



DOWNFALL

By

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Chapter One

Club Downfall – Los Angeles

The first time Sebastian saw Hope he had his tongue stuck down another woman's throat. It didn't matter that the redhead in his arms had been rubbing her Pilates-toned body against his crotch for the last half-hour. Or, that her French-tipped nails trailed lightly across his chest beneath the unbuttoned shirt he wore. He still felt nothing.

As usual. Nada. Not a single twitch in his jeans until Hope walked into the room.

Now, he had a boner that promised to be a real piece of work, which was pretty amazing considering that sex itself was not pleasurable to his kind. They fed off a female's sexual energy, but never gained gratification themselves. Commanding his body to fuck was easy. It had nothing to do with desire.

Amazed at the desire rolling through him, Sebastian separated his mouth from the woman he held in his arms and returned Hope's wide-eyed stare.

"Hey!" he called loudly enough to be heard above the roar. "Grab a drink and enjoy the music."

The sound of his band's latest CD blared from the speakers. Elicit Me was their current single and a particular favorite of his. He'd written it about an emotion he'd never experienced or even imagined he wanted to feel. Until now. Now, it was like a sledgehammer beating at his heart.

Hope smiled and gave a little nervous wave as she moved closer. Yeah, she was definitely nervous. The lip biting gave it away and sent his gaze sliding across her berry-red colored lips. Mmm ... lip gloss. He wondered what her kiss tasted like. Another surprise. He'd never thought about a human female's lips before or wondered how they tasted. He'd never fantasized about any female.

"What's your name?" He already knew. His telepathic senses made that part easy.

"Hope." She shrugged, revealing more of her nervousness in that one tiny movement.

Sebastian was enthralled with the way her short blonde hair fell neatly against her neck. With the fingers of her left hand in the front pocket of the low-riding, tight jeans she wore, her body swayed to the pounding music. A short-sleeved red shirt clutched her full breasts and gave him little peek-a-boo glimpses of a diamond-studded belly button as she moved.

And, boy, did she ever move. Not blatant, but enough to send heat shooting straight to his groin.

The redhead bit and licked his ear. Shocked that he'd forgotten all about her, he pulled away. What was her name again? Carly? Carrie? It didn't matter.

"Sorry, babe, it's not happening tonight."

He gave her a quick kiss of dismissal on the forehead and gently pushed her away. Only one female held his curiosity. Just looking at Hope, sent Sebastian's energy level into overdrive and he hadn't even touched her yet. How would he react if he did touch her? Combust? Maybe they both would.

If he were smart, he would take the redhead and find a nice, dark place to strip her of every ounce of the raw sexual energy she carried until she was senseless.

That's what he should do. But it wasn't what he was going to do.

Staying with the redhead was no longer an option. The drive--the compelling need--to have Hope naked against him, skin to skin, without anything in between was too strong to ignore.

Unfortunately, the redhead wasn't as easily dissuaded from the treat she'd thought would be hers that night. Despite Sebastian's attempts to gently extract himself from her clinging arms, she clumsily grabbed for the hard shaft tenting his jeans and squeezed, whispering urgently, "Come on, baby. We're just getting started."

Sebastian winced and gingerly removed her grasping fingers from his penis. "Hey, watch the family jewels there, darling." He firmly set her away from him.

The redhead forgotten, Sebastian stood, his gaze searing upon Hope. She smiled in satisfaction and he sensed her relief that he was no longer tangled up with another woman.

Their gazes locked, he felt the pull of her sexuality, much stronger and faster than anything he'd ever experienced before. Frowning at his own reaction, Sebastian could do little more than stalk towards her. Her siren's call was more than he could resist.

An almost animalistic growl rose from his throat. He didn't stop. Nothing mattered but Hope, reaching her and immersing himself in her big blue eyes, burying himself inside her soft warmth--those were the things that mattered.

Until he saw a masculine hand grab her arm.

That sight stopped him in his tracks. Another growl left his throat before he could stop it.

The bleach blond kid was massive, with muscles that spoke of many hours spent at the gym. He was well over six feet, with short, spiky blond hair, and wore a muscle shirt with jeans.

"This place is a dive," the kid grouched. "Let's go somewhere else."

He tried to pull her away, but she resisted. "We just got here," she said, her gaze glued to Sebastian's.

"I said let's go. Now. It stinks in here."

Hope glanced uneasily at him, then back again at Sebastian. She licked her lips and shook her head. "I'm staying."

The guy apparently had little to no sense. He grabbed her shoulder and forcefully turned her. "Like hell. I paid for dinner and...."

"Let. Her. Go."

The kid turned, narrowing his eyes on the menace flowing from Sebastian. Sebastian knew he was intimidating. All of his kind were. But he really, really wanted to kick this guy's ass for daring to touch her. It took every ounce of his self-control not to plant his fist in the jerk's face.

The kid's lips curled in disgust and Sebastian knew it was about to turn ugly. "This chick is my fuck tonight, buddy. I don't give a damn who you are. You don't want to take me on or I might hurt that pretty face of yours."

The kid turned his back on Sebastian and jerked on Hope's arm with a force that made her stumble against him. She slipped and the guy yanked again.

Pure instinct kicked in. A lifetime of training on how to act around humans dissolved in an instant. He became like an animal protecting its mate, with no thought of anything else but the natural desires and instincts of a predator.

"Get the hell away from her!" Without thought for the consequences of his own strength or what he might be exposing his Clan to, Sebastian rushed the kid, heaved him up, and threw him behind him, as easily as he would toss away a paper wrapper and with as much thought.

Hope fell to the floor as he turned to advance on the kid. A deep, rich haze of fury engulfed him. He wanted to kill. He needed to kill the asshole who'd dared touch what belonged to him....

Mine.

Hope's soft cry eased the haze threatening to devour him as it called to him like nothing else ever had. Exerting a control he didn't know he possessed, he turned his back on his prey to look down at her.

She lay on the floor where she'd fallen. He reached down to grasp her upper arms then eased her upright into a standing position. With all the gentleness inside of him, he cupped her cheeks and examined the arm she clutched. It was red and starting to bruise where the kid had grabbed her roughly.

"Are you okay?" he asked urgently, running his hands over her hair and neck. He slid his fingers down to her right elbow, which she clutched with her opposite hand. Dazed, Hope nodded, then glanced behind him. Her eyes widened with horror.

All around them were shouts of confusion and fear. He didn't care.

Bending his knees slightly until he was on eye-level with her, he searched her gaze for confirmation that she was truly unharmed. "What the hell were you doing with an asshole like that? Did he hurt you?"

Confusion lined the blue of her eyes and she moved back a little.

Sebastian straightened. He knew fear when he saw it. He smelled it. The lust that had softened her lips before the asshole had intruded was gone. In its place was confusion, a little bit of fear, and perhaps some fascination thrown in as well.

"W-what did you do to Dylan? How...? He's--" Unable to finish, Hope turned her gaze back to the wall behind Sebastian.

