

REBORN IN BLOOD

DRONE VAMPIRE SERIES

STEPHANI HECHT

It's been over a year since Ozzie had his whole world implode on him. Born a werewolf, but turned into a vampire, he's a pariah in both societies. Now hunted by his former pack, he knows he's running out of time. Before he dies, he vows to make the ones who turned him into who he is pay.

Micah may be a vampire, but that doesn't mean he fits the stereotype of being sexy or seductive. He's more a computer geek than a creature of the night. He may be a Drone soldier, but that doesn't mean he likes a fight. A fight is just what he gets when Ozzie captures him and tries to force him into a crazy, suicidal revenge plan.

Despite his fears, Micah finds himself drawn to Ozzie and he knows he'll do anything to save the man. But will Micah lose his own life in the process? And if so, will Ozzie lose the last bit of humanity he has?

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REBORN in BLOOD

DRONE VAMPIRE CHRONICLES BOOK EIGHT

BY

STEPHANİ HECHT

DEDICATION

*To Ava March. Thanks for all the late night
chats.*

CHAPTER ONE

The little piece of fresh meat tripping down Woodward Avenue had no clue that he had around five minutes to live.

Ozzie curled up one corner of his mouth in disdain at the thin college student who just waltzed around like he didn't have a care in the world. That had to take stupid to a whole new level. Detroit was never safe for anyone to gallivant around alone after dark. On top of that, this kid reeked of vampire, which meant he had to worry about a whole array of predators.

The city teemed with werewolves, kobolds, raksas, chupacabra and too many other baddies to list. Right now, a pair of werejackals followed the kid. They were in human form, looking as slovenly as usual in filthy army jackets and dirt-crusted jeans. Even from a distance, Ozzie could see them exchange triumphant smiles, certain that they'd found easy prey.

Which was true. Although the lone vampire had enhanced strength and speed on his side, he

wouldn't stand a chance against one jackal, let alone two. Not with as small and scraggly as he was. The pair of stalkers had to know that, too. They no doubt saw the kid as easy meat, a toy to be played with, hardly a challenge.

One thing they hadn't counted on was Ozzie though, because while they hunted the vampire, Ozzie hunted them.

He stayed far enough back so they couldn't scent him. Not that he'd expect them to know what he was, even if they did get a good whiff. Not with his fucked up jumble of DNA. Neither vampire, nor werewolf—he was a mixed up confetti bag of both.

Which meant the little vampire had finally come across a stroke of luck because Ozzie was stronger, faster, meaner and one of the creatures he hated more than anything, were cocky werejackals. So he always looked for an excuse to take them out of commission.

He frowned when he saw the vampire duck in between two buildings. The kid must be dumber than Ozzie had originally given him credit for. Even a pup would know not to walk into a trap like that.

He saw the jackals exchange another one of those creepy smiles before they followed the kid. Ozzie picked up the pace, not caring about being scented anymore. With each pounding step he

took, he kept expecting to hear screams or something, but all that came were the usual city sounds.

He rounded the corner and stopped dead, taking in the surreal scene in front of him. The vampire stood at the end of the makeshift alley, his head slightly lowered, a hood covering his hair and hiding his face. He had on a jean jacket over a red sweatshirt and worn jeans with black military style boots on his feet. An olive-green messenger bag hung by his side.

The jackals were facing the vampire. While they didn't strike, they started to laugh and feinted movements as if they were about to attack. His stomach curdled in disgust. Jackals loved to play with their prey, to make them feel fear before they died. A disgusting trait that the wolf in Ozzie couldn't comprehend.

Yet, no matter how loud the jackals growled, taunted or otherwise tried to get a rise out of the kid, the vampire remained unmoving. It went that way for so long that even Ozzie started to get a hinkey feeling in his gut.

"Don't you realize you're about to die, you stupid neck sucker?" one of the jackals asked, clearly exasperated.

"No, I don't," the vampire finally replied.

He lifted his head to reveal the softest set of blue eyes Ozzie had ever seen. At the same time, a

pair of black sais seemed to slide from the sleeves of his coat, the base of the handles landing in his palms.

The twin weapons were black and coated with something that his wolf senses had never encountered before. The way the vampire held them showed a very close relationship with the weapons as he crouched into a fighting stance and hissed, showing off large, white fangs.

Ozzie realized that the vampire wasn't a kid at all, but a fully trained warrior. He also realized the jackals were in a whole hell of a lot of trouble. The jackals seemed to have come to that same conclusion because they tensed, one even taking a step back.

The air grew thick with the stench of their fear and Ozzie smiled in response. All his life, despite being a wolf, he'd always cheered for the underdog. He had a feeling the show he'd be getting would be better than anything Hollywood could manufacture. The only thing missing was the greasy popcorn and over-priced soft drink.

One of the jackals had the audacity to say, "Look, we don't want any trouble."

"No, you want an easy kill so you can go back to your den and brag," the vampire replied in an eerily calm voice. "What you got was something a whole lot worse."

"You're one of the Drone Vampires from Eric's

clan, aren't you?" the second jackal asked, his voice shaking with fear.

Now that really perked his interest. Ozzie had his own personal agenda as far as that clan was concerned. It did shock him that a member from that group of vampires would be out alone. They never went anywhere without some kind of backup.

Just to be sure, he tilted his face into the wind and sniffed. While the scents of several other vampires filled the air, none were within shouting distance. His confusion grew.

Who was this man and why did he have a death wish?

"Yes, I'm a Drone soldier. Would you still have attacked me if you'd known that ahead of time?" The vampire cocked his head while he waited for an answer. When none came, he continued, "I don't think you would have given two shits either way, just so long as you got your kill."

Ozzie found himself nodding in agreement. The jackals had come out tonight for one purpose only—to hunt, and they didn't give a damn who they took down.

"You want this prize so much, then why don't you come and get it?" the vampire taunted, his lips curling up into a wicked smile that did strange things to Ozzie.

The jackals exchanged looks of confusion, all

their earlier bluster gone. They still attacked, moving with a speed that no human would have been able to match. The only problem was, the vampire wasn't a human, at least not anymore.

He swung one arm up, catching one of the charging jackals in the chest. The jackal immediately fell to the ground, screaming as the wound started to sizzle like a steak left on the grill. Tendrils of smoke even started to rise from the injury.

The second jackal's eyes widened in horror as he tried to pull back, but it was already too late. The vampire swung the other sai around, his body moving with a liquid grace that rivaled any fighter Ozzie had ever encountered.

A loud scream ripped through the air as the second jackal's back took the hit, the wound instantly reacting the same way. He fell to the ground next to his partner's body. Ozzie repressed a gag as the stench of burning flesh hit his nose. There were times where having a wolf's enhanced sense of smell was good and this was not one of them.

"What in the hell did you put on those knives?" the first jackal shrieked.

Ozzie cocked his head to the side, mimicking the movement the strange vampire had made moments ago. That's a question he wouldn't mind finding out the answer to himself. He allowed

himself to smile as a realization hit him. Not only was this kid from Eric's clan, but he was also one of the ones who specialized in making new weapons. The little vampire standing a few feet from him just happened to be the key to all of his prayers. Ozzie walked out of the shadows and exposed his presence. "If I were you boys, I would run for it and just be happy he let you keep your guts intact."

The scent of the jackal's fear went up several notches as they gaped at Ozzie, horror making their jaws slack. He smiled in return. At times like this, being a freak amongst monsters paid off.

"Sorry, man. We didn't realize he was yours." One of the jackals held his hand up in a placating manner.

"Leave. Now," Ozzie all but growled out, showing off his own set of fangs.

The jackals scrambled to their feet, despite the fact their injuries were still smoking. One of them even let out a small whimper of fear. Giving the vampire a sympathetic look, they ran as fast as their feet could carry them.

The vampire was still in a fighter's crouch and he didn't move, his hard gaze glittering with menace that Ozzie now knew he was more than capable of backing up.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"An old friend of the clan." Ozzie walked

closer, all the while keeping a wary eye on the vampire in case he decided to attack. From what he'd seen already, this guy could kick some ass, despite his small build. Not that Ozzie was too worried, with his mix of vampire and werewolf skills, he could take on just about anything, but, the vampire was a scrappy fighter and he'd make sure Ozzie hurt before the fight ended.

"What's your name?" he asked as he inched closer another step. Just three more feet and he'd be within striking distance.

The vampire hedged, as if deciding just how much to reveal. Finally, he said, "Micah."

The name didn't register with Ozzie, but that wasn't surprising. Despite his earlier claim, he only really knew a handful of vampires. "Are you going to tell me what you coated your weapons with?"

"No. Now, fuck-off and go home."

Well, the vampire could be blunt—Ozzie had to hand that to him. "Okay, then how about you tell me why you're out here all by your lonesome?"

"I lost my field trip buddy and can't seem to find him anywhere," Micah replied calmly.

"Don't bullshit me. I know your clan. You never leave your dwelling without at least one buddy in tow." Ozzie took another step closer.

Micah continued to eye him warily.

Ozzie took a moment to study the vampire.

Damn, he was even better looking than Ozzie had originally given him credit for. The hood of his sweatshirt framed soft, yet sensual features that held a certain amount of innocence that called to Ozzie. A lock of Micah's hair had slipped free and hung over his forehead. Ozzie got to see for the first time, the dark brown color. It contrasted nicely with his blue eyes.

While Ozzie usually went for females, his cock grew hard and ached as he stared at the man in front of him. God, how he'd love to play all kinds of naughty games with the scrappy vampire. It almost made Ozzie regret what he was about to do.

"What does it matter to you that I'm out by myself?" Micah tilted his chin up defiantly. His tongue darted out to lick his lips, the first sign of unease he'd displayed since he'd ducked into the alley.

Ozzie watched the move, transfixed at the sight of that pink tongue running along his full lips. Adding to the whole erotic mix was the brief hint of a fang. Despite himself, his body reacted even more, growing tight with need. *Get a grip. You've come too far to lose everything at the last moment because you started thinking with your dick.*

"I guess it doesn't matter." Ozzie shrugged. "It does let me know that you're not as innocent as you appear. I'm guessing your leader, Eric, would

be pissed if he found out you were running around baiting werejackals and, let's face it, that's exactly what you were doing. You knew they were trailing you and you led them here on purpose."

Micah's mouth formed an O of surprise.

Ozzie had to hold back a moan of desire as he thought about those lips being parted for a whole different reason. He gave a shake of his head, almost as if to rinse off his lewd thoughts. What had gotten into him and why the sudden mad interest in Micah's mouth?

"So what if I did? What business of it is yours? Just because you werewolves control Detroit doesn't mean I have to answer to you."

So Micah had pegged his werewolf half. Not too impressive unless the man had just been turned. One of the first things Drones teach their fledglings is how to tell the difference between the various species of paranormal creatures.

"Does it have something to do with what's all over your sais?" Ozzie tilted his head toward one of the weapons. As he watched, Micah's hold tightened on the handles, the skin of his knuckles blanching.

"Fuck off!"

Ozzie tsked. "Language, language. Now you've gone and pissed me off. How do you think the werewolf council would react if they knew you had a weapon like that? Because don't think for a

goddamn moment I don't know it would work on wolves just as well as it did the jackals. Don't fool yourself into believing the council is forgiving just because they granted your clan asylum. If they even hear one whisper about this, they'll come down hard on all the Drones." For the first time, Ozzie saw a real flash of fear cross Micah's face.

"Don't notify them, please. I haven't told anybody about this. Not even Eric or my team leader."

That had been the admission Ozzie had been hoping to hear. So...nobody probably knew Micah was out tonight either. Which meant he wouldn't be missed until it was too late.

"So, you made whatever it was you used against the jackals all by yourself?" Ozzie took another step closer. He was within striking distance now, but held back, waiting for Micah to let his guard down some. While he had no doubt he could take the vampire down, he didn't relish the thought of one of those sais cutting him while he did so.

Micah gave a barely perceptible nod.

Ozzie continued, "How about the Sunlight Grenades? Did you help make those?"

Micah's eyes widened, but he didn't answer.

Not that Ozzie blamed him. The Sunlight Grenades were a very touchy subject with all creatures in their world. Missiles that held a burst

of UV light, one shot could take out dozens of vampires. So far, the only ones in possession of the weapon were the Detroit Drones since they had been the ones who invented the weapon.

“Hey, I don’t blame you guys for making them. I’ve heard the rumors of how the Pure Born vampires are liquidating entire Drone clans. How they won’t even give you guys the same rights and privileges of a stray dog. And why? Just because you guys were turned into vampires instead of born that way. It’s not fair and if I were in your position, I’d want to strike back, too.” Ozzie hoped that if Micah saw him as a sympathizer, maybe he’d be willing to share his secrets. The other option wasn’t going to be very pretty. Ozzie had never forced anyone to do anything, but at this point, he was desperate enough to do anything.

Micah gave a slight shake of his head as he pressed his lips together into a grim line.

Not surprising, since the Detroit Clan was tight. It did disappoint Ozzie and made a cold brick of dread fall into his gut. Things were about to take an ugly turn for the sexy vampire.

With a surge of speed, Ozzie charged. Before Micah could even move, he had the vampire pinned to the brick wall of one building.

Micah brought up his weapons.

Ozzie was faster, using one hand to knock them

away.

As his weapons clattered to the ground, Micah let out a cry of distress.

"Why couldn't you have just been a good little vampire and cooperated?" Ozzie bared his fangs with a hiss, making Micah let out a sharp curse as his body grew tense with shock.

"Oh fuck, it's you," Micah breathed as he started to tremble under the hold.

"Yes, it is," Ozzie replied grimly before he head-butted Micah.

The vampire slumped, his eyes fluttering closed.

Ozzie kept a firm grip on Micah's shirt, not wanting him to fall onto the dirty ground. "I'm sorry," he whispered to the now unconscious vampire.

CHAPTER TWO

Micah awoke with a start, his body jerking, causing white lances of pain to shoot through his every nerve ending. He moaned as more hurt followed. His head pounded, his back burned and his arms were nearly numb. It took him a moment to push the aches aside so he could assimilate his situation.

He was in a sitting position, in a straight-backed wooden chair, his arms tightly bound behind him, by rope. He found his feet bound as well, so he had hardly any wiggle room.

Fear bloomed through his body as old memories slammed into him. His heart raced as a cold sweat broke out over his body. *Not again! Not again! Not again!* Whimpers passed through his chapped lips as his breathing became rapid and shallow. He started to fight desperately against the ropes and this caused more pain to shoot through his wrists and ankles. He hardly

registered it, too desperate to get free.

"No. No. No," he panted as he continued to fight his bindings. His skin chaffed and then got sticky with blood. This could not be happening to him. It just had to be one of his vivid nightmares...again. He told himself that at any moment, he'd wake up, safe and sound in his bed, the familiar sounds of his clan surrounding him.

Even as he assured himself, Micah knew it was a lie. One didn't feel pain when they dreamed and he was feeling a whole hell a lot of it now.

Enough! Get a grip! Assess the situation and find a way out! This time, the voice in his head was that of the clan leader, Eric. Micah had heard his lectures so many times he could recite them word for word. He called all that knowledge in, letting it soothe him some.

This wasn't like last time, he reassured himself. Now he had training, experience and he wasn't powerless. He forced his body to relax and this rewarded him when some of the pain receded. His head still hurt like a mother scratcher, but he could live with that for now.

He slowly scanned the room to take in his surroundings. A cement floor and high, squat windows let him know he was in the basement of some house. The air was rich with the scent of mold and mildew, but there were no real offensive odors. Like say the reek that would come from a

stack of bodies or something.

The floorboards above his head squeaked, making his heart race. Ozzie was there and it would only be a matter of time before he came down. Micah had a feeling he wouldn't like what went down when the man did make an appearance. If he went to all the trouble to capture Micah, it certainly wasn't because he needed a pal to have tea parties with.

Micah cursed his stupidity for going out without backup. At the time, it seemed like a good idea. While he loved his clan, sometimes it got overwhelming, surrounded by so many other bodies. Not only that, he'd been eager to test out his newest weapon.

Now his stupidity had gotten him captured. And not just by anybody, but a half-vampire, half-werewolf who had a major chip on his shoulder. One who, if rumors were to be believed, was a crazed killer.

Micah shivered so hard, the bindings hurt as he recalled all the things he'd heard about Ozzie. How he'd once been very close to the Toren brothers, but had turned against them when one transformed the werewolf into a vampire. According to all the stories Micah had heard, it'd been to save Ozzie's life, however the werewolf hadn't been grateful at all.

It had made him a pariah amongst his old pack

and they had thrown him out. Since then, nobody had heard anything from him – until now.

The sounds of boots coming downstairs assaulted Micah, making him tremble more. He despised himself for having that reaction. None of the other Drones would be shaking like some girl who just spotted a spider. They would have stood up and spat in Ozzie's face. Hell, they wouldn't have even been in this position because they'd never been so weak as to get caught in the first place.

"You're awake," Ozzie observed as he came around into view.

Despite his fear, Micah had to admit to himself the guy was good looking. With short dark hair and amber eyes, he had the clean-cut military appearance that had always appealed to Micah. Add in the hard muscles and whole kick-ass vibe the man was throwing off and Micah may have even been attracted to him if circumstances had been different. "Why did you bring me here?" Micah demanded, his voice hoarse because of his dry throat.

