. It is lodged close to his heart." His voice was hoarse with frustration and deep concern.

"What are you saying?" She stood frozen in the doorway.

"The only way to remove the bullet without risk is to have Sy do it naturally."

"Is such a thing possible?"

"Yes, if we can get Sylus to shift into his true form, his body will automatically reject and expel the foreign object."

Her dark eyebrows slanted in a frown of confusion. *"Can he hear us?"* Za made her way to Sy's bedroom door and this time she didn't meet with any obstacles as she opened it and went inside. The room was abnormally hot and humid.

"He will hear you." He assured her. "Sy is too weak to shift on his own. His body will have to be forced to shift and the only way to do that is..."

"What? Tell me what I must do." She continued their mental *tête-à-tête* while her eyes adjusted to the dimness of the room. *"I'll do anything to keep Sylus with me."* There were no lights, just the glowing blaze from the raging fire in the hearth.

"Zaza, his seed grows in your belly. You know what must be done to get a Satyr to shift beyond his will."

His suggestion startled her but she didn't offer any objection. She just had to make sure she understood him correctly. *"You want me to make love to Sylus while he's in this condition?"*

"It's the only way." Za heard Chiron's affirmation aloud as he came to stand in front of her. He was dressed in a white billowing robe; from the looks of it, he wore nothing beneath it.

Zaza looked up into his compelling blue eyes because they drew her attention from the somewhat rounded nose that dominated his face. His strong features held an assured, coarse sensuality.

Drops of moisture clung to his damp forehead. He had thick tawny-gold hair brushed back off his forehead like a lion's mane; long sideburns flecked with gray only added a distinguished quality. His boldly attractive face smiled warmly down at her as he took her hand in his and drew her forward into the room. Za leaned to the side just to see around his broad shoulders.

The Ancients stood in a circle at the far end of Sy's sweeping bedroom suite, their voices droning in a wordless chant. The chairs and tables in the sitting area before the fireplace were gone. In its place was Sy's glistening naked body resting upon what appeared to be a sacrificial table encircled by marbled decorative plant and statue stands she'd seen throughout the hotel apartment house.

As the circle of gods and goddesses opened, Chiron guided her into the circle before it closed again. She recognized what she assumed was a sacrificial table was actually the elegant antique Chinese wood and brass sideboard that usually rested against a wall in the formal dining room.

Once Za came to stand beside Sy's prone body, her eyes glazed over with tears. He was always unearthly pale, but it was nothing compared to the unmoving ashen figure lying sprawled before her.

Upon each stand small clay pots on brass stands rested with a lit candle in its holder beneath. She didn't know what boiled in the pots but she could see the murky vapor rising from them.

Beside his head sat an ornately shaped decorative lacquer bowl designed with a floral and gilded lid. She grazed her fingers over Sy's abnormally cold skin after Chiron released her hand. He removed the lid off the lacquer bowl and stared at her with expectant eyes.

"How do I begin?" She asked.

“Remove your bathrobe.”

The shock of discovery hit her full force. He wanted her to get naked in front of him and everyone else. They were virtually strangers to her. Za curbed the feelings of panic and fear that gripped her insides.

She had to be strong for Sy, as strong as he had been for her on numerous occasions. This would be her chance to prove she was worthy to be such a wonderful and gracious man’s eternal mate. She would do whatever was necessary to keep him alive. He would live to raise their unborn son and give her more children. They would remain forever young together.

Za kept her eyes on Sy as she untied the cloth belt at her waist and shrugged the robe off her shoulders, allowing it pool onto the floor around her feet. She reached out, lacing Sy’s fingers with her own as Chiron moved to stand behind her with the uncovered bowl in his hand.

“Have no fears. I’m about to evoke the powers of your goddess mother,” he said in a low and composed voice.

Za nodded her head in understanding.

“I evoke your will for this your daughter and call on you, Isis, the mother of all mothers, goddess of enchantment, fruitfulness, life, and maternity.”