Groaning inwardly at the turn of events, he started to turn around just as Marcus, his best friend and mentor, walked up behind him and grabbed his arm in a tight hold.

"You have to leave. Now," Marcus insisted, trying to pull Sebastian towards the door.

"Wait!" Sebastian protested.

"You don't have time to wait," Marcus growled, nodding towards the wall and Sebastian finally saw it.

His stomach clenched.

The asshole had taken a header into the wall where Sebastian had flung him and was out cold. His body had fallen to the floor in an awkward position that spoke of broken bones.

Damn.

The wall where the kid had hit had been depressed with the force in which he'd been thrown against it. Sebastian winced. That meant big trouble.

"You have to get out of here before the cops arrive," Marcus demanded. "One of the women has already called 9-1-1."

Sebastian jerked away from Marcus's hold. "I can't leave her." He looked back at Hope, who had rushed to the asshole's side along with a few of the human women in the room.

Another involuntary growl left his throat and he started towards her. She was his!

Marcus slapped him in the chest. "What the hell do you think you're doing? Get your ass out of here. These humans won't understand. You'll be arrested and charged."

The kid groaned when Hope touched his head. She gave a nervous glance at Sebastian before turning her attention back to her semi-conscious date. "Dylan? Can you hear me?" she asked urgently.

“He’s coming around,” Marcus sighed with relief. “Now, will you leave?”

“Not without her.” Sebastian started towards Hope, but his feet wouldn’t cooperate. He stumbled instead.

Marcus cursed and grabbed at his arm to hold him up. “Energy dive.”

“What?” Sebastian gasped, feeling every ounce of his energy drain away.

“You’re having a damn energy dive. Your anger used up too much of your inner energy. You must’ve been really angry, man. I’ve never seen anyone react like this.”

That was the drawback with the whole energy thing. It was glorious when high, but sucked when emotions brought a Clan male down. Just another reason to stay away from the human females as much as possible outside of sex.

Not knowing his own strength when dealing with humans was another reason to limit the amount of contact.

Yet, the Clan’s survival depended upon the sexual energy of the human female. Quite literally, the continuation of their race on Earth demanded the Clan males mate with the human women. It was the only way to get the energy, and the sex had to be consensual. Bad emotions emitting from their human partners zapped their energy. Only the good emotions built it.

Thoughts of mating had him looking up frantically, trying to find Hope despite the weakness turning his limbs to mush.

Disappointment settled in the pit of his stomach. She was still there with the kid, who was starting to come around. Her pretty little hand stroked the kid’s cheek as she murmured soothing words to him.

A wave of despair hit him and he almost groaned aloud. He’d seen the uneasiness in her glance and her concern for the guy she’d been with. After what she’d seen Sebastian do, she wouldn’t come anywhere near his badass again.

Damn. This sucked to high heaven and beyond.

It got even worse when the police arrived and hauled his badass off to jail.

* * * *

Twelve hours later Sebastian stood at a press conference reading from a pre-typed press release. He apologized to the kid, who he had been told was twenty-one year old Dylan Perry, and vowed to pay all of the guy’s current and future medical bills, as well as provide an undisclosed settlement of a considerable amount--for which his vulture attorneys already had signed legal documents in hand. Sebastian told the group he was scheduled to attend anger management classes, attend AA meetings--alcohol was blamed for his behavior and unusual strength--as well as perform community service, and speak in a series of public service announcements on the evils of alcohol and violence.

Entertainment media, from the smut magazines to the more legitimate twenty-four hour entertainment networks, were being escorted out when Sebastian pulled Marcus aside.

They stood eye-to-eye. All Clan males were the same height and generally the same build. Their hair, skin, and eye color varied, as did their personalities, but some things were the same--such as the width of their parts.

At six-three with dark eyes and even darker shoulder-length hair, Sebastian glared at Marcus. “I need to find her.”

They both knew who he meant.

Marcus rubbed the rough stubble of a day old beard. He was butt ugly, at least by human standards. On their home planet, he was considered quite handsome. Only human women fell

all over themselves trying to get Sebastian's attention. Back home, Sebastian couldn't get a date to save his life.

Marcus shook his head emphatically. They'd had this same conversation about Hope Riordan at various intervals for the last twelve hours. Those same twelve hours Sebastian had spent sitting on his ass in the Los Angeles County Jail.

"How many times do I have to tell you?" Marcus growled. "No. I won't find that girl for you."

"Why not? It's not as if you haven't taken a special interest in a human female before? Hell, we all do sometimes."

"Listen, that girl whacked out your mind somehow."

"That's bullshit," Sebastian scoffed, disgusted.

"No, man, it's not," Marcus insisted. "I can't believe what you did to that Perry guy in front of all those humans."

"He attacked Hope."

"That's not the way I heard it."

"She didn't want to leave with him. He was trying to make her."

"So you give him a concussion instead? Way to stop him."

"He hurt her," Sebastian growled, damn sick and tired of his friend's meddling. He didn't understand why he'd reacted to Hope the way he had and he certainly couldn't explain to Marcus what he himself didn't understand.

"The girl had a bruised arm," Marcus continued. "Not the same, bro."

"Did you hear what I said? She didn't want to leave with him. He was making her go and was hurting her in the process. What did you expect me to do? Let him take her out of there and do who knows what to her? Not fucking likely."

Marcus stared at him. "It wasn't your call to make. These humans have their own problems. We don't get involved. And why should you want to anyway? We don't care about them. What's one girl over another when there are plenty others to give us what we need?" Marcus sighed in disgust. "If anything, in the past you've been too nonchalant about the human females. It's that whole rock star persona of yours. You've always been colder and more deliberate about using them than the rest of us."

Sebastian gritted his teeth. "So, I've changed for the better now. Will you help me find her or not?"

Frustrated, Marcus raked a hand across his face. "Don't be an asshole. You know what I mean. That girl is trouble for you, man. Stay away from her."

"I'll find her myself."

"Like hell you will. The Clan won't let you. She's Torlae to you now and you don't want them having to remove her permanently from the scene."

Torlae. Forbidden. Shit.

Sebastian's gaze narrowed dangerously. "They wouldn't dare. It goes against our laws to kill indiscriminately like that."

"It's not indiscriminately when she endangers us. That girl did something to you. She affected you somehow, just by looking at you. Without even touching you, she caused you to react without thought and to inflict harm on another human." He shook his head emphatically. "That chick's emotional charge is too powerful for you to handle. In fact, it might be better for us all if the Clan took care of her permanently. If she affected you like that, imagine what she could do to other Clan boys who might not have your usually sunny disposition."

Fear shifted through Sebastian. He'd known of situations where the Clan "took care of" a human problem, but that was usually when a dumb human bastard had found out something that no one else should know. The human would then have an unfortunate, completely explainable, death--usually an accident or something made to look like death by natural causes.

"It wasn't her fault," Sebastian growled, unable to look at his friend.