"I need your help," Ozzie replied simply, as if that explained everything.

"What can I possibly have to offer to you?" Micah winced at how bitter he sounded. Luckily Ozzie didn't call him out of on it.

"The Sunlight Grenade. I need one."

"Sorry, don't have any on me." Micah coughed around his parched throat. Whenever a vampire was injured, the blood lust grew, and right now, he'd give his left nut for bag of blood.

"Wrong answer." Ozzie crossed his arms over his massive chest.

He had a t-shirt on so Micah got a great view of the man's biceps. They were so huge they stretched out the black fabric, almost to the breaking point. "I swear I don't have one on me. I'm sure you searched me while I was out, so you should already know that. Trust me. I haven't stashed it up anywhere on my body." Micah looked up from under his lashes, his gaze honing in on Ozzie's jugular. God, what he wouldn't do just to tap that vein for five seconds. Micah held back a groan as his fangs dropped in response. As soon as Ozzie flashed a knowing smirk, Micah wanted to curse in frustration. So much for hiding his condition. With his fangs popping out like a boner in gym class, he may as well have invested in a neon sign.

"Hungry?" Ozzie asked in an overly bright voice.

"No, just pissed." Even as Micah told that lie, he knew Ozzie would see right through it.

"I've got blood for you."

When his gaze automatically went to Ozzie's neck, the werewolf shook his head.

"Sorry, kiddo, nobody goes fang on me. I do have some bagged stuff upstairs and since I used to serve the vampire brothers, I know how to warm it up just right. You'll hardly know the difference."

His gut twisted in need as his fangs grew larger. "Why do I get a feeling there's a price tag attached to that blood?"

"Because there is. Didn't the Drones teach you nothing comes for free in our world?"

"I must have been off that day at Vamp school," Micah drawled.

Ozzie went on as if Micah hadn't slipped that zinger in. "All you need to do is give me a Sunlight Grenade and the blood is yours. Hell, I'll even let you go home to your clan."

"How many times do I have to tell you, I don't have a fucking Sunlight Grenade?" Micah snarled, his anger making him forget himself.

"No, but you can get your hands on one."

"If you think I'm going to help you, then you're even dumber than I heard you were."

"I'm guessing that once your clan finds out where you are, they'll be more than eager to give up one grenade in exchange for your skinny ass."

Micah winced at Ozzie's backhanded insult. Maybe he wasn't as built as some of the other Drone soldiers were, that didn't mean he was a hundred-pound weakling. At least not anymore.

Since he'd started to serve under Eric, Micah had trained twice as hard as everyone else to make sure he wasn't the same stumbling idiot he'd been when he first found his way to Detroit.

"If you want that to happen then you picked the wrong vampire to nab. They probably haven't even noticed I'm missing." As soon as that damning admission slipped past his lips, Micah wanted it back. Not only did it make him look like an emo crybaby, but it just may make Ozzie think Micah was useless and expendable to the clan. To stay breathing, he needed to make Ozzie believe he had something to offer. It would make no sense in keeping someone alive who couldn't help in the final goal.

"Oh, that's just sad. Poor little Micah gets no love. What, didn't anyone ask you to the vampire prom?" Ozzie mocked.

Micah growled, lunging against his bindings. He instantly regretted the movement when blood began to trickle from his wrists again. The scent didn't go unnoticed by Ozzie. A glint came to his eyes as his fangs grew, too. Ozzie had one of the largest set of incisors Micah had ever seen, but he didn't back down. He let out another snarl and a curse word that Dante Toren would have been proud of hearing. "Just let me go. I didn't do anything to you."

"Not until you help me."

His frustration and anger grew. Didn't the asshole know how to listen? "And I told you, there is nothing I could do for you. Once my clan finds out you have me, you're going to regret even seeing me."

"I'm going to guess that the specially treated sais weren't the first weapon you ever made."

"I know where you're going with this and you're wrong. It was my team leader, Brenden, who developed the Sunlight Grenades, not me."

"But you were probably right next to him, helping. Are you going to try to deny that you couldn't make one if you had the right materials?"

Micah stilled, shocked at how quickly Ozzie had figured that one out. "I won't do it. I know you'll use it against my clan and I won't put them in jeopardy. Not even for my own life."

"What makes you think I would use it on them?" Ozzie sounded hurt by the comment.

"Because Rafe Toren lives there and everyone knows you hate him for turning you into a vampire." Micah braced himself for an angry outburst, only to get a wounded look from Ozzie instead.

"I'll admit I was mad at first, but I would never wish any harm to Rafe or his brothers. Not after how close we used to be."

"Then how come you've never come forward to the clan before? Why hide all this time if

everything is forgiven?"

"Because I know how close your clan is to my old pack and I didn't want to cause problems," Ozzie snapped.

"I don't get it. Why would your pack care?"

"Because I'm half-vampire and they consider me a defect and there's only one way wolves handle that."

"You don't mean..." Micah trailed off, unable to continue as his stomach did a slow flip of horror.

"That's exactly what I mean," Ozzie replied, his jaw set in a hard line. It made him look both dangerous and, oddly enough, good looking.

"So, if you don't intend to use the grenade on my clan, then what do you need it for?" Micah swallowed, trying to relieve some of the dryness in his throat.

"Let's just say I have my own personal beef with the Pure Born vampires."

"So do I, but you don't see me throwing around bombs at will, do you?"

Ozzie let out a loud growl as he moved in aggressively, not stopping until their faces were inches apart. "You have no idea what they took from me!"

Anger surged through Micah, making him not give a damn he had over two hundred pounds of angry werewolf in his face. "You think you're the

only one who lost everything? You have no fucking clue what I've been through so you can take your poor-me attitude and shove it up your ass."

A low rumble started deep in Ozzie's chest and worked its way up past his clenched teeth. "For someone who's tied to a chair and at the mercy of someone else, you sure are cocky."

The anger, fear and uncertainty finally became too much and Micah unleashed, "What are you going to do to me? Beat me? Use a whip on my back? Bleed me dry? Hate to break it to you, but it's all already been done to me. So unless you have something new and interesting to throw at me, leave. You're boring me." He expected Ozzie to start smacking him around.

Instead, he straightened and took a step back. "How long have you been a vampire?"

"What does that matter to you?" Micah spat.

"I don't think you've been a vampire that long, which means you probably need to still feed at least once a day. Since you were out of it for a few hours, I'll give you half a day before you start going through withdrawals."

Micah clamped his lips together and looked away. Half a day, nothing. He already felt sick from lack of blood. He couldn't let Ozzie know that.

"Unless, you're already hungry," Ozzie said

with a knowing smile while reaching out and touching one of Micah's protruding fangs.

Micah knew the touch was supposed to be mocking, but for some reason it shot straight to his cock, making him hard.

Ozzie sucked in a breath and quickly brought his hand back.

"Are you offering to feed me?" Micah asked thickly as desire shot through his bloodstream like a drug.

"Like I said, nobody goes fang on me." Ozzie's eyes grew stormy with anger. "I think I'll leave you alone down here so you can see how much fun it is to suffer through an unanswered blood lust. That is unless you agree to help me build a Sunlight Grenade."

Terror crawled up his spine at the thought of being alone, tied up and suffering through the hunger. Micah forced himself to give a curt shake of his head. "I can't do that for anyone, even if my life depends on it."

"Fine, have it your way." Ozzie left, storming up the stairs.

The door slammed and Micah flinched at the loud noise, but managed to bite back the groan of despair. As the basement flooded into darkness, he fought his fear. He was a vampire, after all, and he had excellent night vision because of it. Still, the thought of being tied up and helpless brought

on old terrors. Micah shivered and prayed that the other Drones actually would notice he was missing. Part of him worried. When he'd said nobody knew that he existed, Micah hadn't been totally lying.

Sure, he'd always joked around with his team, but Micah had never reached out and become close to any of them. He hadn't even taken on a feeding buddy like some of the others had, instead relying on bagged blood. So it could be hours if not days before someone noticed he wasn't hanging around.

As he called himself every name in the book, Micah let his head hang. He wondered just how in hell he was going to get himself out of this mess.

CHAPTER THREE

Brenden raced through the Clan dwelling, beating a path directly to Eric's office. Once he got there, he burst inside, not even bothering to knock. "We have a problem," he announced by way of greeting.

Eric sat behind his overly messy desk, his nose buried in some type of paperwork. He looked up and cocked a blond brow. "Yes, we do. You've seemed to have forgotten your manners."

"Sorry, sir, but this is an emergency. One of my team members went out last night and he hasn't come back yet."

"Which one?" Eric demanded, immediately turning serious.

"Micah. We only figured it out after the sun came up. He went off without any backup or telling us where he was going," Brenden said as he ran a hand through his short blond hair. He'd been doing that so much out of frustration the past

hour that he probably had all kinds of interesting cowlicks.

Eric frowned. "Micah is usually the most level-headed member of your team. Why would he do something as stupid as that?"

"I'm just as confused as you are. He's been going through a lot lately, but I didn't think he'd do anything rash."

"What do you mean by *going through a lot*?" Eric steepled his fingers and fixed a hard steely-eyed gaze at Brenden.

"A couple of weeks ago, his father died. Since we can't have any contact with our human families anymore, Micah couldn't go to the funeral or even call his mother to consol her." Brenden felt for the guy, but at the same time, he was frustrated that Micah could be so dumb as to walk out of the dwelling without permission.

"So he took it hard?"

"That would be an understatement. To make matters worse, Micah knew his parents were still searching for him. He feels like it was his fault his dad died because they were so broken up over him disappearing."

"You don't think he would do something rash like go back home, do you?" Eric demanded sharply.

"At first, I thought that might have been a possibility so I had one of the warlocks scry for

him. They found nothing, not even a small sign of where Micah may be." A feeling of dread and helplessness made Brenden want to yell or at the very least, punch the wall.

"Do you think he's dead?"

"I asked the warlock that and he told me even if Micah had been killed, they'd still be able to locate his body. He thinks someone is using magic to shield Micah's location."

"Shit," Eric replied grimly.

Shit indeed, because now they had no way of finding Micah short of a street-by-street search and in a city this big, it could take weeks, if not months. That was even if Micah was still in Detroit. "As soon as the sun sets, I'd like your permission to take my team and a few others to start the search," Brenden requested.

"Permission granted. Anything it takes to find him. After all he went through before he came to this clan, I don't want him to have to suffer any more than necessary. So that means we need to find him fast."

His chest grew tight as Brenden remembered some of the stories Micah had shared about how things had been right before he'd been turned. While his own transformation hadn't been a walk in the roses, it couldn't even begin to compare to what Micah had experienced. "I'll find him. Even if I have to turn this city upside down and do

some shaking," Brenden vowed. "Micah is a good friend and I won't let him down."

* * * *

Despite his harsh threats, Ozzie worried about the vampire tied up in the basement. He paced for several hours, trying to force himself to push back the guilt. This was war after all, and if he were going to win, he wouldn't do it with a soft heart.

It didn't matter. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get the image of Micah or that innocent gaze out of his mind. When he'd told Micah that he was leaving him to suffer, Ozzie hadn't missed the brief flare of fear that'd rolled off the man. Not just normal terror, but something else. Something stronger and more visceral.

Cursing himself for caring, Ozzie walked over to the fridge and grabbed the bag of blood. He even poured it into a cup and warmed it up, softy that he was. Once it was ready, he carefully carried it down the stairs.

Micah's head was drooped forward, making his brown hair hang over his face. He must have heard Ozzie coming because he snapped up straight and put on a calm façade.

"I haven't changed my mind," Micah rasped.

His gut clenched in guilt. In the little time he'd been gone, Micah's condition had deteriorated.

His skin was ashen, dark circles rimmed his eyes and his body trembled so hard the chair he was tied to, creaked a bit. "I didn't think you would have this soon." Ozzie lifted up the mug. "I brought you blood."

Micah's glazed eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Why would you do that?"

"Because you won't be any good to me if you're dead," Ozzie grunted. No way in hell he'd admit that he actually felt bad for Micah.

"You didn't spike it or anything, did you?" Even as he continued to grill Ozzie, Micah hungrily eyed up the cup as he licked his dry lips.

"Wolves just go straight for the jugular. They don't hide behind poison." Ozzie waited for Micah to point out that he was only half-wolf, but it never came.

"Are you going to untie my hands so I can hold the cup?" Micah continued to devour the cup with his gaze.

"And give you a chance to attack me?" Ozzie drawled, not bothering to hide how stupid the question was. "I'll hold it for you."

Micah hesitated for only a second longer before he gave a slight nod.

Ozzie went over and knelt on the ground, his face level with Micah's. He instantly became painfully aware of how alluring Micah's spicy scent was. When Micah parted his lips, revealing

sharp fangs, Ozzie knew he was a goner. The sight of that sensual mouth open, waiting to be filled, made his cock press painfully against the zipper of his jeans.

He gave his unruly cock a silent *down boy!* as he lifted to cup to Micah's lips. As soon as he tilted it back, the vampire gave a moan of appreciation.

Micah let out a soft whimper as he started to take in big gulps.

"Easy, there, you don't want to make yourself sick," Ozzie said with a tenderness he'd thought he wasn't capable of anymore.

Micah slowed down a bit. A little dribble of the blood still slipped past the corner of his mouth, leaving a crimson tail down his jaw and neck.

Ozzie regretted not thinking ahead of time and bringing a straw with him so it would have been easier for Micah.

"Thanks," Micah sighed as soon as the cup was empty.

Ozzie set it on the floor next to him, but didn't get up. Locked in Micah's intense gaze, he just couldn't bring himself to pull back. The thin line of blood still marred Micah's jaw and before he realized it, Ozzie leaned forward so he could lick it clean.

At first, Micah tensed, but by the second pass of his tongue, the vampire relaxed, even letting out a soft moan. Ozzie had to hold back a moan of his

own as he got lost in the slightly salty taste of Micah's warm flesh. He moved lower, his fangs just inches above Micah's fluttering pulse.

"Are you going to bite me?" Micah breathed, without a hint of fear to his voice.

"Would you let me?" Ozzie gently nipped at the area, but didn't break the skin.

"It's not like I have any choice in the matter since I'm the one tied to a chair." Micah gave a small chuckle.

"All you have to do is tell me, *no* and I'll stop. This is one situation you have complete control of."

"Would it make me a fang whore if I said *yes*?" Micah turned his head to the side.

That move exposed him in such a way that both the vampire and wolf in Ozzie stood up and cheered in approval. "You have no idea how tempting you are, but you're still too weak to lose any blood." Ozzie gave him another love bite.

"Then kiss me instead," Micah ordered, his face flushed from both the feeding and passion.

The request surprised him, but Ozzie was more than happy to comply. Tilting his head up, he captured Micah's sweet mouth in a tender kiss. Micah immediately parted his lips, melting into his touch. Ozzie languidly slid his tongue inside Micah's mouth. A hint of blood still lingered there, the tangy coppery taste mixing in with sweet taste

of Micah. Ozzie savored both flavors, even capturing Micah's tongue so he could suck it.

Micah let out a gasp as he strained forward, the ropes creaking from his efforts.

Ozzie yearned to wrap his arms around Micah, to feel the returning embrace, but he didn't dare undo the bindings. For all he knew, this kiss could just be Micah's way of tricking him.

Micah thrust his tongue out, his movements timid and unsure.

It screamed of inexperience, making Ozzie wonder just how many intimate encounters Micah had shared. Odd, since vampires were known for their voracious sexual appetite. Ozzie pulled back, suspicion pushing past his arousal. "Why did you just ask me to kiss you?"

A slight flush covered Micah's rounded cheeks. "I don't know. I guess I just got carried away."

There was such innocence about Micah that Ozzie was tempted to believe him. "Do you always go around making out with strangers?"

The blush deepened on Micah's face as he averted his eyes. "Not usually."

"What made you do it just now?" Ozzie demanded harshly.

Micah jerked at the hard tone, his eyes going from passion infused to anger in a second. "I was thinking about opening a kissing booth to raise a few bucks and needed the practice."

"Don't get smart with me," Ozzie warned.

"So, how much do you think I should charge?"

"Not much. What you just showed me wasn't anything special," Ozzie lied.

"Oh." Micah looked crestfallen.

Ozzie wanted to take back his mean comment. "Okay, maybe it wasn't that bad," he hedged. When a tiny smile played on Micah's lips, it sent a warm thrill through Ozzie.

"So five bucks would be fair?" Micah teased, continuing with the ridiculous conversation.

"I'd say twenty. Don't sell yourself short." Ozzie knew the last thing he should be doing was joking with his captive, but something about Micah drew him in. He wondered if Stockholm Syndrome ran both ways. Or maybe he just had a fetish for tied up vampires.

"Okay, twenty, but no happy endings unless they cough up at least twice that much." Micah laughed, showing a flash of fang.