She felt the heat of the warmed oil applied over her body by several different hands. There was nothing sexual about their touch but still she felt a warm glow flow through her. Her nipples hardened and dew spread on her vaginal lips as his gruff voice created a force of energy in the bedchamber. The chanting of the Ancients continued.

Za’s lips parted in a sigh. A sense of strength came to her and her despair lessened as Chiron lapsed into another language as old as time. Za didn’t know what he was saying but she felt his words guiding her. She stepped closer towards Sylus and lifted her arms up towards the ceiling and her feet left the carpet.

She felt no fear and basked in the learning of her power as she drifted above her husband. With the lowering of her arms, she came down knees spread wide and straddled his hips. Her body vibrated with new life and she took charge with quiet confidence, leaning forward nuzzling against his serene face. *“Sylus, our life has only begun. Fight for me.”*

Za smoothed his hair with her hands and loved him with her eyes. Her body, wet and naked, pressed against his. Even though he wasn’t moving or touching her, his body was familiar.

His hard frame, the thick, flaccid cock, she straddled one of his long muscular thighs and brushed her clit against him as she placed tender kisses over his throat, chest, the entrance where the bullet had entered and tore his beautiful flesh. Za brushed over his abdomen and buried her nose in

his pubic hair, breathing in deeply his recognizable fragrance. *"Baby, I need you."*

She lifted the heaviness of his sex in her hand and was amazed that part of him felt warm, when the rest of him felt so cold. Beads of sweat rolled over her glistening, oiled skin from the warm temperature in the room and the heat of her aching desire.

"Sylus, you promised to always be there for me or maybe you prefer I do this to another man." Her tongue flickered out and traced the length of the vein she could see under the skin of his penis.

As though her words raised his ire, his cock swelled in her hands and she smiled with deep satisfaction. *"So you can hear me."* She licked and ran the tip of her tongue around the head and dipped in the slit. *"Satyr, will you find the strength to fuck me or will I have to call upon Chiron of the Centaurs to take your place?"*

His cock jumped in her hand and she started grinding her pubis against his thigh as she nipped and sucked him while fondling his testicles. *"I suppose you'd rather another Satyr raise your son."*

She paused to smile as she saw his hands tighten into fists at his side.

Sylus pulled himself out a languid darkness and found himself in the most exquisite dream. He could feel Za's tongue slurping up his erection. Her mouth was searing and adoring as her tongue rippling over him, her teeth sliding, light and sinful, tightening and awakening every muscle in him.

He felt an awful burning pain in his chest area, but it was a bittersweet sensation coursing through him. He nearly came up off whatever hard surface he was laying on as she sucked him deep into her throat and he moaned as his horns unfurled. Sy wanted to open his eyes, he wanted to watch her suck on him, but he was so tired. Why was he so weak?

Sy felt bereft as her mouth moved away from him. He felt cool air on his lengthy erection. He released a sigh of relief when he felt a scalding shield of heat slowly lowering over his mushrooming cock.

"Za, my love." His mind caressed hers as he felt his body push its way into hers. She was taut, searing, and slippery all at the same time. She was also the one in control for he felt completely useless.

He tried to meet her hips with a thrust but his bottom weighed him down like lead and he took the battering of her round bottom against his thighs as she rode him. Her movements becoming unrestrained, he could feel her sheath throbbing over him. For the first time he was uncaring of who

reached their peak first as his body shifted beneath her.

Sylus felt a pleasure pain as if something was ripping its way out of his chest. As his sperm shot deep and true inside Za, he released an animalistic wail that sounded horrific even to his own ears. He coughed a few times and groaned from the pain ripping through his upper body.

His eyes fluttered open to find Za cupping his chin. Her large golden-liquid eyes stared down at him, searching his face. He managed a weak smile. “Woman, you’re trying to kill me and I like it,” he rasped. Sy’s dark eyebrow lifted in question and he lifted his hand up to caress the tears from her face. “Why do you weep, sweetheart? Did I hurt you?”