"Maybe not. But she was the catalyst. You had to get to her because you were compelled and had no choice but to do so. It didn't matter who got in the way or why."

Jerking his gaze back to his friend's, Sebastian frowned. "How do you know that? I didn't tell you."

Marcus nodded solemnly, placing a comforting hand on Sebastian's shoulder. "It was pretty obvious. I saw her walk into the room, remember? There wasn't a Clan boy in there who didn't feel your lust. It was electrifying."

Sebastian nodded. "Hope exuded sex appeal. I know everyone recognized it like I did."

"Yeah, but it was focused on you, only you. Which is why you went ballistic when someone got in your way."

"I did what I thought was best," Sebastian argued. "I wasn't going to let him take her out of there against her will."

"I doubt her 'will' had anything to do with it. She was as hooked up on you as you were on her."

"This conversation is getting old really fast, Marcus."

"For me, too, Sebastian," Marcus growled. "I've got better things to do than try to rein in your ass. But you can't seem to get it through your fucking thick skull that you aren't thinking clearly where this girl is concerned. What is one human female over another? Nothing. They're food. You were compelled by this woman, not the other way around. We do the freaky Dracula shit, remember? We compel them. We are the ones the humans can't resist and the only reason we need them is to survive. It's not emotional for us. Hell, we don't even get an orgasm out of it. It's not important because we get the energy. Nothing else. Nothing more."

Sebastian continued to glare at him, frustrated by what Marcus was saying. He knew exactly what his friend meant because it had always been that way for all of them. They didn't want the human females, hell, some of the Clan boys didn't even like sex, but they needed it just like the humans needed food.

"I wasn't compelled," Sebastian lied, knowing he lied.

"Then why are you chomping at the bit to get to her?" Marcus shrugged negligently. "If you need energy, pick a girl. That redhead sucking face with you before Hope walked into the room was just as good an energy source as this girl you can't get out of your frigging head."

Marcus straightened, shook his head in disgust, and then turned to walk away. But before he left, he sent a razor-eyed glare filled with meaning to his friend. "Whatever has you caught, let it go, man. Forget about her or you'll get both your asses killed."

Sebastian was left in the hallway of his record company's business office, staring at the beige walls. Endangering her life wasn't where he wanted to go, and getting himself killed wasn't high on his list of things to do either.

If only he could forget about her! But he couldn't, and now he had an itch that only she could apparently scratch. The thought of "sucking face" with any other female was suddenly repugnant.

Fuck. He slammed out of the door knowing exactly what he had to do to keep her safe and not liking it one damn bit.

Chapter Two

“Was it Dylan’s idea to go to that dive or yours?”

Hope could feel her father’s eyes on her. Police Sergeant Jeff Riordan watched his daughter with nothing less than contempt. He knew where she had been and what had happened, but he had no idea of the electrical charge to her senses the moment she’d stepped into the same room as Sebastian King.

“Mine.” She didn’t lie, knowing it really didn’t matter one way or another.

“I told you that punk was trouble. But did you listen to me? No more than your mother ever listened, but at least she had enough sense not to embarrass me in front of my coworkers.”

“I’m sorry, Dad.”

He slammed his fist down on the kitchen table. The bowl holding the green beans shook with the force of it and, for a moment, Hope feared his beer bottle would tip over.

“Buddy Mitchell said that you were dressed like a slut and acting like a bitch in heat over that long-haired singer.”

“I wasn’t....”

“Shut up, damn you!”

Hope cringed. He was working himself up into a lather that always spelled nothing but trouble.

“Buddy arrested the punk.”

Hope knew the ‘punk’ in question was Sebastian, not Dylan. Dylan had left Downfall on a stretcher, while Sebastian had walked out in handcuffs.

He took another swig of the beer. His second bottle since he’d arrived home an hour before. Hope didn’t want to know just how many he’d had before getting back to the apartment that evening.

“Fucking celebrities,” he muttered. “Every damn one of them in this town thinks their shit don’t stink.”

He tipped the bottle up and turned his gaze to her. “Bet you think that rock star likes you, don’t you? Bet he said you were special,” he sneered. “You ain’t nothing. Their kind will knock you up and leave you with a little bastard in your belly. You’ll never see him and his rich wallet again, girl. They ain’t worth picking up out of the middle of the street.”

Jeff stood and kicked the chair. It tipped over onto its side with a crash. “Damn celebrities!”

Hope cringed. Her dad was really angry, but worse, he’d been drinking since the end of his shift. It was Saturday night and he’d worked for the last seven days straight. Tonight was his first night off in awhile and he’d been celebrating.

“How do you think it looks when I can’t control my own daughter? Huh?” He stalked towards where she still sat at the table. She couldn’t move. It was too late. He had her cornered in the chair.

He leaned down until he was practically in her face. His breath reeked. Hope hated the smell of beer. It always reminded her of fear and anger and helplessness.

“You don’t go to that club again. And stay away from that punk body builder, too. He’s nothing but trouble. You don’t go nowhere. I don’t want you leaving this house except for school and work.”

“But, Dad...”

He slapped her.

“Don’t you ever talk back to me. You hear me?”

Her hand to her reddening cheek, Hope lowered her gaze, unable to look at him when he was like this. He fairly shook with suppressed rage. Although he’d never hurt her physically beyond a slap or two, it was frightening. She hated this. She hated being scared of him. He hurt her so deeply with words and an occasional slap that there were times she’d rather he just hit her and get it over with. But beyond a few slaps, he’d limited himself to his favorite torture of belittling and humiliating her on a regular basis until all she wanted to do was cower away from him.

“Answer me,” he barked.

“Yes, Daddy.” What else could she say?

He straightened up to his full height of five feet nine inches. He’d taken off his gun when he’d first walked into the door. His blue uniform shirt wasn’t tucked in and his face was splotchy and red.

He’d drank a lot more than two beers, she realized. His shift had ended at three in the afternoon and it was going on seven thirty. He’d probably been drinking from the moment he got off work.

He moved away from her to the refrigerator where he retrieved two more beers. “The game’s on in half an hour. Clean up this damn table.”

With that, he stalked off to the living room. The only consolation to the small apartment was that the living room was fairly secluded. It was her dad’s favorite place, where he could drink himself to unconsciousness while watching America’s favorite past-time on the television screen.

She seriously doubted he’d make it through the first inning before passing out. The thought of staying in the apartment, holed up in her tiny room while he snored the house down, was almost unbearable.

She’d learned early on after her mother’s death in a car accident when Hope was only ten-years-old that her father was not a nice person. Get him drunk and he turned mean. Although she’d been unable to completely shield Hope from her father’s drinking problem, her mother had run interference. Before her death there was laughter and some semblance of normalcy in their household. But she was gone now and Jeff Riordan still had a firm hold on his daughter.

When Hope had wanted to move into the dorm, her father had flatly refused and that had been that. Someday, somehow she would escape him. She just didn’t know when she’d manage to gather the courage to do so.