His cock jerked in response. "On that note, I'm going upstairs." Ozzie stood up, trying hard to ignore the brief look of panic that flashed over Micah's face. He'd reached the foot of the stairs before his damn conscious got to him. Cursing under his breath, Ozzie turned around and looked at his vampire problem. Micah had his gaze directed at the ground again, his hair shielding his face. He didn't appear tense, but the way his

bound hands were clenched into fists gave him away. That and the strong tang of fear that was coming off him in waves. "Is there anything I can get you before I leave?" Ozzie felt compelled to ask.

Micah gave a slight shake of his head.

Ozzie sighed heavily. "Nothing? Are you sure?"

"Okay, untie me and let me go home to my clan," Micah suggested with a hint of sarcasm.

"You know I can't do that." For the first time Ozzie actually regretted it, too.

"I won't tell anyone where to find you or anything, I promise," Micah begged with a tinge of desperation.

"Look, I know how hard this is for you, but I can't do that." Ozzie walked back over and stood in front of Micah.

"How could you possibly understand what it feels like to be tied up and at someone's mercy?"

"Did you ever hear how I was murdered?" His gut clenched as it always did whenever Ozzie thought about that incident.

"No, just that you showed up to the clan in time to die and Rafe brought you back."

"I was captured by the leader of the Pure Borns, Corbin, and a witch. Corbin wanted to punish the Toren brothers and he thought that since I was their friend, killing me would be a good way of

doing that." Ozzie couldn't believe he was even talking about this. Usually, he refused to revisit that day of his life unless he was having a nightmare.

"What did they do to you?" Micah finally lifted his head and stared at him.

"They tortured me and had all kinds of fun with me before I was able to escape. I tracked the brothers back to the clan and...well, you know the rest from there."

"They said when you woke up and realized you were half-vampire you tried to kill Rafe." Micah shook his head. "Somehow I don't think that's what you were really trying to do."

"First kissing and now standing up for me?" Ozzie cocked a brow. "Patty Hearst has nothing on you."

"I guess you have a point there. Just don't ask me to rob any banks and we'll be good. I won't wear one of those stupid berets either."

Before Ozzie even realized what he was doing, he reached down and cupped Micah's cheek.

Micah didn't pull back, but continued to gaze up with those blue eyes of his.

His chest grew tight with unanswered emotions. "How about you, Micah? How did you become vampire?"

Micah's face immediately became a closed book as his body tensed. "The normal way. A vampire

drained me dry and then gave me his blood to drink."

"That's all?" Ozzie pressed. Judging by Micah's reaction, his transformation had not been a pretty one.

"That's it," Micah responded with a hard finality.

Ozzie knew the subject was over. "You sure are a mystery." Ozzie fanned his thumb over Micah's jaw. For some insane reason, he couldn't get enough of the vampire. Each touch, each caress, only left him wanting for more.

"Nah, I'm just plain, boring Micah."

"There is nothing boring about you." Ozzie drank in Micah's sensual features, especially the way his brown hair was cut collar length in the back, but left long enough in the front for someone to grab onto and pull during bedroom play.

"Trust me, I tend to blend into the background." There was no bitterness in Micah's statement, just matter of fact acceptance.

Ozzie couldn't disagree more since all he seemed capable of doing was noticing Micah. He didn't say that aloud. "I'm going to take you upstairs so I can keep a better eye on you." That couldn't be further from the truth. The real reason had more to do with the fear he sensed had overcome Micah at the thought of being left alone in the basement. He squatted down and started to

work the knots loose so Micah was free from the chair. At the same time, Ozzie took care to make sure Micah's ankles and wrists remained tied together. He knew, kiss or no kiss, Micah would bolt at the first opportunity.

Micah had to hobble, but they managed to get up the stairs. It nearly required Ozzie to carry the man up the stairs. He bit back a groan of desire as Micah's body all but molded into him. Once they reached the top step, Ozzie found himself strangely reluctant to let go.

"It's nice up here," Micah said in the automatic way that showed he'd been taught manners.

Ozzie shrugged. While his place wasn't a dump, it wasn't exactly a Martha Stewart showpiece either. The couches were comfortable, but didn't match and the kitchen table was secondhand, but it was his safe haven from his old pack and any others who would like to see him dead, so he was fond of the place.

"Where's the bathroom?" Micah asked, blushing again.

"This way." Ozzie led the way, then retied the vampire's hands in front before he turned his back while Micah took care of his needs. It must have been awkward with all the bindings, but Micah didn't complain. Ozzie didn't turn back around until he heard the toilet flush, then water running in the sink.

Micah washed his hands before he studied his reflection in small mirror. "I look like I've been rode hard and put up wet," he mused as he turned his face from side to side.

Ozzie bit back laughter. He was beginning to wonder if Micah's internal monologue was on the fritz at times. "You should have seen you before you were fed. You made the zombie from the bar look like a supermodel."

"Don't pick on Igor. He's just misunderstood and wants some love."

"Hate to break it to you, but Igor wasn't a zombie."

Micah cocked his head to the side and met his gaze in the mirror. "Okay, Lurch then."

"I'll give you that one." Ozzie paused. "What really is the zombie at the bar's name?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you." Micah winced and glanced down at his wrists.

Ozzie saw they weren't fully bleeding anymore, but they were still oozing and looked like hell. "Try me." He edged in so he could open the medicine cabinet to grab some ointment.

"Alonzo." Micah gave a shit-eating grin and lifted his wrists closer.

"I don't buy that. You're just saying that to fuck with my mind."

"It's the honest to God's truth, I swear." Micah laughed.

The rich sound made Ozzie smile. "How did you find that out?"

"One night I asked and he told me."

Somehow, Ozzie could see that. From the little time they'd spent together, he was already hard pressed to deny Micah any request. That was, except to let him go. But the more that Ozzie grew to know the young vampire, the more reasons he was finding to keep him and not just for the Sunlight Grenades.

CHAPTER FOUR

Micah hissed as pain shot through his wrists when Ozzie started to dab on ointment. At first, he assumed it was the normal antibiotic kind until the rancid smell hit him. “Ugh, what is that stuff?” He wrinkled his nose in disgust. He wondered how Ozzie managed even to be in the same room as the crap, given his enhanced wolf sniffer.

“It’s something a witch friend made for me,” Ozzie explained as he continued to apply the foul stuff.

Micah had to repress a shudder when he saw it had a gray, lumpy appearance. “Does she hate you or something?” he quipped, half-serious.

“She likes my money. She also made up some protection charms for the house. Once I buried them in the four corners of my yard, no magic could scry this location.”

The bottom of Micah’s stomach dropped out as

the ramifications of those words hit him. His distress must have shown on his face because Ozzie pinned him with a knowing stare.

"That means the magics living at the clan dwelling won't be able to use any special tricks to find you."

Fear clawed at Micah's insides as he realized he wouldn't be free from the ropes anytime soon. "Why do you want that Sunlight Grenade so bad?"

"Remember how I told you Corbin helped kill me? I'm going to use it on him. He's part of the Pure Born Vampire Regulation Force and I happen to know he has the corner office to their main headquarters." Ozzie's eyes burned with anger.

A while ago, that would have terrified Micah, now it made him sympathize. "You can't be serious. That would be a suicide mission." Micah slowly shook his head in disbelief. Had Ozzie lost all his common sense when he'd been tortured? No sane individual would be crazy enough to take on the VRF alone. Hell, Eric refused to take in his soldiers and they were now the largest clan in Northern America. Plus, they had a coven of magics at their backs.

"All that matters is Corbin pays for all the hurt he's dished out and I just don't mean to me. I'm talking about the liquidations of the clans, the mass transports, the false imprisonments, all of it.

If I have to die to make sure the world is free of his stench, then so be it."

All of Micah's worries centered on Ozzie. Ozzie had knocked him out, dragged him to the basement and was now holding him captive, but he didn't want to see the man get hurt. Which had to make him the lamest vampire in history. "Who decided it had to be you to make this sacrifice? This isn't the way to go about this. Come back to the clan with me. You can join our ranks and fight that way."

"I could never fit in there and we both know it," Ozzie argued with infuriating calmness.

"Why, because you're mixed? Rafe and Ethan are accepted and they're part magic."

"I wouldn't do well if I had to live with so many other individuals."

Micah let out a harsh laugh of disbelief. "Bullshit, you were raised in a pack. Just because you've been on your own for the past year, doesn't change that."

"Are you talking about the same pack that has the death warrant on my head? The one that totally disowned me and spat in my face when I came to them for help? You're right. It was stupid of me to not want to get close to another group."

"We're not that way." Micah told the truth, too, while one or two of the clan members might be assholes, on the whole, they were all supportive

and protective of each other.

"I'm supposed to just trust you and believe that?" Ozzie challenged as he put the ointment back up.

Micah opened his mouth to give an *of course* only to shut it when he realized how ridiculous the conversation had gotten. Here he was, abducted, tied up and at Ozzie's mercy, yet instead of trying to find a way to escape, he was more worried about helping. "There's no way I can make a grenade for you. I don't have the right tools or supplies. Besides, I've only assisted Brenden. I've never made, began or finished one on my own," Micah said, desperate for Ozzie to understand.

"How about that weapon you used on the werejackals? Was that all your creation?" Ozzie continued to talk in that calm voice.

Micah ground his teeth in frustration. "Yes, I developed that on my own time," Micah admitted reluctantly.

"What was it?"

"Some oils mixed in with a special silver compound I invented. I wasn't sure if it would even work until last night."

That finally got a reaction. Ozzie cursed under his breath as his gaze grew stormy. "Yet, you went out there and played *bait the werejackal*. Seems like I'm not the only one with a death wish."

"If it hadn't of worked, I would have just fought my way out the old fashioned way." Micah had no doubt he would have been successful, too. While he'd been inept and lacking battle skills when he first came to the clan, since then, he trained hard to hone his skills. Now, he could hold himself with any of Eric's soldiers.

Ozzie gave his bound wrists and ankles a pointed look. "Yeah, because you're so good at fighting your way out of situations."

"The only reason you got the drop on me was because I wasn't prepared for you to be as fast and strong as shit," Micah defended, more than a little stung that Ozzie doubted his skills.

"Relax, I saw you move in the fight with the jackals. You're badass status remains intact. I just think it's dumb to go out looking for fights. In this world, we get enough trouble without seeking it out."

"You mean just like you're doing by going to the VRF and trying to blow it up?" If Micah had a free hand, he would have made a check note in the air to show he'd just scored a point in this maddening debate. Ozzie didn't rise to his bait, instead grabbing him by the rope around his wrists and leading him out to the kitchen. At the sight of the olive green fridge, his stomach grumbled for something other than blood. At this point, he'd even take bologna on stale bread.

"Sit." Ozzie pointed to one of the chairs. "I'm going to leave your hands tied in front of you while you eat, but if you so much as sneeze aggressively, I'm putting you back in the basement. This time for good."

"I'll behave," Micah promised as he took a seat and rested his hands on the table. While the ointment and his vampire healing were helping some, his wrists still hurt like a son of a bitch.

They settled into silence, Micah watching as Ozzie moved around, making up eggs and hash browns. It was mid-afternoon, going by the clock on the stove, but it was still early to them. Back at the clan, they would all just be starting to get up and moving around. A sharp pang hit his chest as Micah wondered if he'd ever see the Drone dwelling again. It may not have been the choice he would have picked, given the chance, but the vampires had become the closest thing he had to family.

"Here, eat," Ozzie grunted as he set the plate in front of him.

The enticing scent of food brought him out of his musing. Micah reached for his fork, only to discover, that with his bound hands, it was nearly impossible to scoop the food up without making a mess. After his third clumsy attempt, Ozzie sighed and reached out to roughly jerk Micah's chair sideways so they were facing each other.

Taking the fork, Ozzie rolled his eyes. "God, I can't take it anymore."

Micah glared at him, bristling at Ozzie's put-upon tone, as if it was his fault that he didn't have full range of motion. It's not like tied up his own goddamn hands. He opened his mouth to tell Ozzie off, only to get a forkful of food shoved in. Micah had no choice but to chew.

As soon as the flavor hit his taste buds, some of his anger faded. It had been so long since he'd had eggs this good. Fluffy and not overcooked. "Wow, you're a good cook," he managed to get in before Ozzie shoveled in another bite.

"I used to work for the Toren brothers before they came to the clan and part of my duties was cooking. Since I didn't want to listen to them whine if I got it wrong, I made sure I became the next Bobby Flay."

Micah gave a soft chuckle. "Was that just a joke? I didn't think you had it in you. You sure you don't want to go mark this event down somehow? Maybe in your day-planner or blog?"

"Smartass," Ozzie grumbled, but the corner of his mouth twitched as if he was holding back a laugh. He held out a slice of bacon in the air.

Micah leaned forward and very slowly let it slide into his mouth. The entire time he looked up from under his lashes at Ozzie. When Ozzie let out a soft gasp as his gaze grew stormy with need,

Micah's cock stirred in reaction.

"You have no idea what you're getting yourself into," Ozzie warned in a low dangerous voice.

While it should have scared Micah, it only made him hornier. He gave an internal shake of his head. What was going on with him? Before now, he'd never sought out any kind of companionship, too shy to say shit to either males or females. Yet, he was throwing himself at somebody who'd knocked him unconscious and was now holding him captive. If there had been a vampire shrink in business, Micah might have been tempted to make an appointment to get his head checked. "I know exactly what I'm getting myself into," Micah responded, taking that one, huge last step. He tensed, waiting to see how Ozzie reacted.

"How do you know I'm even interested? I could just be into chicks."

In answer, Micah nodded to the very evident bulge in Ozzie's jeans.

"It's not going to make me untie you," Ozzie said as he hungrily eyed Micah up. "You wouldn't be the first one to use sex to distract their captor long enough to escape."

"We can keep the bindings. I'm sure you know how to work around them?" His breaths were coming out rapid and fast as desire rocketed through his body. Now Micah understood why

some of the other vampires let their arousal rule them. It was stronger than any drug he knew of.

"You have no idea how tempting that is, but the last thing you need is to have any emotional connection to me." Ozzie shook his head.

"Just this once." Micah ducked his head to the side, mortified that he was actually begging. "I need to feel like someone cares, if only for a night."

"Micah—" Ozzie started.

"Please."

Ozzie didn't say anything, just continued to stare with a shocked expression on his face.

Micah cursed and looked down at his hands. "Fuck it. I'm sorry. I never should have—" Ozzie's mouth swallowed his last words as he lunged forward and kissed him with a near frenzied passion. Micah let out a little growl as he returned the need, his tongue thrusting out to lick Ozzie's fangs.

Ozzie jerked, a moan slipping past his lips. Micah had heard that the fangs of a vampire were an erogenous zone and it looked like the rumors were true. Emboldened by Ozzie's reaction, Micah did it again, this time scraping his tongue along one fang so drops of blood would fall into Ozzie's mouth.

"You won't be alone, at least not for today," Ozzie promised in between passes.

Micah clutched at the front of Ozzie's shirt, desperate to get him closer. He would have spread his legs out so he could experience the hard press of Ozzie's cock against him, but the damn ropes prevented it.

Ozzie shifted and broke the kiss, moving his lips so they were just above Micah's ear. Micah trembled as he felt Ozzie's hot breath on his neck. Just a couple more inches and Ozzie's fangs would be sinking in.

"No biting each other," Ozzie ordered.

Micah felt intense disappointment at that edict, but nodded. If that's what Ozzie wanted, then that's what he'd get. Right now, Micah was so worked up that Ozzie could ask for a pony and he'd get it.

Ozzie did lick his neck, and that felt damn good. Micah let out a low hiss of pleasure as he tilted his head to the side in blatant invitation. Ozzie nuzzled the exposed flesh for several moments, using his fangs to scrap against the skin without once drawing blood.

"You tempt me so much," Ozzie growled, almost as if the fact annoyed him.

Before Micah could apologize or get angry, Ozzie pulled back and slid from the chair. Pulling a knife from his boot, he sliced through the ropes at Micah's ankles. As soon as he was free, Micah went all slutty, instantly spreading his legs so

Ozzie could get in closer.

"That's it, show me how much you want it," Ozzie urged in a husky rumble that went straight to Micah's cock. Rubbing Micah's aching dick, Ozzie gazed up at him. "I have one question for you."

Micah blinked stupidly at him as he wondered why Ozzie had to pick that moment to get curious. "What?"

"I could tell by the way you kissed that you aren't very experienced. Has anyone ever sucked you off before?"

Micah felt his face grow warm. "No, is that going to be a problem for you?"

Ozzie's lips curled into a wicked smile. "Are you kidding? It's a dream come true. Every stroke, lick and nibble I give you will be your first. I'm going to be the only one who knows what you taste like. What noises you make when you come. How tight your ass is as it clamps down on my cock."

While the thought of Ozzie fucking him up the ass terrified Micah, it also excited him in a way no other thing ever had. Ozzie reached between them and slowly undid Micah's pants, almost as if he was giving Micah time to change his mind. Like there was any chance of that happening. Micah even lifted his hips up a little in a show of encouragement.

As his pants were unzipped and the cool air hit him, Micah gasped. He watched, breath tight in his chest, as Ozzie reached in to slowly tease and caress. His dick had been touched plenty of times, but not ever by someone besides himself. He had to admit, it felt much better to have Ozzie's fingers on him.