“You fool. I thought I’d lost you. Don’t ever scare me like this again.” She sobbed, burying her face against the side of his throat. “Welcome back...welcome back.”

He turned his head, noticing for the first time they weren’t alone. He would wonder later what was going on, but for now he just wanted to hold on to Za. *You’re misguided and ready for Bedlam if you think I would ever allow another Satyr or any other creature to raise my son. Pffff, I don’t think so.*

His large palm slapped down and cupped her full ass cheek with satisfaction and she cried out with a chastising giggle before spraying his face with loving kisses.

“Oh, baby, you have ruined me. There could never be anyone else for me,” she assured him.

Za’s words echoed inside his head, warming his heart and soul. After centuries of surviving the unspeakable, his life had come full circle and it was only the beginning.

EPILOGUE

Four months later on a Friday evening, Za and Sy curled up with weariness on their big bed in the penthouse apartment that used to be hers alone. They decided to wait until Selby and Darius returned from their honeymoon before searching out adjoining estates so that their children could grow up together.

In that stupor, between being a celebration hangover and sleep, Za smiled in contentment with her back spooned against her husband. His hand rested heavily on the growing swell of her stomach. "Hey! I felt that."

"I felt it, too. My boy obviously isn't as exhausted as his parents."

"Well, considering how I was speaking of his father's erection pressing into the small of my back, apparently *I'm* the only exhausted party in this bed."

"Just ignore my penis, because I promise you that I can barely raise my aching head." He groaned and caressed her belly. "On the other hand, my cock has a mind of its own and I can't help it if it hasn't become accustomed to having expedient pussy within reach yet."

Za laughed and playfully slapped the arm she was resting her head on. "I know Satyrs can hold their wine, but all of you overdid it at the wedding reception last night."

"Hey, its not everyday two eternal Satyrs are lucky enough to come upon their mates in the same lifetime. Also, we have gained three more descendents of Nymphs, with Selby's mother and sisters."

"True, and now that they know the truth about themselves, maybe they can find happiness."

"Just because they know doesn't mean they will come across their mates soon."

"Baby, don't say that. I saw the way your brother Roman was eyeing Selby's baby sister." Za giggled.

"Don't say that. Talk about militant. I thought after he sang that ballad to her at the reception she was going to pull her gun on him. I mean I know she's a bodyguard, but why she had to wear her pistol to a wedding... Who was she protecting?"

Za kissed his forearm and he snuggled closer. "From what I can tell, she needed protection from Roman."

"Not true. He actually was asking if he could acquire her services on his European tour," Sylus countered.

"Oh, baby, please. You believe that. How many centuries has your brother been touring without a bodyguard?" Za squeaked as he nipped her shoulder.

“Pipe down, woman, and mind my aching head. Also, how is my son supposed to settle down when his momma is caterwauling?”

Za rolled her eyes. “Well, it was a pain to have to reschedule all of Selby’s engagements to coincide with the new wedding date but it worked out for the best. It gave her the opportunity to meet her mother and sisters and make them a part of the affair.”

“Yes, sweetheart, and as the matron of honor you did an excellent job on incorporating the mortal world with the immortal world and none was the wiser.” He kissed her behind the ear and whispered. “Thank you, also, for changing it to evening so that Quin could attend.”

“I wish I could have done more. He really wasn’t comfortable around all those people. He made an appearance at the reception but left before most of the party arrived.” A deep look of sadness came to her face. “It’s terrible what happened to his mates. Is it possible for him to find someone else someday?”

“All things are possible, my love. We are proof of that,” Sylus assured her and shifted as she rolled over on her side facing him. Her fingers reached out, plucking his thick platinum braid from his shoulder and guided it erotically around the dark areole of her baby-heavy breast.

“Mmm, has my wife decided to take the badly-behaved cock up on its offer?”

She looked at him with amused wonder, enjoying the gentle banter as much as he did. “Well, I was thinking--”

“Call the Ancients to protect me, for that only means trouble.” His feigned look of horror came over his handsome face.