An image of Sebastian’s face flashed in her mind. She remembered the smile he’d given her last night and the instant chemistry they’d had. A rebelliousness she’d never known filled her. She rarely, if ever, disobeyed her father.

But something more important than fear held her in its grip. She needed to see Sebastian. Almost frightened of herself for what she was thinking, she tiptoed into the living room. Sure enough, the first inning was starting and her father was nodding off. Give him another half hour and he’d be dead to the world.

She cleaned up the table and kitchen as quietly as she could manage, then moved quickly to her own room at the other end of the apartment. Something akin to excitement zinged through her veins. She was going to Downfall again, her father be damned. He'd sleep the night away in the recliner like he usually did on his off nights.

And she'd be out having fun, instead of stuck in the apartment listening to him snore and being grateful for the snores. If he was asleep, he couldn't yell at her or make her life miserable.

She hoped that Sebastian was at the club and that whatever had drawn him to her the night before wasn't gone. What if he didn't remember her? Or, even worse, what if he did, but wanted nothing to do with her?

* * * *

"You're a few crayons short of a full box if you think coming here tonight was a brilliant idea." In disgust, Emily Watson parked her Toyota Corolla and turned off the engine. "Going to Downfall two nights in a row, especially after what happened last night ... loony tunes, girl." She pushed a long, unruly dark curl behind her ear and got out of the car with Hope.

Excitement and fear danced the hula inside Hope's stomach as she shut the car door. "All I'm sure of is that I have to see him again. It's important."

Emily clicked the lock on the doors then hurried to catch up with Hope's much longer strides. "He sounds like a whack-job to me. A cute whack-job, but crazy just the same.

"I have to see him."

"He put Dylan in the hospital, Hope. The guy has multiple broken bones and a concussion. This is serious stuff."

"Dylan grabbed my arm and was making me leave the club," Hope reminded her without slowing her walk.

"That didn't mean he had to throw Dylan into the wall. Sebastian King is one strong guy. Super-strong. It's freaky."

Hope frowned at that. When it had happened, she'd been scared of Sebastian, but he'd seemed ... drained afterwards, like it had taken all of his strength.

"He didn't mean to hurt him," she reminded her friend. "In his news conference, he said he'd been drinking too much and got carried away."

And she believed it. His gentleness and insistence to stay despite his handler trying to get him to leave before the police arrived, said it all. He was a good guy who didn't know his own strength.

Emily snorted. "That's what he's supposed to say. A publicist made it up. You don't believe that, do you?"

"Yeah, I do. He's a good guy."

"How do you know that? The tabloids have billed him as a womanizing reclusive rock star. He comes off as cold, Hope, not exactly warm and cuddly."

"Jeez! That doesn't make him a bad person. He's in the spotlight a lot. He's probably just cautious."

"You told me you never even had a real conversation with the guy. I mean, he's like a knock-out, and he is, like, wow, a rock star. But it's kinda creepy, you know, the way he threw Dylan into a wall so hard and he's so strong but he didn't even know it. How could that be?"

Shaking her head, Hope didn't respond. She couldn't because Emily was right. Yet, she wasn't. Hope simply knew that Sebastian wasn't a creep. She felt it inside her somewhere. The way he'd looked at her last night....

Hope shivered suddenly at the tingle that skated down her spine. It was a good tingle, one of excitement and with a small dash of fear that she absolutely refused to acknowledge. The guy fascinated her more than he scared her.

End of story.

As they approached the entrance to Downfall, the blaring rock-n-roll music could be heard out on the streets. The crowd was huge, the line to get in much longer than usual. Obviously, the excitement from the night before was good for business.

"Crap," Emily moaned, "we'll never get in that place. It's so late, it's probably packed."

"It's only ten o'clock." Hope glanced around the line to the entrance. It circled the block, the end meeting near the back of an alley, while at the front stood two huge bouncers. Body-builder types that were far from handsome, yet there was an attractive quality to their biker persona.

Other, similarly built guys walked the line, keeping everyone in order. Downfall didn't need the police to work crowd control like some of the other ritzier clubs downtown. They apparently had their own private security force of ugly, big brutes.

"Let's go." Hope grasped Emily's arm and pulled her along despite the girl's whining protest.

"What're you doing?"

"Getting us in there," Hope said with determination. Nothing would stop her from seeing him tonight.

As she passed one of the bouncers, he did a double-take and halted in front of her. "What're you doing here?" he demanded, his form looming menacingly from the shadows. "Haven't you done enough damage?"

Ignoring him, Hope rushed passed with a suddenly silent Emily in tow. She had to reach the front! If only she could get inside where he could see her, she knew Sebastian wouldn't let them throw her out. Emily squawked as Hope pulled her into a run--which was cut short by the rather large and forceful hand on her shoulder.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" the bouncer snarled, jerking her around. Emily came up beside her, clearly intending to defend her friend.

Chin lifted in determination, Hope challenged, "We're going inside to dance."

The bouncer leaned down to her level, his scraggly dark hair falling over his eyes. Dressed in black leather from the bomber jacket to the tight leather pants, with a black t-shirt, and scuffed boots, the bouncer's harsh hands tightened perceptibly on Hope's shoulders, enough so that she gasped, not so much in pain as in fear.

"Get the fuck out of here. Now," he growled.

Emily took that moment to come out of her stupor. "Hey!" She tried to push his hand from Hope's shoulder without success. "What do you think you're doing? Just who do you think you are to treat her like that?"

Without even glancing in Emily's direction, the bouncer growled into Hope's face, "Go. Away. Now."

Emily, being her daddy's "little princess" all of her life, wasn't too keen on being ignored. She pushed Hope out of the way and went toe-to-toe with the bouncer, forcing him to give her his attention.

"Get a life, bozo." Fire blazed from her brilliant blue eyes. "Don't get your panties in a wad. We're just going to dance."

It always amazed Hope exactly how gorgeous her friend truly was. Except for her petite stature, Emily could've easily been a model. Small, but with a figure that had more than one guy on campus salivating whenever she walked by, her long brunette hair hung almost to her waist in a mass of loose curls that was all natural. The high-cheekbones were a present from an Indian ancestor, but the smooth alabaster skin was pure Irish.

"We have as much right to be here as anyone else," Emily continued, "and who gave you permission to act like a Neanderthal? Do you even know who my father is?" she challenged. "I'll tell you all about Daddy. He's a four time World Championship Boxer who'll kick your butt into next Tuesday if he thinks you're messing with his little darling." An absolute lie. Her dad worked construction.

The bouncer jerked back, startled, as if Emily was some kind of alien Clifford. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Emily poked her finger at his chest. "I'm trying to get you to listen, bucko! If you so much as lay a finger on us, you're toast...."

Hope hurried away from what looked like the beginning of an interesting argument. Sending a silent word of gratitude to her friend, who at the moment was tangling with a very scary looking dude, she took off.