"Nice," Ozzie hissed as he pulled Micah's cock out and started to stroke it up and down.

"Thanks?" Micah cried out, not knowing the best way to respond when one's cock was complimented.

Then he didn't care, because Ozzie's fingers really started to go to work and Micah was reduced to grunts and moans. When he felt the flick of a tongue on the tip of his erection, Micah almost came out of the chair.

Ozzie looked up at him and smiled. "Do you want to finish breakfast first?" His tongue darted out to swirl over the head of Micah's erection.

"Are you joking? All I want is for you to continue what you're doing. I would be willing to miss every meal for the rest of my life if it meant I got this special treatment." Micah bit back a sob when Ozzie licked him again.

"I thought you'd say that." Ozzie ran his tongue up the underside of Micah's length. All the while, he continued to gaze up as if savoring Micah's reaction.

Micah let out a long, guttural sound that would have been embarrassing under any other circumstances. The warm, velvet sensations of Ozzie's tongue, the intense emotions building up in his own chest, all nearly became too much and Micah had to close his eyes to fight against them.

"Do you have any idea how fucking hot you look right now?" Ozzie asked.

Micah shook his head in response. "You don't need to say that to seal the deal. Since my dick's out and I'm begging for more, it's a pretty sure thing."

"I mean it," Ozzie replied fiercely. "I've wanted you ever since I saw you take those two werejackals out by yourself. The way you moved had me so hard, I couldn't even think straight."

"Yet, you still managed to take me down with one blow." Micah chuckled as he clumsily ran his fingers through Ozzie's short locks.

"I had a great incentive. I wanted you and your sweet ass at my mercy. Plus, I needed to do this." Ozzie parted his lips and slowly took Micah's cock into his mouth.

Micah yelped at the sudden sensation of moist heat surrounding him.

Ozzie sucked in, his cheeks hollowing.

The pleasure became so much that Micah bucked up in his seat, inadvertently driving himself deeper into Ozzie's mouth. Ozzie didn't

complain, simply moaned. The sound vibrated around Micah's shaft, sending more lashes of pleasure shooting up his spine. Micah thrust forward again, this time going in so far that the tip of his cock bumped into the back of Ozzie's throat. For a second, Micah worried that he'd pushed things too far, but then Ozzie sucked in, hard. "Fuck, I had no idea this would feel so good," Micah panted as he thrust up again.

Ozzie looked up, his eyes looking almost black because his pupils were inflated with passion. A primal thrill went through Micah as he realized he was the one that caused that. Someone wanted him and it just happened to be one of the sexiest creatures in Detroit. "Untie my hands. I want to really touch you," Micah pleaded. He actually yearned for much more than a caress. He needed to bite and lick every part of Ozzie.

Ozzie didn't answer his request, but did suck harder, at the same time pulling back, so Micah's cock almost slipped past his lips. He even added his teeth to the action. Although Micah could see that Ozzie's fangs were fully extended, not once did he cut or break the skin.

A short gasp escaped Micah's lips as his body grew tight. He tried to call out a warning, but it was too late. His cock exploded, shooting off inside Ozzie's mouth. Micah expected an outraged outburst or gagging. Ozzie seemed to take it all in

stride, swallowing every drop and even licking Micah's cock clean after he finished.

"I'm so sorry," Micah panted, still out of breath.

"I'm not. You tasted great, just like I knew you would." Ozzie rested his forehead against Micah's thigh and took several deep breaths.

Micah could tell Ozzie was still tight with arousal and that he hurt from that unanswered need. He awkwardly ran his fingers through Ozzie's hair. "You know, I'm not hungry anymore. Why don't you show me where the bedroom is?"

Ozzie's head snapped up. His eyes were wild with passion, the lines on his face hard with frustration. "We go in there and I'll end up fucking you."

A slight shiver went through Micah that was equal parts fear and excitement. "I know and I still want you to take me."

"You want your first time to be with the same guy who tied you up and left you to suffer in the basement?"

"Sure. My friend, Jeremy, pays all kinds of good money for guys to do that to him," Micah teased, hoping to hide his nerves.

"I'm a half-breed. If you get involved with me, they'll be gunning for you, too," Ozzie rasped, shame stamped on his face.

"If they come anywhere near either one of us,

I'll introduce them to my sais, like I did the jackals." He would, too. They'd known each other for less than a day, but Micah felt a strong protective urge toward Ozzie. Which was crazy since Ozzie had more than proven that he could take care of himself. But Micah wanted to protect him from just the physical pain. As sappy and cheesy as it was, he wanted to wrap his arms around Ozzie and shield him from all the hurtful words and actions others kept throwing at him.

"Why are you so willing to throw yourself into the same boat I'm in?" Ozzie reached up and gently ran his finger over Micah's bottom lip. "After this is all over, you can just go back to your clan and forget about the fucked-up half-wolf who interrupted your life for a few days."

"I don't want to forget about you," he confessed, his heart pounding madly in his chest as he realized how much he meant that, too. He didn't want to go back to the way things were before either. Alone, even though he was surrounded by hundreds of his fellow vampires. His only companions, haunting memories and guilt over what should have been. For once, he wanted to willingly step outside of his comfort area, to take a risk. Nipping at Ozzie's finger, Micah then said, "I want to fuck and I don't want it to be with anyone but you."

CHAPTER FIVE

A surge of primal ownership went to Ozzie on hearing Micah's words. He forced himself to hold still even as his wolf was screaming, *Take him! Claim him! Take what he offers and mark him as yours!*

Then Micah bit Ozzie's digit again and that was his undoing. Letting out a growl, Ozzie stood up and hooked his fingers behind the bindings on Micah's wrists. Pulling the vampire to his feet, Ozzie led him to the bedroom.

"I guess this means, *yes*," Micah teased in that sexy way of his.

Ozzie turned back to look at him and almost stumbled at the fuck-me-now face Micah presented—from his kiss-swollen lips to the feral-glazed expression in his eyes. Ozzie ran his tongue over his lips, savoring the lingering tang from Micah's cum.

Once they reached the bedroom, Ozzie didn't

bother to turn on the lights. Heavy drapes prevented any of the lingering sunlight from leaking in and their vampire vision allowed them to see every small detail of each other.

As soon as they got by the bed, Micah started to pull off Ozzie's shirt. When the binding hindered his progress, Micah let out a frustrated cry. "Take them off, please. I want to touch you, too."

Ozzie hesitated. While he wanted the caresses just as much, a part of him still worried that it may be a ruse. He had used that very trick to get away from the witch, after all, so what was to prevent Micah from doing the same thing?

"Please, Ozzie." Micah held his hands up, an imploring expression softening his features even more. "I'll be good, I promise."

"Don't make me regret this," Ozzie warned before he bent down to take the knife out of his boot again. Taking a deep breath and praying he was doing the right thing, he sliced through the ropes, then tossed the knife all the way across the room, out of reach.

As soon as his hands were free, Micah's hands went to Ozzie's shirt. He lifted it over Ozzie's head and tossed it to the side. Micah immediately started to touch Ozzie. His caresses were slow and exploratory, screaming of his inexperience.

Ozzie savored it more than any stroke he'd ever been on the receiving end of.

"Wow," Micah breathed, his finger circling Ozzie's nipples.

Ozzie decided to take that as a compliment, especially when Micah leaned forward to nip experimentally at his pecs. Even though his fangs were out, Ozzie noted that Micah took great pains not to break the skin. For a wild second, Ozzie yearned for something he'd always considered taboo. He wanted to feel the slice of Micah's fangs. To experience the white, hot lance of pain that would be followed by pleasure. To kiss Micah and taste his own blood lingering inside the vampire's mouth.

A lifetime of pack life held him back. Werewolves considered it dirty and beneath them to carry the bite mark of a vampire. After all, they were at the top of the food chain, not at the bottom serving leeches.

Damn, Ozzie wanted it bad. More so, he wanted to pin Micah to the bed and drive his cock inside the vampire's tight ass at the same time as he bit him from behind. To not only hear Micah's screams of ecstasy, but taste it as it coursed through his blood. Ozzie looked down and smiled when he noticed, not only was Micah's cock still hanging out, but that it had grown hard again. Reaching between them, Ozzie gave it a gentle squeeze.

Micah let out an almost animalistic sounding

hiss as he jerked.

"I love the way you respond to me," Ozzie said, as he ran his thumb over the tip of Micah's cock, collecting some pre-cum. Pulling his hand back, he rubbed the stickiness across Micah's lips before capturing his mouth in a hard, possessive kiss.

The taste of the cum made Ozzie wild for more, but he held back. This time, when Micah came, it would be when Ozzie was fucking him, their sweaty bodies straining against each other. Micah returned the kiss, seeming to grow confident as he thrust his tongue out to flick over Ozzie's fangs.

Red, heated need shot through Ozzie. His claws actually came out for the first time since he'd been turned into a vampire. The urge to claim Micah grew so strong, he had to fight within himself not to tear off the man's clothes and throw him onto the floor.

Ozzie wouldn't do that. This was Micah's first time and after all he'd already done, the least Ozzie could give him was one pleasant memory. Pulling back, Ozzie caressed Micah's jaw, being careful not to scratch him with the huge ass claws.

"Take your clothes off for me," Ozzie urged. Hopefully, while he watched the show, he would have time enough to call his claws back in. Even though Micah was trying hard to hide it, Ozzie still felt the nerves coming off the man. The last thing he needed to show right now was his animal

side to his soon-to-be lover.

Micah gave Ozzie's chest one last lick before he stepped back and slipped his sweatshirt off. He wore a tight, plain white tee underneath that showed off his thin, yet muscular body perfectly. He got rid of that, too, so the top half of his body was nude, with the exception of the tattered ropes that still hung from his wrists.

A sexual thrill pulsed through Ozzie until he noticed several white, crescent shaped scars on Micah's neck and chest. Touching one, Ozzie asked, "What happened?"

Micah cringed, but his face remained otherwise impassive. "I don't want to talk about that now."

"Okay, but later I want to know who hurt you like that."

Micah lunged forward for a kiss, his lips hot and eager against Ozzie. An obvious distraction tactic that Ozzie was willing to go along with, for now. Before they left this room, Micah would tell him every little detail about those old injuries, even if Ozzie had to screw him senseless to make him compliant.

Their bare chests brushed together, Micah's skin hot with passion. Ozzie reached down and tugged Micah's pants south so they pooled around the vampire's legs. Since Micah's boots were downstairs, locked up with all his weapons, it was only took a kick of his legs and the jeans were off.

His underwear followed and Ozzie finally had him naked and completely exposed to his touch.

Ozzie nudged him so the back of his legs hit the edge of the mattress. Micah fell back on it and Ozzie climbed up after him so he was stretched out on top. Micah moaned as he spread his legs so the hard length of his cock pressed against Ozzie.

"Aren't you going to get naked, too?" Micah asked as he tugged on the waistband of Ozzie's pants.

"In a minute. I'm enjoying you too much right now." Ozzie started to nuzzle Micah's neck, his fangs dangerously close to the jugular. At least his claws had receded so he knew that he hadn't lost total control of his body—yet. With great determination, Ozzie forced himself to ignore the vein that fluttered so temptingly close to his mouth and moved away, slowly kissing his way down Micah's chest.

He kissed, nibbled and licked his way down and then back up Micah. The only area left untouched was his cock. Ozzie did it purposely, both to tease and to make Micah desperate with passion. By the time he was done, Micah was covered in a fine sheen of sweat and trembling.

"Stay just like that, don't move one inch," Ozzie ordered as he got out of bed. He shucked his jeans and underwear before grabbing lubricant from the bathroom.

When he got back, he was pleased to see Micah had obeyed for once. He remained on his back, his eyes closed, lashes stark against his flushed cheeks. His long, thick cock jutted out, hard and glistening with pre-cum.

Ozzie drank in the image, hoping to burn it into his memory forever. It would serve to keep him warm during the empty nights. While he would give anything to see this daily, to truly take Micah as his mate, deep down, he knew it could never happen. Micah belonged back with his clan, while Ozzie no longer belonged anywhere. Tonight, though, Micah was his and he planned to enjoy every moment of it.

"Get on your hands and knees. It will make it easier," Ozzie rasped. Micah scrambled to obey and Ozzie wasted no time, climbing on the bed and positioning himself behind Micah. Running his hand along the slope of Micah's ass, Ozzie reveled in the shiver that went through the man's body.

Micah let out a soft whimper as he rocked back into the touch, his ass tilting up perfectly. "I'm ready."

Ozzie smiled. "Not yet, but you will be soon. Relax and let me take care of things." With a twist of his hand, Ozzie cracked the lid of the lube and spread a liberal amount over his finger. It was going to make a hell of a mess, but Ozzie didn't

mind. All that mattered to him was that Micah enjoyed this. "I'm going to start with one finger, so you can get used to having something inside you." Even as he spoke, he started to slowly rim Micah's tight hole.

"Okay, I trust you." Micah rested his forehead on his arms and waited.

Ozzie paused, stunned by Micah's declaration before he recovered and slowly slid one slick finger inside.

Micah tensed and let out a low hiss. "Oh, that feels good."

Ozzie started to work the finger in and out for several seconds before he thrust a second one inside. "You're doing so great, babe," he cooed as he ran the palm of his free hand down Micah's back.

Micah didn't answer, instead letting out a low moan as he rocked back against Ozzie's hand.

Ozzie rewarded him by adding a third finger, stretching Micah's ass so he could take the width of his cock.

"I can't last much long, I'm going to come," Micah panted, his face strained from effort.

Ozzie gave him one last caress before he moved his fingers. He put more lube on his cock before he pressed the tip against the still tight opening of Micah's ass. When Micah grew eager and tried to thrust back, Ozzie reached out to still him. "Easy, I

don't want to hurt you."

Micah let out a sound that could only be frustration.

Ozzie chuckled at his eagerness before starting to slowly inch the head of cock past the tight ring of muscle. After several torturous heartbeats, it eased in all the way.

"Oh, God yes. More," Micah stammered.

At first, Ozzie moved in short, slow thrusts until his entire length was buried inside Micah, then he switched to long strokes that had them both moaning. Micah clawed at the bed coverings as he tilted his ass up for more.

Normally Ozzie would have reached around to caress Micah's cock, but by the way Micah was whimpering and moaning it was obvious one added touch would send him over the edge. While Ozzie wanted to see Micah come, he didn't want him to do it just yet.

"You're so tight around my cock," Ozzie groaned as he started to pound into Micah harder.

"Sorry."

"Don't be sorry, it feels so good."

Despite his desire to drag things out, Ozzie felt himself reaching the edge, too. He shifted the angle of his strokes so his cock brushed against Micah's sweet spot.

Micah let out a loud gasp before he shouted in pleasure.

It only took a couple more strokes before he came, his body shuddering under Ozzie. "That's it, babe, ride it out," Ozzie urged as he gave one last thrust. His cock erupted inside Micah, releasing waves of cum.

Even after it was over, Ozzie stayed that way, still buried inside Micah. The euphoria continued to linger and he wanted to enjoy every second. It wasn't until Micah started to squirm that Ozzie moved out and sat back on his heels.

Micah rolled to his side and gazed up at Ozzie. "Tell me we can do that again soon. That was fan-fucking-tastic."

Ozzie laughed. "I think that has to be the strangest compliment I've ever received."

Micah got up on his knees so he could playfully nip at Ozzie's neck. "So does that mean you'll fuck me again right away?"

"How about we take a shower first and clean the sheets. We kind of made a mess on them." Ozzie moaned when Micah started to gently suck on his skin.

"I'm not going to apologize for the sheets since it was all your fault I came."

The vampire chuckled against his flesh and ran his hands along Ozzie's back, the ragged ends of the rope tickling. Ozzie cupped Micah's ass and pulled him closer. "Are you okay? You're not in too much pain are you?"

"I'm a vampire and we heal fast. Give me an hour and I'll be ready for more."

Ozzie secretly hoped so, because he sure as hell knew he would be. Getting out of bed, he held his hand out to Micah. "Come on, let's get in the shower. Since you've been good, I'll wash your back for you."

Micah looped his fingers through Ozzie's and only winced slightly as he got to his feet. "Only if you let me wash yours in return. I like touching you."

Ozzie wasn't going to argue with that since he'd quickly become addicted to Micah's caresses. The best decision he'd ever made had been to cut his bindings so his hands were free to move.

The bad thing was during the past few hours, Ozzie had grown to care for Micah. While he'd had his share of quick fucks with both males and females, not one had come close to the connection he'd just shared with the vampire.

Which just sucked because Ozzie knew that no matter how hard he wished for it, there was no future between the two of them.

CHAPTER SIX

Micah quietly shut the bedroom door closed behind him and walked carefully to the kitchen. With each step he took, his heart pounded a bit harder, the hand clutching the stolen cell phone sweated a bit more, the guilt in this gut churned a bit faster.

He dressed only in his jeans and t-shirt, since he planned on just making a quick call, then climbing back into bed with Ozzie. While what he was about to do felt like a bitter betrayal, Micah knew it was only a matter of time before the Drones found them. Maybe if he called them now and let them know he was okay, when they did come, it wouldn't be with guns drawn.