Her eyes narrowed and she slapped him across the face with his own hair. He laughed with the happy memory of Ancients falling over themselves to welcome his wife into the fold. They loved her almost as much as he did. No one could love her as much as he did.

“I will make you pay for that later, but for now I have come to a long-awaited decision.” Za’s mouth twitched with amusement.

“Why do I think that it has something to do with me?”

“Well, it does, because you owe me.”

“I owe you.”

“Yes. A deal is a deal. It’s after the wedding and I stuck with you until then. So now, Mister Sylus de Gauls, when will you have those songs ready for recording?” She flashed her lashes at him.

Sy knew her wide-eyed innocence was merely a smoke screen. She was serious.

“Well, sweetheart, about that contract--”

“Oh, no, you don’t!” Za slapped his hand on her breast. “You can’t distract me. You are too talented to let it go to waste.”

“I agree completely.” He noticed he caught her by surprise.

“Really?”

“Yes. As a matter of fact I need to do my tongue exercise right now.” He flickered his tongue across her sensitive nipples until she was squirming and her eyes rolled heavenward. “See, Za, you know how to sell music, but I know how to make it and the tongue is the most important instrument of all.”

“I can tell,” she managed to say in a husky whisper. “But there is one more thing I need to say before you make me forget and speak in tongues.”

“What now?” He lifted a brow.

“I know since we live in a different world, that adopting the house full of children I always wanted is no longer possible.”

He became serious in his expression. “I’m sorry, my love, I do know it was a dream of yours.”

“Well, I was thinking of opening a home for children so that we can raise them that way as a community, with others from the Darkworld assisting. So many of the women can no longer have children. Or it may be centuries before they find their mates. I think it would be good for them and the children.”

“What shall we do when it is noticed that none of them appear to age?” Sylus questioned.

“The children will not be there for ever, I would hope to find families that really will love and care for them. We can even enchant them to make sure of it.” She stated firmly.

“You would have us use, magic?”

“It’s for a good cause so I’m sure the council will agree. Besides, what are powers good for if not to use for the world?”

“What indeed?” He smiled at her. “Do you have any idea how proud I am that you chose me.” He kissed her growing stomach.

“As if I you really gave me a choice,” she giggled. “Now, what were you saying about tongue exercises?”

“Oh, yeah. Once you become a master of the craft such as myself, you can manipulate the *treble clit* into notes that go beyond pleasure.” He made his way lower, pushing her thighs wide and lifting her legs to rest over his shoulders.

“You...do mean *treble cleft*?” Her heart pattered in anticipation.

“Wife, I am the musical genius in this marriage. Shall I demonstrate?” he said with a smirk and arched a brow arrogantly.

“Oh, please do,” she responded; her voice was deep and dusky like the dark flush going across her skin as his head dipped.

Za was very happy she married a pompous musical perfectionist. As she cried out, she hit a most melodious note. In fact, it was so perfect Sy spent all of the next day composing his next orchestrated arrangement; he called it *Za and Sy’s Infinite Sonata*. It was to become double platinum hit worldwide.

AUTHOR NOTE

Everyday there are children and adults, who are suffering in silence, struggling to find their voice, and praying someone can see what they're to ashamed to say. Ignoring the signs is like a slow death sentence.

A large number of children are molested; mostly, by people they trust or love, do not aid the molester by being blind. Call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 800-4-A-CHILD (800-422-4453) for help or visit <http://www.childhelpusa.org>

Victims of child abuse grow up to be adults who carry the pain with them for the rest of their lives. You're never too old to seek help

If you are an adult that suffered child abuse please seek help. Visit <http://www.napac.org.uk/> for more information.

Thank you,
Shiree McCarver



SHIREE MCCARVER

Interracial relationships with action, romance, humor and emotions rolled into one memorable tale has become a trademark of Alabama native, Shiree McCarver's novels. She learned a long time ago that laughter and dreams is necessary for daily survival. Ms. McCarver loves hearing from her readers. She can be reached at:

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