Getting through the front door was no longer an option if she expected to receive the same reception with the other two bouncers as she had with the guy going Round Two with Emily. Time to rethink strategy.

Heading towards the back of the alley, Hope took a swift turn through the kitchen. She slid inside the door as quietly as possible. A couple of guys in chef's hats were smoking a joint near the sink, while a bare-bellied waitress loaded a set of drinks and appetizers onto her tray.

Hope eased around the doorway and slid through a dark hallway. As she walked, the music got louder, attesting to the fact that she was on the right track. Follow the music.

Almost like a dream, she went from an entirely black hallway to the sudden roar of the music and the crowd. The main area of the club was huge. People were everywhere, munching on appetizers and pulling down drinks, while the dancers loaded the dance floor. The music from the band was loud. Pure rock-n-roll, but obviously missing the one person Hope had been expecting to see.

The crowd was almost overwhelming, the noise too much. Thankfully, the song ended with a bang and the shaking floor settled down. What if Sebastian wasn't singing tonight? She'd been crazy to come here, she realized. Risking her father's anger, not to mention Emily's safety, was beyond stupid. It was flat-out irresponsible.

Glancing around at the people littering the room, she realized that most of the men wore leather. Tight leather pants, in fact, that were almost identical to what the bouncers outside wore. Actually, most of the guys in the bar were dressed exactly alike! Frowning at the unusual anomaly, she noticed that the women were all dressed pretty scantily. Perhaps that was normal for this kind of club, she guessed, not really being well-versed in clubbing herself.

Suddenly, the crowd erupted with cheers. Feeling out-of-place and stupid for hatching the hair-brained idea to come here in the first place, Hope turned to leave when the music began again.

She froze.

She knew those chords, had played the song so many times on her playlist that it held the top spot.

Suddenly, nothing mattered except the hypnotic pull of the lazy, drawling chords. They called to her just as they had the night before, only this time she didn't hesitate to move through the crowd towards the stage.

Slowly, she halted, knowing the exact moment when he would appear.

The music twanged and the curtain opened. The band played hard, but they eased the chords a little as he walked on stage, weaving a spell of sensuality around every woman there.

The breath stopped in her throat. Her heart beat double-time and she was as helpless as every other woman to resist the tall, dark-haired man.

Sebastian was beyond gorgeous. He was exactly what a man was supposed to be, and she seriously wanted to find out what that meant.

The words of the song held the audience's attention. Spellbound, the women swayed slightly to the beat, while the men appeared unmoved, as if they were simply watching and waiting for something to happen.

Strange. Hope was too intent upon the feelings rising inside her to care. His voice sent a psychedelic chord of lust through her veins. The words talked to her soul. Her heart was completely lost.

The force from above,

Calls to you--

--come to me.

Set me free--

--be with me until the dawn.

Take the light with you--

--take the power you know.

A shiver settled inside her and she walked towards him--towards something she did not understand.

In this world of danger--

--pleeease, please don't go.

My heart's not my own--

--your love like the darkness in the night.

Take it all from me--

--bring me your sweet light.

She wanted him. That much was clear and heaven help him if he denied her.

He continued to sing, pulling her closer and closer to something she couldn't outrun even if she wanted to.

Chapter Three

Sebastian felt the air zing with electricity the minute the first word left his lips.

She's here.

As he sang about the emptiness in his heart, his gaze frantically searched for her. He didn't dare let on that anything was happening in case his good buddy Marcus got wind of it and made her leave. He had a set to finish--no!--one song, that was it. He couldn't wait any longer to get to her. He'd get them out of the club somehow, though it wouldn't be easy with Marcus around.

It was no longer a matter of if he would have her. It was a matter of when. The need was too strong to be ignored. He felt a moment of fear, wondering if maybe Marcus was right, that Hope's pull was too dangerous for him.

Sebastian opened his mouth and belted out a particularly high verse.

Don't leave m-e to-night--

The crowd parted.

He saw her and almost lost it. Choking slightly, he recovered enough to hit the next note.

The force from above--

He could see her clearly now. She was much closer and he drew her gaze just as he had the night before. They became lost in each other's eyes.

Only the fact that he sang from his heart a song that he knew as well as his own name was he able to continue without faltering.

You are like--

Only the fact that he sang to her kept the right words flowing from his lips.

--an energy inside of me.

With eyes only for her, he removed the microphone from the stand then slowly eased his way to the front of the stage down the steps leading to the dance floor.

Tongues of fire make our desire.

She stopped at the end of the dance floor with the audience of dancers still crushed around her.

Lazily, in tune with the hypnotic music, Sebastian never halted his stride. He felt their energies touch, as if a billion electrical circuits were exploding inside him. Too enthralled to care about the huge boner tenting his faded jeans, Sebastian continued to slowly walk to her.

Burn my soul with your touch--

The pull of her was almost his undoing.

I need you so much.

The slow walk to the object of his desire was an increasing build-up of pleasure that bordered on pain.

Mine, his soul demanded as the crowd parted and he finally stood in front of her. Her gaze spoke to him, though she had yet to say a word aloud.

Sebastian raised the microphone up again and finished the song. I wa-nt y-ou for my o-wn-n-n.-

The microphone fell from his hand to land with a bang on the hard wood floor. Everyone around them stood in silence, merely bystanders to the show playing out in front of them. The energy of their combined need sizzled through the airwaves, a physical being of shimmering light and sparks of blue.

Many of the Clan frowned and searched the crowd for Marcus, the sensible one who guided them all, but he was nowhere to be found.

Some of them had been there the night before. They had to know a near repeat of Sebastian's enthrallment was being played out in front of them once again.

Sebastian bent slightly, his gaze roaming across her face, to touch on her straight nose, the lush curve of her lips, and the fine arch of her brows. "You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," he whispered, his voice hoarse in the silence.

Her eyes glazed over with need.

Hunger pulled at him, hardening him until he was sure he'd burst from it. Never, ever had he felt ready to explode before. These emotions were both wondrous and frightening at the same time.

Hesitantly, almost reverently, Sebastian lifted a long finger and traced the gentle curve of her cheek. "Soft. So soft."

Her throat worked as she swallowed. He sensed her uncertainty, as well as the growing obsession she was beginning to feel. He recognized in her what he was beginning to feel in himself.

Tracing the outline of her lips, Sebastian leaned down until his breath whispered across her mouth. Lips barely touching, he demanded softly, "Open for me" just before he licked the crease of her lips. They parted on a strangled moan.

Silently groaning with need, he leaned down to cover them with his own.

Their lips touched and sparks flew. She jerked away from him. Frightened, she moved one foot backwards as if to escape.

Acting on primal instinct, he reached out and captured her hand.

Hope froze.

Sebastian's unearthly awareness of the beat of her pulse beneath the delicate, white skin fed something inside him, reaching beneath the layer of civilization his kind cultivated. The need--no, the craving--to claim, to possess this human enveloped him, a compulsion so fierce he struggled to stand upright.