Once he got to the kitchen, he leaned against the counter and dialed Brenden's number. His fingers shook some when he pushed the buttons. While he truly did have Ozzie's best interests in heart, if he found out about this, he would view it

as a disloyalty.

It only rang twice before Brenden answered it with, "I swear, Jeremy, if this is you using somebody else's phone because you lost yours again, I'm going to take the cost for a new one out on your ass."

"No, it's me, Micah." He kept his voice low, barely above a whisper.

"Holy hell! Where are you?" Brenden demanded, his tone more concerned than angry.

"Some house. I'm not for sure exactly where it is." He resisted the temptation to peek out the windows to look outside for any street signs or other identifying markers. No sense in making it easier for the Drones.

"Are you going to tell me what's going on?" Now there was an edge of irritation. One thing that had always pissed his team leader off the most was when one of the soldiers serving under him tried to keep secrets.

"You remember Ozzie?"

"How can I forget? He tore up half the infirmary that night he was turned."

"He kind of persuaded me to come with him," Micah hedged, not wanting to risk the clan's rage by telling the whole truth.

"*Persuaded?* We found the alley where you had the fight. Not only did you leave your sais behind, but also a good sized puddle of blood. We all

know you didn't go willingly."

"Maybe not at first," Micah conceded. "But we're reached an agreement since then."

"Really, then why are you whispering? He doesn't know you're making this call, does he?" Brenden challenged.

Micah winced, as usual his team leader was way too smart for any of them to get away with anything. "He doesn't exactly trust the clan or other werewolves, right now. Which is why I don't want you guys to try to track us down. If you come blasting in like some vampire version of Steven Segal, he'll never believe we don't mean him any harm."

"How about we do this? You walk out of that house right now and run back to the clan. Then we can calmly discuss a way to make Ozzie come in on his own," Brenden worded it as a request, but the hard edge let Micah know it was actually an order.

"With all due respect, sir, I can't do that." Micah gripped the phone tighter, shocked that he'd just disobeyed a direct order for the first time.

"Can't or won't?" Brenden snapped.

Oh yeah, he was good and pissed. "Won't."

"What in the hell has gotten into you? Did you take a blow to the head and it totally rearranged your personality? You were the last one I ever expected this kind of behavior from."

Of course not because boring, quiet Micah would never do something as daring as actually having mind blowing sex with anyone, let alone a fugitive. Micah said, "Ozzie has been given a raw deal and I just want to help make it right. That's all."

"Are you sure about that?" Brenden challenged.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I think if you were doing this for purely humanitarian reasons, then you'd come in and speak to Eric about it, instead of camping out at Ozzie's house and refusing to leave. You need to get your head straight and realize that Ozzie's not one of us."

"Neither was Dante, he's Pure Born, but that didn't stop you," Micah shot back, wincing as soon as the words left his pie-hole. There was a long pause and Micah stumbled to fill it. "I'm sorry...I like Dante and all. I know that he and his brothers have done a ton for our cause and I don't mean them or you any disrespect. It's just Ozzie has come to..."

"Mean a lot to you?" Brenden finished for him.

"Yeah. I know it sounds stupid since it's only been a day, but I don't want to see him get hurt. By anyone. So could you please back off? Just for a little bit?"

"You know we can't do that. He attacked a clan member, that's something we won't ignore." Brenden's hard tone said there would be no

swaying him.

"We're the reason he's the way he is. Isn't it bad enough that his own pack is hunting him down? He hasn't done anything wrong!" Micah yelled. He cringed and cocked his ear in fear of hearing the bedroom door open. When there was nothing, he sighed in relief.

"If he's so innocent, then why did he take you in the first place?"

Micah scrambled to think of something. No way could he tell Brenden that Ozzie wanted to acquire a weapon that could wipe out a good portion of the clan in a matter of seconds. That would bring the wrath of the clan and Eric down on Ozzie quicker than anything. "Maybe he was lonely?" Micah suggested, knowing how lame it sounded. He turned, facing the counter so he could open the cupboard to look for a glass.

"You do have a winning personality, but somehow I don't think that's it," Brenden drawled, sounding very much like his usually sarcastic mate.

Micah started to answer, but gasped instead when he felt the hard length of Ozzie's body against his back. Fear spiked through him as he wordlessly opened and closed his mouth several times.

Taking the phone from Micah's limp fingers, Ozzie spoke into it, "Micah has to go now."

Micah could hear Brenden's voice talking frantically, but then phone was slapped closed and slammed down on the counter next to his hand.

Ozzie leaned forward and growled in his ear, "What in the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"I was just calling in to let them know I was okay." Micah cringed when Ozzie slapped his hands on the counter on either side of his, making it so there was no room between their bodies. Ozzie had taken the time to put on a shirt and a pair of jeans, but Micah could still feel every tense muscle pressed against him.

"Are you sure you weren't letting them know where we are?"

"No! I don't even know if we're even in Detroit anymore so how can I tell them where I'm at?"

"Why should I believe you? You've already proven you're a sneaky thief." Thick black claws grew out of the tips of Ozzie's fingers and punched into the countertop.

"I just borrowed your phone because you locked mine up with my other stuff. I would have given it back to you, I swear."

"Before or after you left?"

"I wasn't going to leave." Micah gave a slight shake of his head.

"You're right about that," Ozzie declared before he wrapped his arms around Micah's waist and

started to carry him over to the basement door.

"No! You don't have to do this." Micah began to struggle as full-blown panic made him tremble.

They reached the door and Micah thrust his feet out, bracing them on either side of the door, similar to what a cat does when it doesn't want to be thrown in a tub full of water. Had the situation been different, he would have laughed at the ridiculous pose. Instead, he fought to keep it as Ozzie struggled to get him through. "Don't tie me up down there, please. If you have to restrain me again, cuff me to the bed or something," Micah pleaded as he started to fight even harder.

He managed to wiggle free of Ozzie's steel hard grip. Falling onto the ground in an ungraceful heap, Micah scrambled across the kitchen floor on his hands and knees. A growl was his only warning before Ozzie tackled him, pinning him to the ground.

Ozzie's arm was inches from Micah's face so Micah attacked with the only weapon he had. Hissing, he sank his fangs into Ozzie's forearm. Blood bloomed from the wound and filled Micah's mouth. He moaned in pleasure. Ozzie tasted so rich, warm and full of life. Despite the intense situation, Micah's body responded, his cock swelling to life and pressing against his jeans.

"Fuck," Ozzie moaned as he pulled his arm free.

Now more than just panicked, but terrified because he broke the no-biting rule, Micah tried to crawl away again. He only made it a few feet before Ozzie was on him. Grabbing him by the shoulder, Ozzie flipped Micah over onto his back so they were facing each other.

Micah looked up into Ozzie's wild, almost black-eyed gaze and gasped. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to."

"Do it again!" Ozzie snarled, his own fangs out and ready.

Micah stilled his struggles, shock pounding through his body in time with his heart. "What?"

Ozzie sat back on his heels, taking Micah with him so he was straddling his lap. When he felt Ozzie's thick, hard cock pressing into his ass, he knew that the thrill of the bite had gone both ways. Cupping the back of his head, Ozzie brought Micah in to his neck. "Bite me again."

So Micah did, his fangs sinking into that jugular he'd been eyeing up for so long. It was even better this time as the blood flowed stronger and tasted sweeter. He drank greedily as he ground his cock into Ozzie.

"Wrap your legs around me and hold on," Ozzie ordered.

As soon as Micah complied, Ozzie staggered to his feet. The fact he was able to stand while still holding up Micah's weight showed how much

strength Ozzie possessed. Relief flooded Micah's body when Ozzie headed for the bedroom instead of the basement.

"Your fangs feel so good. I could come just from you sucking me," Ozzie moaned.

Not wanting to take too much, too soon, Micah pulled back and licked the wounds closed. They had reached the bed and Ozzie tossed Micah on it. As soon as he bounced onto the mattress, Micah tilted his head to the side. "Your turn. Feed from me."

With a growl, Ozzie moved in, his body covering Micah's. He groaned a second before he struck, his fangs sinking in. Micah yelled as pain gave way to the most intense pleasure of his life.

He jacked his hips up, desperate to find any relief for the red-hot arousal careening through him. The vampire in him came completely out for the first time ever, his fangs growing larger as snarls ripped from his throat. Claws sprouted from his fingers, too, although his were smaller than Ozzie's. He still made good use of them, clawing at Ozzie's thin t-shirt.

He ripped and tore at the clothing, desperate to feel the heat of Ozzie's skin. "Need you. Got to touch and fuck," Micah panted, not even caring he didn't make sense.

Ozzie licked his bite closed and pulled back. His tore at Micah's clothes with the same ferocity.

They soon had each other nude, although Micah doubted anything would ever be wearable again.

Micah spread his legs out, too jacked up even to play shy. With the frenzy they were both in, he fully expected Ozzie to thrust inside him. Instead, the werewolf grabbed the lube from the nightstand and slicked up his cock.

That was all the prep Micah was willing to take. "Fuck me," he begged, the words coming out slurred because of his fangs.

Ozzie had mercy on him, easing his cock in Micah's tight passage. Once he was all the way in, Ozzie only paused for a second to give Micah time to adjust before he started to fuck him hard and fast.

A low growl was his only warning before Ozzie bit him on the neck again, this time harder, deeper. Micah screamed as pleasure bloomed through his body. The small sane part of him, still lurking deep within his mind, realized that he'd lost total control. He couldn't call the wildness back in. He *didn't* want to. For the first time, he'd given into his vampire side and it felt so damn good – liberating, fulfilling, right.

Ozzie's neck loomed so close, Micah could smell the blood flowing through his thick jugular. It would be too much temptation at a rational moment, let alone when he was in the throes of blood lust and Ozzie fucking him.

"Mine," he snarled in a guttural voice he almost didn't recognize as his own. Baring his fangs, he struck, biting Ozzie hard. As soon as the blood hit his tongue, Micah lost even that last shred of self-control. With a muffled growl, he dug his fangs in deeper.

At the same moment, Micah came, his cock pulsating, then shooting off. Semen covered both his and Ozzie's stomachs in hot waves. Micah still drank, his need to gorge himself on Ozzie's blood unsated. It wasn't until Ozzie came, with a great roar, and licked Micah's bite mark closed, that he was able to stop.

Lapping the wound on Ozzie's neck, Micah winced when he saw how deep and vicious it looked. "Sorry," he said.

Ozzie collapsed beside him on the bed and brought Micah to his chest. "Sorry for biting me so hard or for trying to escape?"

"For biting you. I wasn't trying to leave you earlier." Micah bit back a gasp when Ozzie rolled on top of him and pinned him with a hard glare. There was anger stamped in Ozzie's amber eyes and something else—something that had Micah's heart hammering with anticipation.

"I hope you're telling the truth about not leaving because now that I've claimed you, I'm never going to let you go."

The words held such sincerity, Micah knew he

wasn't kidding. His body numb from shock, Micah gaped up at Ozzie. "Claimed me? What are you talking about?"

Ozzie reached down and lightly fingered up the bite mark on Micah's neck. The one that had brought him such pleasure earlier, but had now settled into a dull ache. Next, Ozzie pointed up to the wound Micah had left behind. "These bite marks aren't going to heal and they're not like the other scars you have either. They're bonding bites and you know what that means."

Micah's gut flipped. Yeah, he was very well aware of what bonding bites were. It was something vampires only did to their mate. It was a way of proclaiming ownership over somebody. By carrying Ozzie's, he was letting every vampire he came across know that Ozzie owned him.

He and Ozzie were irrecoverably tied together forever.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ozzie continued to ignore his ringing cell phone as he moved around the kitchen, preparing a meal for Micah. While he could have just turned the ringer down, he didn't want to miss it if someone important actually did call. Plus, his ringer was *Walk Away from the Sun* by Seether and he really liked that song. It wasn't until he listened to the chorus around fifty times that he finally got annoyed enough to pick up. "Micah can't come to the phone right now because I ate him," he said in an overly cheerful tone.

"For your sake, I hope that's not true," an all-too-familiar voice snapped.

"Dante?" Ozzie pulled the phone away from his ear to give it a confused glance before he realized how dorky that probably looked and put it back to his ear.

"It's nice to hear that you cared enough to remember me."

Dante didn't sound pleased at all. While Ozzie felt bad that an old friend was pissed, another part of him didn't give two flips. "Okay, maybe I did nibble on Micah a little, but I can promise you he really liked it."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that he's mine and I plan on keeping it that way. So you can tell Brenden and your clan to back the fuck off," Ozzie replied in cool, clipped tones.

"Ozzie, where in the hell is your head? You just can't pick up cute vampires off the street and adopt them like a stray kitten. You need to bring him back to the clan before you find all kinds of trouble."

"You can't order me around, Dante. I don't serve you anymore. My family's debt to you Toren brothers was paid in full the day Rafe turned me into a hybrid freak."

"Is that what this all is about? A way for you to fuck us sideways because of what Rafe did?" Dante demanded.

His voice was hard, dangerous and would have scared most others. Not Ozzie. While he knew that Dante might be pissed, they had way too much history for the vampire to get homicidal. At least Ozzie hoped so. While he was pretty sure he could hold his own against Dante, he didn't relish testing that theory in hand-to-hand combat. "No,

believe it or not, I've never really blamed Rafe for what he did."

"Yeah, try telling that to the Ozzie-shaped hole we had in our infirmary window. Call us crazy, but going ape-shit loony and disappearing for over a year, doesn't make me think you still consider us close."

"Sorry I didn't have time to send you a Hallmark, but I've been spending most of my energy on hiding from my pack." Now it was Ozzie who laid out the sarcasm.

"Did you piss them off, too?"

"Yeah, by living. Seems they don't like having any weak members in the pack and they consider me having fangs and a drinking problem, huge ass weaknesses."

"Are you serious?" Dante's voice grew softer, sounding much more like an old friend. "Why didn't you come to us?"

"Since the Drones are taking refuge in Detroit and the werewolves control the city, I didn't want to cause any trouble for Eric and the clan."

"Eric would have protected you, wolves or no wolves. Besides, the clan is much bigger now and we have a coven of magics on our side. The wolves don't dare mess with us anymore."

It was on the tip of Ozzie's tongue to ask, if they had so much muscle, why in the hell were they sitting on their asses while the VRF murdered

at will, but he held back. The Drones was already upset at him for taking Micah, no sense in shoving a stick in the preverbal beehive.

"So, are you going to let Micah go? Or are you going to make us hunt you down?" Dante asked, bringing the topic back to exactly where Ozzie didn't want to go.

"I haven't decided yet," he answered honestly.

"Where is Micah? Can I talk to him?"

"He's in bed, still sleeping." Which is where Ozzie wished he were.

"You don't have him tied up, do you?" Dante demanded sharply.

"Not anymore. Why?" Ozzie's chest grew tight as he remembered the horror in Micah's eyes when the vampire thought he was going to take him back down to the basement.

"Did Micah tell you anything about how he was turned into a vampire?"

"No, we've never gotten around to discussing it."

"Most Drones wouldn't call their transformation to a vampire a pleasant experience, but his was one of the worst I've ever heard." That said a lot since Dante had been around for a while.

"What happened?" Ozzie croaked.

"You'll have to ask him that. It's not my story to tell. I will say, he carries around a lot of hurt still – even more with what happened to his father."

"His father?" Ozzie echoed, feeling stupid.

"Damn, he hasn't told you anything. Have you two been too busy playing to take time out for real conversation?"

"Maybe" Ozzie bit out, pissed that Dante had a point. "Are you at least going to tell me about his dad?"

"No, but since I still care, I will give you your new boy toy's full name. Micah Cooper. Goggle it and you'll get some answers."

"Thanks for the nugget of help. Real big of you."

"Yeah, well remember that ten bucks I owed you? We can call it even now. Do the right thing, Oz, bring Micah back." With those parting words, Dante hung up.

Ozzie stood there, in the middle of his own kitchen, feeling like a reprimanded pup as he continued to hold the phone up to his ear. Since it contained nothing but dead air, he put it on the counter and then slowly replayed the conversation in his head.

Sure, it had been frustrating, odd and annoying, but that was pretty much the norm whenever one had a conversation with Dante. The things that really had Ozzie's head spinning had been the mention of Micah's transformation and his father.

Well, he couldn't find the answer about the

former without directly asking Micah and since he was still sleeping, that left Google. Grabbing his laptop, Ozzie brought it back to the kitchen, then fired it up. While he finished cooking, he searched the internet history of the very sexy vampire sleeping in his bed.

With each link he opened, his sadness grew. Nearly two years ago, Micah had still been human. He had a promising future as a college student and a family who loved him dearly. Everything changed one night when Micah never returned to his dorm. According to the various newspaper articles, he just vanished.

Despite a massive search and investigation, authorities had found no sign of Micah. His family never gave up hope, particularly his father, Adam. The man went to every newspaper, TV station and other media outlets in his fight to find out what happened to his son. That was until a couple of weeks ago when Adam died suddenly from a heart attack. The papers all said the same thing—the real reason he died was from grief. He never got over losing his son.