Electricity sizzled between them, his lips burned with the need to devour, to take. And he took. His mouth opened on hers as his palms cupped her cheeks, tilting her to take the searching demand of his tongue.

Profound emotion washed over him in one big wave of heat and longing. Hope felt it too, he could tell by the unconscious sway of her body towards his. Something not of this world seemed to pull them together despite their own will. The barriers that stood so tall between them melted into nothingness.

Open and exposed, Sebastian gasped for breath. Hope lifted a hand to her throat as if she too struggled to breathe. Desire, need, longing, and even fear swirled around them. Their eyes locked as securely as any binding chain, and every nerve ending inside his body screamed to take, possess, own.

Mine! She belonged to him.

"Mine," she answered groggily, looking drugged and incredibly delicious. Her lips parted as if she struggled to grasp for oxygen beyond the ragged breaths that left her. He felt his own breath quicken and wondered at that.

Hope wrenched her hand from his, stumbling a little, swaying for a second until she caught herself.

They stood amidst the crowd, who were as hypnotized as the world-be-lovers by the electrical charge swishing around them. Her eyes widened with surprise, amazement shining in them like the warmth of the sun. He followed her gaze, as startled as she at what they saw.

Wave-like currents surrounded them, almost imperceptible movements, like some distortion of the molecules of the air.

"Are we doing that?" she gasped.

Her gaze returned to his face. He knew in that moment that his life, such as it was, would never be the same. Everything had changed. This human belonged to him. All bets were off. Whatever he'd known in the past, Hope was important to him, something he couldn't even begin to understand yet. But he would. And so would she. She will accept that she belongs only to me and me to her.

A small sound left her lips and his gaze instantly narrowed on her face.

"Oh, God," she gasped. "I heard you."

A frown puckered Sebastian's forehead. "What?"

"Your thoughts. I heard your thoughts. You said I will accept that I belong to you and you to me."

"That's impossible." Humans weren't telepathic as a rule. A very small percentage possessed some form of Extra Sensory Perception--or ESP, as some of the yokels called it--but few had genuine telepathic abilities.

Hope shook her head. "You're right. It can't be. How could I?" Confusion replaced the enthrallment she felt and Sebastian saw the currents disappear, their connection broken. "This can't be happening. I have to leave."

A rush of isolation hit the pit of his stomach. Longing, compiled with her emotional separation from him was almost more than he could bear.

"Wait!" he protested, instantly reaching for her arms. "Don't leave me."

She pulled away from him. At Hope's startled cry Sebastian's eyes opened immediately, and he saw the change in the room and a very angry Marcus bearing down on them with a small dark-haired woman swatting at his arm.

It was about to turn ugly.

Sebastian grabbed Hope's hand and they ran. By the time they reached the dark hallway, he heard a shout from behind them.

"Come on!" he urged Hope, taking her hand and running with her while tugging her along behind him. They hurried through the kitchen, surprising the kitchen staff and almost upending a waitress with a tray full of drinks.

"Sorry!" Sebastian called after them, laughing for no reason.

Sweet freedom! They gained the door leading outside the kitchen and the cool brush of night air hit them both, easing the sweat beading on their skin.

Sebastian glanced sharply at her where the light from the club emanated outside the door. "You okay?"

She nodded then smiled slightly, determination easing the worry of her features.

He grinned back at her, leaned down and gave her a hard, quick kiss on the lips. “Come on, then. I know where we can go.” He tightened his hand on hers and they took off running down the back alley.

Within moments, they'd reached Sebastian's vintage Mustang. He unlocked the car, then urged her inside, over the gear shift, until she settled in the passenger seat.

“Buckle up.” A quick grin slashed across his face as he put the car in first then squealed out of the parking lot.

They barreled out of the side street, heading for the freeway at record speed with only one thought in mind ... being together.

Chapter Four

“Where are we going?” she finally asked as they took the Interstate 10 exit east.

Sebastian glanced at her and grinned. “Away from here ... Anywhere. Where do you want to go?”

He flipped a switch on the dash and the zoom-zoom of the convertible top lowering could barely be heard above the roar of the tires hitting the pavement. Within moments, the top was down and he was gazing at her again in between watching the traffic.

Her head fell back against the headrest, tilted slightly upward with her eyes closed, savoring the wind hitting her face. “With you.” She opened her eyes and turned to him. “I want to go with you. Wherever that takes us. Is that crazy or what?”

A dark, masculine hand reached out and covered the folded hand she had resting in her lap. “Or what,” he smiled. “That’s my answer. Whatever this is, I know you feel it, too. No one understands it, least of all me. But I’m not going to let them take it away from us without trying to find out exactly what it is first.”

Sobering, she straightened in the seat. “I don’t understand what happened tonight. That weird stuff in the air...”

Shaking his head, Sebastian laughed then linked their fingers together. “Don’t worry about that now. Don’t worry about anything. There’s plenty of time for us to talk about this later. Right now, just enjoy the ride, baby,” he added with a boyish grin.

She gently squeezed his fingers in response, though it was little consolation for what she really wanted to squeeze. The worry inside her eased. This strange fascination they had for one another with the weird telepathy thing was magic, but she wasn’t going to go there tonight, not when she had him all to herself and the moon was shining brightly. She didn’t understand it, she didn’t even know him, but she would worry about that tomorrow.

“Enjoy the ride,” she muttered in agreement.

Sebastian followed the Pacific Coast Highway exit until it curved around Santa Monica Bay. The night sky was clear, the stars sparkling in the heavens like diamonds. Sebastian began humming the song Lucy in the Sky, an old Elton John hit, that felt particularly right for the moment.

He briefly took his gaze from the road and glanced at her again. She relaxed in the warmth of his heated stare. It was so peaceful and exhilarating at the same time. She felt the urgency ease a little, though it never went away, just stayed fomenting below the surface, building inside of them both until they would finally be in a place to touch, to kiss, to immerse themselves in one another.

And it would happen. Hope had little doubt that they would both get lucky tonight. That didn’t bother her as much as she’d thought it would. She wasn’t a prude, nor was she a virgin. She’d had one lover. A guy she’d dated through high school, but once they’d done the nasty the summer she turned eighteen, the relationship had fizzled and they’d been broken up within months of becoming lovers.

Yet, she’d just met this guy and, for some stupid reason, the feelings she was having felt real and strong and ... right. She didn’t really know Sebastian beyond his pictures in the tabloid

magazines and an occasional music award show, but every ounce of her being demanded she trust him and she couldn't ignore the compulsion.

With the sudden tightening of his hands on the steering wheel, she sensed that Sebastian struggled against the surge of lust that had settled heavily in his groin.

She laughed out loud and he smiled at her.

She'd felt it! The weirdest thing! She'd felt the aching inside of him, the need to give himself full reign to devour her.

She frowned at that. Devour seemed like such a strong word, yet it completely fit what she knew he was feeling.

The lust ... it was all new to him and that confused her even more. He was a rock star, for Pete's sake. Yet, there it was. His uneasiness with the strength of the lust controlling him made her feel like the luckiest woman on earth. Sebastian had a reputation as a womanizer, but those nameless women couldn't have meant anything to him if he was acting this way towards her. Thanks to their telepathic link, she knew exactly what he was feeling.

Wow! This telepathic stuff was amazing!

* * * *

Despite the sexual tension doing a dance through her nervous system, Hope couldn't help but be a little apprehensive as Sebastian pulled his Mustang into the gated Malibu "Colony" as it was called by the locals. Only wealthy people actually lived in Malibu, and Hope was a little shocked.

Sebastian hadn't been on the music scene very long. The debut album of his band the Fingers 3 had only been released a little over a year ago. The band had been an overnight sensation, but dodged the limelight, preferring to play in clubs and local bars instead of touring. The band's deliberate lack of pursuit of the fame most newly successful bands sought had seemed to make them only that much more popular. The press called them "unique" while some in the industry had said it was downright "brilliant" of them to make their music on their own terms. Still, how could he afford Malibu?

The wall that blocked the scenic Pacific Ocean coastline, as well as the ritzy homes of entertainment makers and shakers, shielded the affluent community thoroughly.

"It's almost deserted." Hope looked around at the empty street, completely lacking in traffic.

"Most people use these houses as second homes, vacation homes, weekend get-aways, that kind of thing," he explained.

She turned to face him, admiring the way his thigh muscles clenched and unclenched as he pumped the clutch while downshifting. "Do you live here year-around?" she asked.

"Yeah, I like it here. In the off-season it can be nice and quiet."

"I can imagine the security is pretty intense."

He shrugged. "People prefer their privacy and Malibu offers it. It's actually a rather unique, quaint little town."

"I bet the homes here run well into the millions."

"In Malibu, people live on estates, and anything less than twelve million is a discounted price," he admitted.

Settling back against the door, she turned to face him, curling her fingers together to keep from touching the hard line of his jaw, his lips....

"Anyway," she took a deep breath to distract herself, "how did you end up here? Does your family own one of the homes?"

"I guess you could say that." He gave her a quick, wary glance she somehow found more unsettling than most of what he'd done that night.

"So, you're what," she asked with a nonchalance she didn't feel, "rich or something?"

"My family gets by," he answered evenly, leaving Hope with the impression that he was being very cautious with his words.

She shrugged. "Don't worry. I'm not after your money."

"I didn't think you were," he snapped, then his lips softened as he glanced down at her breasts. "I know what you're after, baby, and I'm betting my next record contract that it doesn't have a damn thing to do with how much money I have in my bank account."

Swallowing against the truth of his words, Hope continued, "I guess I just want to get to know you. This is so ... strange. I don't understand any of it. What happened tonight was the weirdest thing I've ever experienced."

He didn't answer immediately. Instead, he slowed the car and hit the remote, then drove inside the tall, forbidding iron gate. The main house was up ahead. She could see an outline of it looming against the night sky. The smell of the ocean filled her senses. Sebastian took a left, avoiding the main house, driving closer to the beach.

"We're not going inside?" she asked in surprise.

"I prefer one of the beach houses to the mausoleum up there. If I can hear an echo when I talk, then it's not for me."

Laughing, Hope smiled. "It sounds perfect," she murmured as he pulled to a stop in front of a single-level house that was probably more along the line of a bungalow.

The air around them sizzled as he turned to her, sliding a hand around the back of the seat, lightly tickling her neck with his fingertips. The moonlight put parts of his face into shadow, but what she could see was devastatingly handsome. A rush of desire flowed through her, making her instantly wet and wanting.

Sebastian's nostrils flared suddenly and he leaned towards her, touching the curve of her bottom lip lightly, tracing the contours with his fingertip. "I felt that," he whispered, his voice dark and mysterious.

"What?" she gasped, wanting desperately to close her eyes because the need was so strong, yet she was just as compelled to look at him as his desire played out across his face. Looking at him alone was enough to send her pulse into orbit.

"You're wet." He moved closer still, his hand going to the curve of her cheek, then tangling in the short strands of her hair.

The minty scent of his breath touched her lips, sending her inner muscles into tiny spasms. Was she climaxing? No, she realized. Mini-climaxes. That had never happened before. It had taken major stimulation on her lover's part to get her to reach orgasm. In fact, she had rarely reached that ultimate point of satisfaction and had given up all together just before she and Kyle had broken up. It hadn't been worth the effort or the disappointment.

She would bet the farm that would not be the case after ten minutes in Sebastian's bed.

"Only ten minutes? That's not much time, baby," he whispered against her lips, his light touch headily arousing.

Confusion marred her brow. "You read my mind again."

She could see his confusion as well in the startled brown eyes gazing deeply into her own. Then, they darkened even more, only further with arousal, and she no longer cared if he could read her mind or see the future or fly to Pluto.

She wanted him like her next breath.

Moving her hands upward, Hope touched his chest just below his neck. "I want to touch you everywhere."

"I want that, too."

His tongue flicked out to trace her upper lip. A moan whispered from her at the electricity such an intimate touch generated. She opened her mouth, and he sucked gently on her tongue, sending a bolt of need straight through her.

His arms crushed her body against his. His hands were everywhere, the sensation electrifying. Tilting his head to better take her offering, one hand trailed down her right side to her jeans-clad hip, while the other curved around her shoulders, then her back, pulling her into him.

Hope surrendered with a whimper, completely giving herself over to him, to whatever he wanted, to do whatever he needed. She needed it, too, she realized. Wanting him was like a drug and she was completely addicted. It vaguely crossed her mind to wonder if she would ever be free.

She no longer cared.

His wandering hand had found the warm skin of her stomach and moved upward to the curve of her breast. A tormenting male finger slid beneath the strapless bra she wore and covered her breast completely, caressing her. They both gasped at the contact.

Her breasts weren't anything to write home about and she'd always hated that, had been a little embarrassed by their miniature size, but that apparently wasn't bothering Sebastian if his grunt of satisfaction was any indication.

Hope dug her fingers into his hair, pushing her tongue even further inside his mouth as he sucked on her. The need was overwhelming. The urge to crawl inside his body was so intense she became dizzy with it.

The world moved and she realized it was Sebastian trying to lift her onto his lap. The gearshift rammed into her knee, sending an unexpected shaft of pain through her leg. Pulling back, they both reached to cover the injured area at the same time, but he got there first.

"Sorry, baby. I'm sorry--" His mouth lowered to her neck, as if his lips had to touch some part of her skin. She needed it, too. He kissed and nibbled at the delicate flesh until Hope completely forgot about everything except the heat their mere touch generated.

The need became so acute tiny whimpers burst from her as she sought to connect with him. The hand on her knee moved to her buttocks and he shifted, trying to align their pelvises. Not an easy task in a forty-year old car with bucket seats and a gearshift.