“Oh, babe,” Ozzie whispered. The number one rule all vampire fledglings are told is they can never contact their old human families. Not only would it be hard to explain away never aging, but it raised the risk of humans finding out about the paranormal world. No one, be they vampire,

zombie or werewolf, wanted to find a pitchfork, torch-holding welcome party at their front door.

Still, for Micah to have known that his family was out there, looking so desperately for him, had to have been hard. He must have wanted to contact them so many times. His father's death probably dealt the last blow.

Ozzie looked back on the night they'd met. When Micah had gone out without backup and purposely taunted those werejackals. Had it truly been to test his new weapon? Or was it a death wish brought on by guilt?

That was one thing Ozzie was determined to find out...and soon. Putting the food on a tray, he abandoned the kitchen and laptop, moving to the bedroom. He nudged the door open, not wanting to startle Micah. As he set the tray down on the nightstand, Ozzie stared at his new mate.

Micah lay on his stomach, the sheet pulled up to his waist. The white covers contrasted nicely with his tan skin. Not pale like one would expect from someone who never saw the sun. How a vampire managed any other pallor, Ozzie didn't know, but Micah somehow had pulled it off. His face was turned toward Ozzie so he could take in the full lips, the rounded cheeks and the slight bit of stubble along the jaw line.

Ozzie also saw the bite mark and the various scratches he'd left behind. They ran all up and

down Micah's muscular back, not that Ozzie wasn't sporting a few of his own. It's just when coupled with the faded scars already marring Micah's flesh, it seemed almost like an added insult.

Since the food was getting cold, Ozzie forced himself to put that worry away. He sat on the edge of the bed and gently shook Micah's shoulder. When Micah awoke with a start, Ozzie held his hands up. "Easy, it's just me."

Micah's wild-eyed gaze scanned the room before it finally locked in on Ozzie and stayed. Slowly, the fear faded to be replaced by embarrassment. "Sorry, I guess I was sleeping pretty hard."

He sat up, wincing several times, adding to Ozzie's guilt as he thought about how rough he'd been earlier. To make up for it some, he twisted around and grabbed the tray. "Here, I made you something to eat." Like a steak and potatoes could make up for him basically attacking Micah like some savage animal.

"Wow." Micah smiled as he stared down at the food. "I haven't had someone bring a tray to my bed since I had the chicken pox in fifth grade. Thanks."

"Yeah, well since it's only the second real meal I've made for you since you got here, it's the least I could do," Ozzie grunted, uncomfortable with the

gratitude.

"It's not like I've been suffering. Not with all the blood I've had," Micah retorted with a sly smile. He grabbed the tray and put it over his lap.

Ozzie waited until Micah's mouth was full before he said, "Dante called to tell me your clan is pretty upset at me for vampire-napping you. They want me to bring you back."

Micah's head snapped up, his eyes wide. "Did you tell them I'm not leaving you?" he asked as soon as he swallowed.

That warmed Ozzie way more than it should have. "I told him that we're pretty much a matched set now."

They still needed to figure out many things. Micah would eventually want to go back to the clan and Ozzie didn't know if that was a step he would ever be ready to take. The thought of living surrounded by so many others made his skin crawl. Irony didn't even begin to describe that situation since he'd grown up in a pack.

Something about his face must have projected his troubled thoughts because Micah set down the silverware as his eyes narrowed in suspicion. "You're not still thinking about getting a Sunlight Grenade and going after the VRF on your own, are you?"

"I don't know," Ozzie replied honestly. "I still think they're a parasite that needs to be taken

out."

"The Drones are working on that. Not just my clan either, but several others from across the country. We're starting to coordinate efforts and pretty soon the VRF is going to regret all the things they've done to us."

"Really?" Ozzie cocked a brow. "Because all I've seen is you guys sticking your heads in the sand and hiding out in Detroit." He expected Micah to explode at him.

Micah picked up his fork and started eating again. "If you don't believe me, then come back to the clan and see for yourself. If you still think that we're just a bunch a big talking cowards after I show you everything, I'll hand you over a Sunlight Grenade myself."

Ozzie ground his teeth together in frustration. Micah was manipulating him and not even bothering to be coy about the fact. Two could play that game. "Fine, I'll go take the nickel tour of the clan, but you have to do something for me first." He had kept his tone casual, but could tell he didn't pull it off by the pinched look on Micah's face.

"You're not going to tie me up again, are you?"

"No, you have my word as your mate, I'll never do that to you again." Ozzie reached over and gently caressed Micah's cheek, the stubble tickling his fingers.

"Then I'll do anything for you." Micah leaned into the touch, a look of pure adoration on his face.

"I want you and me to take a quick visit to your old hometown, Linden."

Micah stiffened as he sucked in a huge breath. "What did Dante tell you?"

"He just gave me your full name and I was able to figure out the rest on my own by going onto the web. There are a ton of articles out there about you." Ozzie playfully tugged on the front of Micah's hair. "Although, going by the pictures, you have changed some. You're old haircut was a lot more..."

"Nerdy," Micah supplied, woodenly.

"I was going to say conservative. But you did look like you'd be more comfortable in a lab than on the football field," Ozzie teased, hoping to get that look of bleak despair of Micah's face. It didn't work.

"I'm still more comfortable in a lab." Micah bit his bottom lip as he pushed the food around the plate.

"Yeah, but now you can also take out two werejackals and smile while doing it."

"Why do you want me to go back to Linden? This is my life now."

"You need to say goodbye. Maybe then, you'll realize it wasn't your fault." Ozzie yearned to

wrap his arms around Micah...to hold him close and soothe away some of the hurt.

"It's forbidden for us to go back to our human families. Eric doesn't enforce that many of the same rules as the VRF, but that's one and it's high on the list. I'm sure you know that."

"We'll just go visit the gravesite. Since it'll be at night, there isn't any chance of us running into anyone."

Micah paused, clearly tempted. "If I do, will you promise to come back to the clan with me?"

"Yes," Ozzie answered quickly, surprised at how swiftly he'd allowed Micah to have his way.

Micah finally nodded. "Okay, when would we go?"

"Just as soon as you're finished eating."

CHAPTER EIGHT

As Micah watched the familiar landscape come into view, he couldn't help but reflect how different he was since he'd been ripped from his home. It wasn't just the different hairstyle or the fact that he was a vampire now. He'd grown and changed in so many ways and not all of it good.

"Are you ever going to tell me about it?" Ozzie said, finally breaking the tense silence.

"What? How it was growing up in a small town?" Micah replied, deliberately misunderstanding.

"Micah, please?"

Micah closed his eyes. The soft, imploring way Ozzie had just asked cut him deeper than any amount of yelling would have.

"I already know there is a huge chunk of time between when you went missing to when you came to live with the clan. What happened in between?" Ozzie pressed.

"I had my whole world turned inside out and found out the hard way that nightmares really are true." While that statement may have been a bit melodramatic and worthy of a B-movie, it really did fit.

"Start with the night you went missing," Ozzie urged.

"I had a job on campus and it ran late. So when I started back for my dorm, everything was pretty deserted. I had just made it to the door of my building when they attacked."

"Vampires?"

"Yeah, I didn't know it at the time that they were a group of Pure Born who'd gone feral and were running from the VRF. Before I could even scream for help, they had me and dragged me to the car. If I had known then what they had planned for me, I would have never let them take me alive." Micah's stomach did a slow flip as he recalled the terror that night—the shock of being bitch-slapped with the knowledge that a whole different world existed. "They took me back to some old house. It had one of those old-fashioned storm cellars in it. That's where they kept me." Micah made air quotes. "*With the other food.*"

"How long did they keep you down there?" Ozzie's gaze glinted with anger.

It didn't upset Micah since he knew it wasn't directed at him. "Best I can figure, nearly a year.

They would come down daily and drink from me. Giving me only enough food and water to stay alive. After a few weeks, I started to pray that they'd kill me." Even now, Micah hated himself for that weakness.

"But they didn't."

"Well, yes and no. While I didn't die outright, one of them did drain me dry, so they could turn me into a vampire. One of the ferals, a female named Widow, decided she wanted to keep me as a pet. She turned me and let me out of the cellar."

"Is that when you escaped?"

"Yes, right before I torched the place while they slept. I still don't feel any remorse over it, so what kind of monster does that make me?" Micah asked, finally voicing one of his biggest concerns.

"You're not a monster at all. You just cleaned the earth of some dangerous predators. It would have only been a matter of time before they captured some other college kid and used them like they did you." Ozzie reached over and lightly touched Micah's cheek.

Micah closed his eyes and savored the warmth of his mate's touch. He loved the way Ozzie was always reaching out to him, to give a gentle caress here or there. Up until then, Micah hadn't realized how much he'd missed affection. "But I didn't kill them to protect others. I did it to get back at them. Hell, Ozzie, I even did a happy dance as I watched

the flames consume the house.”

“Would it make you feel better if I told you I would have done the same thing? That if you hadn’t already killed them, I would have hunted them down myself and rip them apart for what they did to you?”

They entered the downtown area and Ozzie slowed down to twenty-five. As they passed by his old high school, Micah got a lump in his throat. “So you don’t think I’m bad for what I did?”

“Not at all. Now keep telling me your story. How did you end up at Eric’s clan?” Ozzie soothed.

“I was still new to all things vampire, but did know I couldn’t go home. Not with the way I was. Plus, I was fighting the bloodlust and terrified I would attack my family. So I kind of wandered around for a while, living off animal blood, until I stumbled into Detroit. Rafe found me living in the streets, and took me to the clan. Eric accepted me and that’s where I’ve been ever since.”

“Where you ended up building weapons that would make the human military terrified?” Ozzie teased in that way of his that Micah had grown to like.

“Well, I had to put my college education to some use,” Micah joked back, shocked he could

feel this light after some of the things he'd just revealed.

"They teach bomb making in college now? How did I miss that?"

"Of course they do. Right along with poisons and explosives." Micah let out a short laugh. He felt the smile fade from his face as the cemetery came into view.

Ozzie parked and turned to look at him. "You won't be doing this alone. I'm going to be by your side the entire time."

"I don't even know where they have him buried at," Micah confessed brokenly, as he looked at the neat rows of headstones.

"Don't worry, we'll find it," Ozzie assured.

They both got out and walked in silence. It took nearly an hour before they did finally find it in the back corner of the cemetery. Micah stared down at the grave, noting how his father's name was harshly etched into the headstone and it all became so final to him.

Several bundles of fresh flowers showed his mother and sister visited often. Micah couldn't see his brother, Toby, leaving behind roses. He noticed some of the arrangements knocked to their sides and got down on his knees to fix them. After he had them just right, he raised shaking fingers to trace his father's name. "I'm so sorry," he whispered. "If I could have, I would have let you

know I was okay."

Micah sat there for several long moments as he said a silent goodbye. He was just getting to his feet when he realized they weren't alone anymore. "Ozzie, are you sensing someone else is here?"

"Yes." Ozzie cursed under his breath. "I'm sorry, I should have picked up on it sooner, but graveyards play havoc with my nose."

A soft gasp sounded behind him and Micah turned around to find himself face-to-face with his sister. *Shit! Not good. Not good at all.*

She wore the same waitressing uniform that she had when he still lived at home, although her dark hair appeared longer. She brought her hand to her chest as tears welled up in her eyes. "Micah?"

Since he had nothing better to say because his brain was busy thinking of possible escape plans, he just went with it. He ducked his head slightly to hide his fangs and said, "Sidney."

"You're alive." She took a couple hesitant steps forward before she stopped and studied him.

"Yes, I am." Well, pretty much so. It wasn't like he could go into all the details with her and even if he could, he would never traumatize her like that.

"What happened? Where have you been?" she demanded as tears fell down her cheeks. Each one brought another pang of guilt.

"I really can't go into specifics. I swear, if I could have, I would have let you guys know I was

okay.”

“Oh, Micah, that doesn’t even matter to me right now. All I care about it is that you’re here now.” She ran the rest of the way and threw her arms around him.

Micah returned the embrace. The familiar smell of her perfume, overlaid with the scent of fried foods, oddly comforted him. It was Sidney. It was home. “I missed you,” he confessed as he kissed the top of her head.

She pulled back, her eyes wide with excitement. “You have to come back to the house. Everyone’s there and they’ll be so happy to see you.”

Micah shot a panicked look at Ozzie. Speaking to Sidney was already bad enough, but actually going home would only be making things worse.

Ozzie gave a slight shrug, as if to say *up to you*.

The trouble was, Micah didn’t see a way out of it, short of knocking Sidney unconscious and making a bolt for the car. She had an iron grip on Micah’s arm and it didn’t look like she was letting go any time soon. “I’m sure we can stop by for a small visit,” Micah agreed. He just hoped his mother didn’t pick up on all the differences in him. As it was, he already had enough to explain.

Micah gave an internal shake of his head. He’d never be able to pull this off. His mom would take one look at him and know something was up. As much as it would break Sidney’s heart, he would

have to find a way out. "Why don't Ozzie and I just meet you at the house?" Micah gave what he hoped was an innocent smile.

Sidney barely glanced Ozzie's way. "No, I think it would be better if you drove with me so we could catch up on things. You're friend can follow us."

Before Micah could even think of an argument for that arrangement, Sidney tugged him by the arm and led him to the parking lot. Micah couldn't have been certain, but he'd bet his Glock that he heard Ozzie snicker.

"So who is he really?" Sidney asked in a sly tone as she shot a glance at Ozzie over her shoulder.

"He's someone who means a lot to me," Micah confessed. Maybe if he came out to his whole family, they'd be so distracted with the fact that he was gay that they wouldn't notice the fangs and sudden sun phobia. Of course, given his luck, Sidney would just take it in stride.

"I can tell he really cares about you, too. Just tell me he's not the reason you left."

"No, actually he was the one who convinced me to come tonight."

"Then I love him already," Sidney declared with a nod.

"What were you doing out there so late?" Micah demanded. Linden was small, but that

didn't mean it didn't have its fair share of creatures who loved to prowl around cemeteries.

"I often visit Dad's grave on the way home," Sidney replied.

She had no clue that the area was teeming with ghouls and at least one zombie by Micah's guess. None of these were things he'd picked up as a human. Now that he was a vampire, his internal warning bells were going off. He was relieved when they reached the parking lot. Micah spotted her old, battered red pickup parked next to Ozzie's Mustang and smiled as nostalgia hit him. "I can't believe this ancient thing is still running." Micah laughed as he ran his hand over the hood.

"Dad was a great mechanic," Sidney replied.

"Yeah, he was," Micah agreed as he got in.

On the short drive home, Micah managed to keep the subject off him, by asking Sidney to update him on all the town gossip. While she obliged him, the shrewd look she shot him let him know that he hadn't fooled her for one moment.

As they pulled into the drive, his heart lurched at the sight of his childhood home. Nothing had changed. Several acres of field and trees still surrounded the house. Dad's huge pole barn still stood a few feet from the house, still painted that same god awful red. Climbing out of the truck, Micah looked up at the modest home he grew up in as he allowed the doubts to take over. What if

his mother blamed him for everything? What if she wasn't as happy to see him as Sidney had been? Most of all, how in the hell was he going to explain what had happened?

"Don't worry, we'll navigate through this together," Ozzie said as he came up behind Micah and put a hand on his shoulder.

The front door opened and his mother stood there, illuminated from the inside lights. She had a welcoming smile on her face that faded as soon as her gaze locked on him. Micah's stomach dropped, sure that he'd been right and she did hate him.

She silently mouthed his name as she stumbled down the steps of the white painted porch.

He found himself pulling away from Ozzie so he could meet her halfway across the yard.

"Micah! My Micah!" she finally cried.

So many times as a kid, he'd run to her, thrown himself in her arms and allowed himself to be comforted. This time, the situation was reversed as it was he who caught her. Holding her tight, he whispered, "I'm so sorry, Ma."

* * * *

While his pack had always eaten meals together, Ozzie had never sat down to a true family dinner until that night.

After the emotional reunion, Micah's mother had whisked them in and before Ozzie knew what was happening, he was sitting at a cramped dinner table between Micah and his brother. Toby looked a lot like an older version of Micah, with the same dark hair. Toby was a lot more muscular than Micah was. At least, Micah before he'd been transformed into a vampire.

Under normal circumstances, Ozzie might have liked Toby. After all, he didn't seem bad for a human. The thing about ol'Toby was that while Sidney and Mom were willing to let things be, he wanted details.

"You've really filled out," Toby observed as he eyed Micah up.

"I've been eating my veggies," Micah replied before he took a drink of milk.

"And where exactly have you been all this time?" Toby pressed.

A brief look of panic passed over Micah's face before he blurted, "A cult."

Ozzie choked on a piece of chicken. Sidney saved him when she slugged him on the back. "Thanks," he muttered as he shot Micah a disbelieving glance. *A cult?* Was that the best he could come up with? It sounded like a plot gone wrong from the Lifetime network. It could have been worse, Ozzie mused. At least he hadn't claimed to have run away with the circus.

"This cult didn't have a phone so you could call your family and let them know you were okay?" Toby glared.

"No, it was one of those live-off-the-earth-and-give-up-all-modern-comforts kind of cults," Micah returned as he averted his eyes to the side.

Ozzie groaned. Micah was such a bad liar he may as well held up an I'm-fibbing sign.

"We don't need to know everything tonight," Mom soothed.

And Ozzie did think of her as Mom since the first thing she told him was to call her that.

"So you're just going to let him walk in, after nearly a year, and not even tell us what happened? Let's not even mention the fact he's brought some strange guy with him and they both look like fighters from a back alley boxing match gone wrong," Toby seethed.

Ozzie looked down at himself and realized Toby did have a point. They both healed fast, but he and Micah were still sporting some bumps and bruises from earlier. To add to it, both of them were dressed pretty scruffy, by human standards. While ripped jeans and ratty hoodies might be okay in pack life, it obviously didn't cut it in Linden. To make matters worse, Micah's clothes were even baggier since he'd had to borrow some of Ozzie's clothes.

Micah let out a low hiss as his body grew tense.

"That strange man is very important to me, so I would advise you not to talk about him that way."

He ducked his head, but not before Ozzie caught a hint of fangs. Putting a hand on Micah's arm to restrain him, Ozzie butted in, "You'll have to excuse him. He sometimes gets very overprotective of me and we've had a rough couple of days."

"Yeah, well we've have a rough couple of years. First, with the searches, then passing out flyers and having to deal with the police. All the while, Sidney and I have been trying to keep Mom and Dad's hopes up. Then we find out that all this time Micah's been alive and was just too selfish to contact us. Mom may be ready to forgive. I'm not." Toby got up and stormed out.

A door slamming from upstairs shot through the house.

They all sat in silence for several seconds before Sidney finally broke it by declaring, "Don't let him get to you, Micah. He's just taken everything really hard."

"I should leave. It was a huge mistake ever coming home. You guys were just putting everything back together and I messed it up again."

Micah still kept his head down and for that, Ozzie was glad. He could sense the aggression coming off Micah and that would mean his fangs

were still fully out.

"No, please don't leave," Mom pleaded desperately.

It tugged at Ozzie's chest. His own mother wouldn't give two shits if he died and he would have given anything to have her show one ounce of the same love. Even though he knew it would be stupid and reckless to linger, Ozzie found he didn't have it in him to break this poor woman's heart yet again. "We can stay a couple days," Ozzie butted in again because he knew that, while Micah wanted the same thing, his sense of honor to the clan would never let him speak up.

"Thank you," she replied, tears coming to her eyes.

"Ozzie stays with me," Micah added, almost as if he were daring her to protest the fact that he was in a relationship with a man. When she didn't, some of the tension drained from the room.

"That is if it's not too much trouble, ma'am," Ozzie amended, trying to cover for Micah's harsh attitude.

"Nah, we have Micah's old room still clean and everything," Sidney said before she flashed a wicked grin. "Although it's going to be a tight fit for both of you on his itty, bitty double bed. At least we got rid of his GI Joe sheets." She dissolved into giggles, clearly pleased with her joke.

Soon Micah joined her and they were both

laughing so hard they doubled over with gasps of mirth. Ozzie smiled. Not only had Micah's fangs receded, so had his anger. Frankly, Ozzie couldn't wait to test the double bed out, GI Joe sheets or not.

CHAPTER NINE

Micah woke up to the wonderful sensation of Ozzie nuzzling his neck. He opened his eyes, but didn't stir, not wanting it to end.

"You need to get up and moving around. Your family is starting to wonder why you've been sleeping the day away," Ozzie said between love bites.

"Is the sun still up?" Micah shifted some and winced. Sidney had been right about one thing, it had been a bitch to fit both he and Ozzie in the small bed.

"Yes, it's only two."

Micah groaned. "What's the use of waking up when I can't even leave the room? If even a tiny bit of sun gets through the windows and hits me, I'm toast."

"Your mom covered all of them because I told her I was allergic to the sun."

Micah chuckled as he turned on his back.

"You're lucky she doesn't read much. I think that's the excuse every fiction vampire has used."

"Really?" Ozzie gave a lopsided grin that shot straight to Micah's cock. "I thought I was being original."

"Babe, you're great at a lot of things. Coming up with passable lies isn't one of them."

Ozzie gave a mock look of shock. "Oh, say it isn't so? This, coming from the guy who's been living with a make believe cult for the past two years."

Micah winced. "Okay, maybe I did choke a bit on that one."

"Yeah, I'll say you did. My five-year old niece could have come up with a better story."

Micah reached up and played with Ozzie's hair, noting it was wet. "You took a shower?"

"Yeah, I would have woke you up and asked you to join me, but I didn't think you would want to shock you mother *too* much in the first twenty-four hours."

"I guess not," Micah agreed. He still hadn't gotten over how easy she accepted the fact that he was in love with another man. Micah paused, shocked at that thought. Did he love Ozzie? Was this more than just blood lust and the need to claim a mate? It only took him a moment of inner reflection to realize the answer to that was, *yes he did love Ozzie*—more than anything. "I should

probably wash up before I go downstairs," Micah said gruffly as he pulled his hand back. He got up and rummaged through his old clothes, hoping they still fit him.

"Toby brought us some pants and t-shirts while you were sleeping," Ozzie informed.

Micah noticed for the first time that Ozzie was wearing a Linden High tee. "Really? I thought he would be too pissed to do that."

"Maybe he's trying to make up for being such an ass last night," Ozzie said with a shrug.

Whatever the reason, Micah took the offered clothing, not being stubborn enough to try to squeeze into his old stuff, just for spite. He showered and brushed his teeth quickly and went back to the room.

When he walked in, he found Ozzie sitting on the end of the bed. "Come in and shut the door."

Micah obeyed, knowing by the sensual tone in his mate's voice that all kinds of good things were about to happen. "Do you really want to test out how much activity my bed can handle?"

"Be good. Your family's just downstairs."

"Then why the closed door?" Micah had to work hard to hide his disappointment.

"You need to feed." Ozzie crooked a finger at him.

Micah immediately obeyed the beckoning, walking over until he was standing between

Ozzie's legs. "That's probably a bit risky to do, now," Micah hedged even as his fangs dropped.

"It would be worse if you start showing signs of blood thirst." Ozzie eased back, taking Micah with him so they both ended up stretched over the bed.

Micah found himself on top of Ozzie and he reveled in the sensation of having that hard body pinned and at his mercy. His cock throbbed in need and Micah couldn't defy the urge to rub it against Ozzie's hip to get some relief. "Fuck, how can I resist when you make it so tempting?" Micah asked before he dipped his head down to lick Ozzie's neck, the flesh warm and smooth against his tongue.

"Just make sure you do it low enough for this shirt to hide it," Ozzie said before he tilted his head further to the side. "While our binding marks may show, they've healed enough not to be that obvious to a human eye. If we go down with fresh wounds, that's bound to attract attention."

Micah licked his lips in anticipation as he lowered the collar of Ozzie's shirt. Already too worked up to waste time playing around, Micah struck fast, sinking his fangs into Ozzie's shoulder. He could have stayed that way for hours and enjoyed the rush of drinking from Ozzie, but Micah only took a few swallows before he forced himself to seal the wound and pull back. While his thirst had been sated, his cock still ached with

need. Letting out a groan, he rubbed it against Ozzie again. Maybe if he did it enough times, his mate would get the hint and do something to ease it.

"Sorry, with as loud as you yell, we can't fuck right now." Ozzie's hand reached around and cupped Micah's ass, the hold impeding his thrusts.

Micah moaned in frustration. "I'm dying here."

"I'm pretty sure nobody's ever died from a case of blue balls." Ozzie chuckled as he caressed the curve of Micah's ass.

"You know what I mean." Micah jerked forward again, nearly crying out in happiness when Ozzie allowed it this time. Hot lashes of pleasure shot up his spine as his cock ground against Ozzie. "You know, I think I like this position. It's nice having you at my mercy for once."

With a growl, Ozzie flipped them over.

Micah gasped as he found himself on the bottom. How Ozzie managed to pull that off without them falling off the narrow mattress was a mystery. He leaned down so his mouth was just inches above Micah's ear.

"Let's both face it. You like it much better when I'm the one in control."

Micah couldn't argue that. Despite their shaky beginnings, he yearned to be at Ozzie's mercy. To be helpless against whatever pleasure he may be

introducing next. If Ozzie had brought out those ropes at that moment, Micah would have begged for several cords to be wrapped around him. "Yes," he confessed, raggedly. "I love it when you tie me up. When I'm at your mercy. It's different with you because I love you."

They both stiffened as his last words hung heavily in the air. The desire drained from Micah's body as horror took its place. Ozzie probably thought Micah was totally off his rocker to be declaring his love after they'd only known each other a few days. Micah would be lucky if the guy didn't get up, leave and never look back. Being mates was one thing, falling in love was so human and usually not a word their kind threw around.

"I love you, too," Ozzie whispered in an awed voice, almost as if he'd just realized it himself.

Micah had all kinds of things he could have said, but in the past few days, he'd had enough angst, after-school moments to last an immortal lifetime. Instead, he turned his head to the side, giving Ozzie his neck in a show of submission. Micah knew this gesture would please both the vampire and wolf in his mate.

"So fucking beautiful," Ozzie growled right before he sank his fangs in.

Micah bit the inside of his cheek to keep from crying out in pleasure. Like him, Ozzie had chosen a low spot. Micah's bonding bite still throbbed in

time with Ozzie's pulls. Micah plunged his fingers through Ozzie's dark hair and held him close, never wanting the feeding to end.

He did try to thrust up again, his heels slipping on the mattress in his desperate attempt to find purchase. When he felt his zipper sliding down, Micah let out a gasp of pure happiness. Once Ozzie had Micah's pants open, he reached in and pulled out his cock. "I thought you said no sex," Micah panted.

Ozzie sealed the wound shut before he pulled his mouth away. "I never said anything about us taking the edge off."

He gave a slight love bite before he started to slowly stroke the shaft of Micah's cock. Micah let out a hiss of pleasure. Meanwhile, his dick was probably singing the *Halleluiah* chorus out of relief.

Micah was so worked up, it only took a few passes of Ozzie's hand and he finally came. His cock jerked before releasing into Ozzie's tight grip. It took Micah a few minutes to catch his breath, but Ozzie didn't seem to mind as he continued to kiss and suck on Micah's neck. Micah began to apologize for making a mess when Ozzie brought his own hand to his mouth and slowly licked it clean, his heated gaze never leaving Micah's eyes.

Micah reached up, grabbing Ozzie by the sides of his face so he could bring him down for a kiss.

"I think that will get me by for a little while. What about you?"

Ozzie pulled back and then rolled off the bed. "I'm more than fine, don't worry." Holding a hand out to Micah, he pulled him up to his feet. Once Micah was standing, Ozzie wrapped his arm around his waist. "You can make it up to me later."

"I can't wait." Micah reached down to cup Ozzie's cock lightly.

"Now let's go before your sister comes up here looking for you. The last thing we need is to give her an education."

The rest of the day passed by so easily that Micah almost forgot who he really was or the fact that he and Ozzie were both probably being hunted. That lack in judgment came crashing down when there was a knock on the door as they all sat down to dinner.

"I think we better get that," Ozzie told Micah sharply. Something about the dark look that'd come across Ozzie's face let him know they were about to be dealing with a whole lot of trouble.

They both got up and Micah opened the door to find a smirking Dante standing on the porch. As usual, the dark-haired vampire had a huge cocky grin on his face that did nothing to hide the whole dangerous vibe he always threw off. Micah found

himself struck stupid as he thought of how he was possibly going to talk his way out of this.

"You are in so much trouble," Dante informed him in a gleeful way one schoolmate would goad another.

Micah looked past Dante and saw several of the black vehicles the Drone soldiers used. As he watched, the doors opened and, what had to be at least two dozen magics and vampires, got out. "No, you can't be doing this," Micah nearly yelled as horror made him forget Dante pretty much always did what he wanted to.

"He's right," Ozzie added. "We'll make an excuse and leave with you right now. There's no reason to bring his family into this."

"It's too late for that," a voice drifted up from the yard.

Looking over Dante's shoulder, Micah saw his team leader, Brenden.

He walked up the steps of the porch and stood next to Dante. As usual, Brenden was the poster child for cool and collective, from his perfectly styled blond hair to his soft-spoken manner.

"No, it's not. They haven't seen you guys yet. Just give me five minutes and I'll leave with you and go face any punishment Eric wants to dole out," Micah begged. At this point, he'd do anything to shield his family. Not that he thought any of the magics or his clan members would ever

harm them. He didn't want to have to deal with a whole new set of questions that he couldn't answer.

"We're not the only ones who know where you are," Brenden informed him as he reached out and put a comforting hand on Micah's shoulder.

Micah forgot to breathe as the whole bottom of his world came out from under him. By visiting his family's home, he'd brought the worst of his kind to his mother's doorstep. "Who or what is it that's coming?" he asked woodenly.

"We're not for sure since the magics can't really get a feel for them. All we do know is the VRF sent them and whoever it is, it's not good," Dante said grimly.

"I was such a selfish jerk for coming back," Micah breathed.

"No you weren't. I convinced you to do it in the first place." Ozzie put an arm around Micah's shoulders and brought him in for a half-hug.

"And I could have easily refused. We both know that."

"Look, as much as I love watching you two beat yourselves up like this, we really need to get the house fortified." Dante brushed past Micah and barged inside. Dante paused long enough to give Ozzie a speculative look. "Nice haircut, by the way. Last time we saw each other, you had the whole hippie look down pat."

"Yeah well, new look, new life," Ozzie replied absently.

"Can't we evacuate my family to somewhere safe?" Micah asked Brenden.

"Ethan doesn't feel there's time. They think whatever it is will attack any minute now," Brenden informed him, referring to the leader of the magics. "As much as I'd thought I'd never be giving this order, you need to go in and tell your family the whole truth."

"Are you kidding me?" Micah exploded. "Not only won't they believe me, but Eric would nail my ass to the wall."

"Little memo for you—Eric already wants your ass so there is no way you can get in any more trouble than you already are. Plus, he was the one who issued the order for you to come clean in the first place."

"How am I supposed to tell them something this big?"

"I don't know." Brenden shrugged. "But you might want to figure something out pretty quickly since Dante's already been in there for a minute now and if I know anything about my mate, it's that he's not subtle."

"Shit!" Micah spun around and raced to the dining room. Dante had taken the seat he'd vacated and was filling a plate as he jabbered away, a mile a minute.

"So which one of you taught Micah his colorful vocabulary? I've never met anyone who could mix five dollar words with swearing like him."

"Dante," Micah seethed as he gestured him to come over. Of course, the vampire ignored it.

"I'm serious, dude. Just the other day you called me a *fucking proletarian who wouldn't know his dick from a torque wrench*." Dante swept a can-you-believe-it look across the table. "Which by the way is so unfair. Because I would."

Sidney let out a giggle.

Toby was just staring in slack-jawed astonishment.

Strangely enough, Micah's mom seemed to be charmed right out of her *Sketchers*. She even beamed at Dante. "So were you in the cult with Micah?"

Dante paused before he shot a smirk Micah's way. "You did not actually go with the cult excuse?"

"Shut up, Dante," Micah bit out between clenched teeth. Now he realized why the guy's own brothers were always going for his throat.

"Sorry, it's just lame. I would have had more respect for you if you'd used the *run away with the circus* story instead."

Ozzie had come up to stand behind Micah and he coughed something that sounded suspiciously like, "Told you so."

Micah tossed a dirty look over his shoulder.

"Oh, Micah, relax." Sidney rolled her eyes. "Like we actually believed that pile of crap you laid on anyway. We just acted like we did so you didn't freak out and leave again."

"I don't freak out," Micah defended. Everyone in the room gave him identical looks of disbelief.

Micah's mom half got out of her chair to peer out the dining room window. "Micah, why are there a pair of leather-wearing men sprinkling salt all over my lawn."

Micah groaned when he looked and saw a set of warlock twins, named Kale and Blaine, circling the property with sea salt. While Micah realized it was as a precaution to keep certain types of creatures out, there was no way he could explain that to her.

Or was there?

Micah realized he couldn't continue to keep the horrible truth from his family. Not when the house was about to be taken over by a Drone Soldier team. Even if he could explain away Dante, there was no way he could hide several heavily armed vampires and warlocks. "They're putting up a shield to keep out kubolds and revenants." He sighed.

"Don't forget vampire slugs. Those things can be nasty buggers, just ask Rafe," Dante pointed out helpfully.

"Why don't you sit down and tell us the truth this time?" Toby suggested with a lot more calm than he'd displayed the night before.

So Micah did. It took him several attempts, but after five minutes, he'd managed to get out a very watered down version of his attack and transformation. By the time he was done, they all had looks of horror on their faces.

"So you expect us to believe you're a vampire?" Toby finally demanded.

"Yeah, I do." Micah briefly considered flashing his fangs to prove his point. He resisted because he didn't want to shock his mother any more than he already had.

"And he's a vampire, as well?" Toby pointed at Ozzie.

"Of course not, don't be ridiculous," Dante scoffed. "Ozzie is half-vampire and half-werewolf."

"Oh, how stupid of me for not realizing that," Toby replied sarcastically.

Brenden poked his head in the room. "Not to rush things along, but I need to let the rest of the team in so they can set up. Are we good to go?"

Micah nodded. "Yeah, I think so."

Brenden smiled. "Good, I brought your gear, so go get suited up."

CHAPTER TEN

It should have felt odd to be wearing his black Drone uniform in his childhood home, but strangely enough, it felt comforting. Micah strapped on his sais and turned around to admire Ozzie. "I'm really glad Brenden thought to bring you a uniform. It looks good on you," Micah said as he took in his mate. The standard issue of black cargo pants, Kevlar vest and long sleeved tee had never appeared sexier.

"I'll admit, I never thought I'd be putting one of these on." Ozzie looked down at himself.

"So, does that mean you'd consider wearing one permanently?" Micah asked, trying to sound casual.

Ozzie came up and cupped Micah's chin. "If you want, then yes. Where you go, I go. I meant it when I said I love you."

"I love you, too," Micah said before he went in for a brief kiss.

"Now let's go finish this so we can get on with our lives." Ozzie tugged his hand and pulled him out in the hall.

They both pulled up short when they saw Toby there waiting for them. He was leaning against a wall, his hands in his pockets. Micah couldn't tell whether or not his brother was there for a confrontation or if he wanted to make peace.

"Let me see them," Toby ordered.

Micah exchanged looks with Ozzie before he shrugged and opened his mouth for his brother.

Toby stepped closer and peered inside. "You really do have fangs. They're not that big."

Micah let them drop to their full length, making Toby jump back with a muttered curse.

"They grow when we get ready to feed or fight," Ozzie explained with an unconcealed grin.

"How come we didn't notice them before? Even when they're not all huge, they still look different than normal teeth." Toby reached out to touch one before he must have thought better of it and jerked his hand back.

"One of the first things fledglings learn is how to keep their faces lowered when around humans," Micah said as he pulled his fangs back in. The relief on Toby's face said he appreciated the gesture.

"Oh, those fuckers did not send a herd of tikbalang!" one of the warlocks yelled from

downstairs.

"A what?" Toby's brow creased in confusion.

"You don't want to know," Ozzie said grimly.

"Wow, there are a ton of them!" another warlock added.

"Of course there are. Why do you think they call them a herd?" Dante quipped.

"That's our cue," Micah said as he started down the stairs.

Toby reached out and grabbed his arm to stop him. "What can I do to help?"

"Stay with Mom and Sidney and keep out of the way," Micah answered, being brutally honest. "These things are nasty and even the strongest human couldn't take them on."

"But you can?" Toby sputtered. "The closest you ever got to battle was when you played *Dungeons and Dragons*."

"Don't worry about me. I've had some training since I joined up with the clan." Not waiting to hear the next condescending comment, Micah rushed down the stairs, Ozzie following. He shook his head in amazement when he saw the transformation that had taken place in the living room.

The lights were all off, the place almost pitch dark. His Drone team was there with four magics. They had pushed all the furniture to the side to make room for the equipment. The couch was on

its side, Sidney and his mother huddled behind it. Micah sighed in relief when he saw Cherish guarding them.

Cherish may be a vampire, however she looked more at home behind her computers and books. Not much taller than Sydney, Cherish had a riot of dark, curly hair that she always kept tucked up under one of her numerous hats. Today it was a black beret to match her uniform.

"Hey, troublemaker." She smiled at Micah as he approached.

"What's the situation?" he asked. In his experience, aside from Brenden, she was always the best one to go to for information. The others all had the tendency to babble on forever.

"You heard Blaine, they just spotted some tikbalangs approaching." She shook her head in disgust.

"What are tikbalangs?" Sidney called up in a small voice.

"They're creatures that in the natural form are half-horse, half-man," Micah told her, glad he'd read up on all the research material Cherish had suggested when he first joined the team.

"Gold star for you." Cherish beamed like a proud schoolteacher.

"So, they're like centaurs?" Sidney's brow crinkled in confusion.

"Not exactly." Cherish wrinkled her pert nose.

"Tikbalang have the body of a man and the head of a horse."

"Ewh! Gross!" Sidney exclaimed.

"Just wait. Dante's not going to be able to resist making a comment on this," Ozzie whispered in Micah's ear.

"I am so going to go all *Godfather* on those ponies' asses. They're all going to wake up to find their heads in some producer's bed," Dante yelled through one of the open windows.

Micah had to bite back a laugh as he lightly elbowed Ozzie. He glanced back over to see Cherish studying them. "Something wrong?" Micah asked, feeling like one of her specimens.

"Who would have thought quiet, sweet Micah would fall for the big, bad wolf?" She gave an impish grin as she reached out and tweaked his nose.

"Knock it off." Micah gave her a mock scowl.

"Seriously, you guys look right together."

Brenden came rushing over. "Okay, everyone is in position. The plan is to eliminate the enemy, then evacuate your family."

"Then what?" Micah swallowed hard as he looked over at his mother and siblings. "They won't be safe now that the VRF is aware they know about us." Only a few select humans were deemed worthy by the Pure Borns to live with that knowledge. All the others were quickly liquidated.

Micah didn't say that part aloud.

"Eric says to bring them back with us. He'll find a place for everyone and give them the protection of the clan." Brenden nodded respectively at Sidney and Micah's mother.

Micah's knees grew weak with gratitude. "Thank you."

"Thank Eric when you see him."

"I will, but I know the main reason he agreed to this was because you went to him and pleaded my case," Micah replied without hesitation. One of the reasons why Brenden had the respect of his team was because of the countless times he'd gone up to bat for them.

"Yeah, well I didn't want to lose one of my best weapons makers," Brenden said gruffly before he walked back over to one of the windows.

"Can I ask an obvious question?" Toby started to come over and nearly tripped over something in the dark.

Micah reached out and caught him before he did a face plant into the wall. "Of course you can," Micah said as he steadied his brother.

"Why are we just sitting in the house, waiting for them to attack? You and your friends should have got Mom and Sidney out of here immediately."

"Damage control, you idiot," Blaine butted in, his face twisted in disgust.

Micah shot him a warning look. In the past, he'd never been one to get into scuffles and fights just to prove his dick was bigger, instead using his humor as a weapon. Right then he wouldn't have minded taking a swing at the warlock. Especially when Toby's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"What does he mean by that?" Toby nearly snarled at Micah.

"It means that strategy-wise, it's better to face the enemy here rather than out on the road where other humans can become involved. This house is isolated enough, that we should be able to contain it without attracting attention," Micah admitted.

"Humans?" Toby's face twisted in disgust. "God, you sound just like *them*." He waved his hands around the room.

Micah had no doubt who he was referring to. "I am one of them, Toby," Micah said, gently.

"No, you're not. You're not mean and vicious like them. Why don't you just grab Sidney and Mom and we can get in the car and leave?" Toby's gaze grew earnest as he gripped Micah by the shoulders.

Micah thought back to all the times Toby had beat up bullies for him. How he'd stood up for his wimpy, nerdy younger brother who had more brains than common sense. It only made sense that he would still want to play the protective role. "I'm not the same anymore. You want to know

what I did to those vampires who captured me? I killed them—burned them alive in their shit hole of a home. They're not the only kills I have under my belt either. All of them have been to protect the clan and save innocents, but I'm not the naïve kid who needs his big brother to watch out for him."

Toby gave a slight shake of his head. "Don't you understand? I'll always want to protect you. Even if you were the biggest, nastiest vampire in the world, you'll still be that same kid brother that used to come to my room when he had nightmares."

"Give him a gun and let him fight," the ever-so-helpful Dante suggested. "If things get froggy, I'll shield his fragile human ass."

"Fine." Micah ran his hand through his hair in frustration. "Mom and Sidney still have to stay behind the couch though."

"Does the human know how to fire a gun?" Jeremy asked as he dubiously handed over a rifle.

"Yeah, I used to go hunting with my dad," Toby grunted as he took the weapon.

"So did Nolan. That didn't stop him from almost shooting my foot off on our mission together." Jeremy shot said vampire a dirty look.

"I apologized for that! Hold a grudge much?" Nolan yelled from his position.

"Well you did laugh after it happened, so what

do you expect?" Cherish said with a soft giggle.

"He squealed like a little girl! How could I *not* laugh?" Nolan defended.

"It was kind of funny," Micah agreed before he turned his attention back to Toby. "Don't mind them. After a while you get used to all the smartass comments." Kneeling down by Sidney and his mother, Micah said, "You guys stay here and don't move until Cherish tells you to. Even if you see me get hurt."

Mom nodded. "Be careful, please."

"They're coming," Nolan yelled, right before a hail of gunfire hit the house. Micah threw his body over Sidney and his mother, trying to cover them as much as possible while the loud retorts and sounds of breaking glass rang through the air. Once there was a lull, he straightened and quickly looked them over for injuries, finding none.

"Oh, they're not wearing their horsie heads," Nolan observed, his voice heavy with disappointment.

"Tikbalang can take any form they want," Cherish said, as usual being an endless resource of all things paranormal.

After giving Mom's hand one last reassuring squeeze, Micah darted to one of the windows to see for himself. A couple dozen, of what appeared to be tall men, were scattered across the yard. Some were hiding behind the cars, while others

took cover behind trees.

"Dante said it was other vampires that wanted you guys dead, so why send these guys?" Toby asked as he rested the barrel of his rifle on the window.

"Because if this goes south, the Pure Borns don't want to take the blame," Micah explained. "They always contract out their dirtier work."

"I still don't get why the Pure Borns hate your clan so much. You didn't ask to become a vampire, you were forced into it," Toby pointed out, his outrage clear.

"They don't care, they consider us inferior because we were once human." Micah shrugged before he returned his attention to the attackers. Nolan had been right. They all did look like ordinary men...except for one thing. Micah squinted, but didn't need to with his vampire vision. He just couldn't believe what his eyes were seeing. "Are they all wearing jumpers?"

"Yes, and not even dark manly ones, but all bright neon colors." Dante snorted as he shot out the window, taking down one decked in a glaring blue. "I'm going to kill them, just for having bad fashion sense. They look like a B-movie parody of a street gang. All that are missing are the roller skates."

Dante's one kill came at a price, as another volley of shots came their way.

Micah grabbed Toby and pulled him down just before the wall by the window splintered as a bullet hit it.

Once it went silent again, Ozzie shook some glass from his hair, the motion almost canine like. "Why would tikbalangs be wearing bright colors? Last I heard they were all about blending into the background."

"I don't know," Micah shrugged. "Maybe this group is starting their own eighties break dancing crew."

"More than likely, they didn't take their usual precautions because they didn't think we'd be here to help you out. They no doubt expected just to have to deal with you, Ozzie and a family of humans," Brenden ventured.

"Why do I get the feeling that humans are on the bottom of the food chain?" Toby swallowed hard.

"Because you are," Ozzie informed grimly. "If they had thought it was just you humans in here, they would have only sent one attacker in."

"Are you guys ready to finish this?" Brenden asked the group.

Everyone readied their guns and, at Brenden's order, fired.

The air inside and out soon became rich with gunfire as both sides became engaged in a battle that would have made the OK gunfight, look like

a day at the kiddie park.

While Micah liked to think he was a good shot, the tikbalangs were proving to be hard to kill. Not only were they good at taking cover, but the bastards had the ability to briefly become invisible. Time and again, he would find a mark only to have it vanish before he could fire. Judging by the more than usual curses going on around him, he wasn't the only one having the problem.

The tikbalangs were gaining ground, reappearing closer to the house each time.

Micah shot a worried glance back at his sister and mother and realized the last thing he could allow was this to become a close hand-to-hand battle. There was too much of a risk of one of them getting hurt in the crossfire. "We need to take them out before they breach the interior," he said to Brenden.

"I have an idea," Blaine interjected. "Me and the other warlocks could combine our magic and cover the yard with blue fire."

Micah hesitated, "Won't that call the attention of the human authorities?"

"We can cover it if we torch the home as we leave. They'll just assume all the flash and bang was from a normal house fire." Blaine shot an apologetic look over to Micah's mother.

"Do it," she said in a strong voice.

"Are you sure, Ma?" Micah felt compelled to

ask. "You and Dad built this place and it's been your home for nearly thirty years."

"None of that will matter if I lose my children." She looked over to Blaine. "Just get them out of this mess safe."

"I will, ma'am," Blaine responded with a respectful tone Micah had never heard coming from the warlock before.

Micah gave his mother a reassuring smile he didn't feel. He just hoped the warlock's trick worked.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Ozzie watched the tense way Micah held himself as he leaned against one of the few walls that were out of the line of fire. Ever since he'd give the okay to the warlocks, Micah had grown quiet and pensive. Much like the first hours after Ozzie had dragged him to that basement. Unable to watch him suffer in silence any longer, Ozzie went over and wrapped him in a tight embrace. Micah immediately melted into him, his cheek resting on Ozzie's chest.

"I really fucked up this time and now both my team and family are in danger," Micah said.

"I think we should both take equal blame for this mess since I was the one who pushed you into going in the first place. To tell you the honest truth, I don't regret it." Ozzie rubbed his palm along Micah's back. "I know how it is to lose your family. If I had a chance, I would do anything to get them back. It feels right that I did this for you."

"Make sure you tell that to Eric when he's putting his foot up my ass." Micah gifted him with a chuckle.

It was short and dry, but Ozzie would take it at this point. "We need to get going. The warlocks are ready. As soon as they light things up, everyone is going to make a run for the pole barn where the Drone vehicles are parked."

"What about your Mustang?" Micah pulled back so he could gaze up at Ozzie.

"It's going to be another sad casualty of the war."

"Ouch, sorry about that."

"It doesn't matter." Ozzie leaned down to give him a soft kiss. It didn't matter. For Micah, Ozzie would sacrifice anything. Even his need for revenge. He no longer felt the need to go out and get himself killed, just to take down Corbin. He would do this Micah's way. By joining up with the clan and fighting in their ranks.

They went back into the living room, just as the warlocks were starting their incantations. Micah and Ozzie both went over to kneel by his family.

"When I tell you to, you all need to run as fast as you can out the side door," Micah instructed. "No matter what, don't look back and don't stop. Once we get to the barn, jump into one of the vans. We'll have to race out of here because the fire is going to travel fast. The warlocks will only

be able to shield us from it for a few moments."

"It's time," Ozzie told them as he watched a bright blue light building up in the warlock's palms.

They all shouted one last incantation before the light shot from them and engulfed the entire front yard. Loud inhuman screams soon followed along with the nearly overpowering stench of burning wood, grass and flesh.

"Go!" Ozzie yelled as he gave Toby a shove in the right direction.

Toby gave the destruction one last wide-eyed gaze before he grabbed his mother's arm and dragged her out.

Sidney froze in place as she stared at the burning tikbalangs stumble around. Ozzie picked her up, tossed her over his shoulder and then grabbed Micah's hand.

As they burst through the door, the noises and smells got worse. Ozzie pushed it aside, worrying only about getting Micah and his family to the barn. It was only a few feet away, but it seemed to take forever before they reached the door on the side of the bright red building.

They ran in and Ozzie threw Sidney into the nearest van before he turned around to help Micah load the rest of his family inside. Ozzie groaned when Dante jumped in behind the wheel. "Please tell me your driving skills have gotten

better?" he pleaded even as he buckled up and gestured for the others to do the same.

Dante turned around to flash a shit-eating grin. "Nope." He then floored it, driving right through the double doors.

Not that Ozzie expected Dante to worry about something as trivial as opening the doors *before* driving away like a bat out of hell.

Dante let out a whoop while Brenden, who was in the passenger seat, just shook his head in resignation. The van's tires squealed as they pulled out onto the road, the other Drone vehicles following behind with a lot less fanfare.

"Nothing like a good fight to get the juices flowing," Dante exclaimed.

"He's crazy," Toby breathed as he stared at Dante with an expression that looked more like respect than disapproval.

"You get used to him," Micah said, before Dante let out another whoop. "Well, actually you don't. You just learn to tune him out."

Halfway home, Micah drifted off to sleep, his head resting on Ozzie's shoulder. It had been a long hard battle and he wasn't the only one who'd crashed. The van was quiet as Ozzie watched the highway zip by. He barely looked up when Sidney slid into the seat next to him.

"I wanted to thank you," she said as she

snuggled up to Ozzie and rested her head on his other shoulder.

"For what? Carrying you out? No big deal, you weren't that heavy."

"That and for giving Micah back to us. You brought our family back together and I'll forever be grateful to you for that." She leaned up to give him a chaste kiss on the cheek. "I know you're not on best terms with your family. Micah told me that much. I just want you to know that's their loss. You are one of the best men I've ever met and my brother's lucky to have you."

"No, I'm the lucky one," Ozzie corrected. He was, too. Just a week ago, he thought he had no future and he would have happily died, just so long as he could have had his revenge. Then Micah had come into his life and let him realize he did have a future—a future that Ozzie was now ready to grab onto with both hands and embrace.

He didn't need his pack, his old life or his family back. So long as he had Micah, he was complete and for the first time in over a year, Ozzie had no regrets—only hope.

About the Author

Stephani Hecht is a happily married mother of two. You can usually find her snuggled up to her laptop, creating her next book.

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