Growling with frustration, Sebastian pulled back. "Bed. Now."

"Oh, yes."

Feeling the rush of emotions sail through him as they settled in his groin was almost enough to push Hope over the edge. She didn't understand it. Couldn't imagine it was even possible. Yet, it was happening to them and she couldn't control it. Didn't even want to try if it meant losing the connection with him.

With a cry of desperation, she scooted backwards, pulling his willing body with her, until her back met the passenger door. Curling her hands in his hair, she shivered against him, her mouth unerringly going to his ear and suckling on his lobe.

Sebastian's laugh turned into a groan as her right hand slid down his chest, immediately zeroing in on the pike in his jeans.

"Not here." His hand covered hers, stopping the urgent caress. "Inside."

She moved against him. "I can't wait."

A deep groan rose from his chest and he pressed her palm against his cock. Her hand molded around him, through the rough fabric of his jeans, and gave his hardness a caressing little squeeze.

He practically jumped. Instead of halting her, this time he bucked against her hand in approval, his wayward body part obviously agreeing with her over his previous objections.

An ache burned inside her to touch him skin-to-skin, with her bare hand wrapped around that part of him that made her mouth water was almost consuming.

Fingers trembling with need, Hope used her other hand to work at his belt, her fingers going still as his mouth moved downward and took a nipple through the thin spandex shirt she wore.

This time Hope bucked against him, trying to align herself against the ridge stretching against the fly of his jeans. It wasn't easy. Sebastian was big. The car was not. Nothing else mattered. Her body burned and only the thick hardness riding her thigh had a chance of easing the pain. She could almost feel the wetness soaking her panties in anticipation.

"Hurry," she whimpered, sliding against him, need piercing her until she thought she would scream.

His knee hit the dashboard. "Damn car," he growled, moving his thick thigh between her legs until it met her clothed warmth.

"Ah." Her inner muscles clenched in relief and demand.

She rode his thigh, desperately moving her hips against it, trying to find that special spot. "Oh, yes, yes." She thrashed as she found it. The building pressure inside her was explosive, so intense, so pulling.

"I want your skin--" she clutched at his shoulders, while his open-mouthed sucking on her neck drove her crazy, "against mine."

Her shirt was bunched up against the top of her breasts, one of his hands was working the button of her jeans, while the other hand propped him against the side of the door, obviously to keep him from crushing her. The fit was so tight in the car that she had no idea how he managed even that.

The sound of the button tearing weaved through her consciousness. Only the urgent grunts he made as he struggled to lower the zipper and dig his hand inside her panties reached her. When his hand found her wet warmth, she melted as sweet relief curled inside her.

"You're so damn wet." He growled the words against her neck and she shivered.

Lifting his head, he stared into her eyes as he moved his fingers downward until they found her. Rubbing around the entrance to her sex, he licked his lips and muttered, "Come for me, baby."

Hope's back arched with the feel of the masculine finger dipping inside her, the tip of his nail massaged the inner tunnel, nearly sending her out of her mind. Restlessly, she moved her legs, wanting to clasp his fingers and open wider for him to thrust hard inside her. She cried out in frustration.

"Please," she begged, "Do something!"

She was going to disintegrate into a million little pieces if she didn't get him inside her. The feeling of impending climax, of hovering over a precipice, was almost more than she could handle.

She wanted him desperately. His skin against hers. She craved his hardness slamming inside her until neither of them knew where the one began and the other ended.

It wasn't enough. Hope had never wanted a man this much in her entire life. Sex had never been practically an out-of-body experience before. She needed everything he had to give or she'd go crazy. "I need your body!" she yelled and reached for it.

Chapter Five

Emotions converged inside Sebastian's mind and skin--merging, enveloping him in a sensual haze of feelings, taste, smells ... leaving him reeling from the sensations.

Hope was heat and warmth and ... emotion. She took him outside of himself, outside of the alien being he had always been. She made him feel human. She made him want to be human just so he could experience these feelings again and again. This was so beyond what his kind had ever known or been taught to expect.

Hope's grasping fingers tore his white buttoned shirt, popping the buttons and pushing it aside while her thumbs did delicious things to his nipples. Her right jeans-clad leg curved around his thigh, pulling him into her heat, while she undulated against him. One nail flicked at his nipple, shooting a dart of lust straight to his groin.

He almost fell to the floorboard. Her lush lips replaced her finger, tugging gently on his nipple, almost sending him into spasms.

That had never happened before!

The urgency rose inside him. He had to feel more! To know where this would lead. Damn, the sensations she made him feel....

The warmth of her core clenched around his finger. Squirming to get a second finger inside her heat, he pumped as deep as he could, his fingers quickly becoming soaked with her juices.

She jerked, gasping, her lips barely leaving his nipple only to return, this time alternately pulling with her lips and swirling around the tiny nub with her tongue.

He buried his face against the top of her head and closed his eyes. He had to get control of himself. At any moment he was going to turn into a raving maniac and attack her. The thought of her inner feminine muscles milking him for every last drop only increased the urge to fuck her and fuck hard.

When her hand returned to his crotch, he moved back, removing his fingers from the fiery clutch of her warmth. Gently caressing her hair, he tucked a wayward strand behind one ear, making her look at him.

Swallowing was difficult. Talking would be even worse. "Hope," he gasped, breathing heavily in the silence of the night.

She arched her neck, need shimmering in her half-lidded eyes. "Please," she cried, biting her lip. "Don't leave me like this."

Sebastian meant to pull back and to lead them inside the bungalow to finish the madness that seemed to have consumed them both. "I want you too," he whispered, bending to give her a hard, deep kiss.

Suddenly, he was drowning in her again. Totally absorbed, he could care less they were out in the open or that any of the Clan could see them if they drove by. The fact that the Clan boys were probably looking for them should've made a difference in his comfort-level. It didn't. The only thing that hit his radar was the woman twisting in his arms.

A blue haze of desire filled his head. He would have her, damn it!

Growling with frustration, Sebastian reversed his movements and landed with his back to the inside of the driver's door, pulling her unresisting form along with him. She landed on top, her pelvis meshed with his, which did little for their situation other than turn him on even more--if that were possible.

He hooked his fingers in the belt loops of her jeans and tried to pull them down gently. Instinct almost had him shredding the damn things just to get her naked so that he could slam her down on his cock, but common sense prevailed and he restrained himself. Using his strength that way would only scare her. He had to get her out of the jeans--the human way. He couldn't stand the thought of frightening her.

She twisted, helping a little, all the while planting desperate kisses on his naked chest.

"Are these pants glued on, woman?" Sebastian practically roared.

Hope swayed, trying to help, but she soon became distracted. Sebastian realized exactly how distracted when her wet mouth moved quickly to his erection that was still covered by the cloth of his jeans. The cloth didn't stop her, sweet, wanton human woman that she was. Her lips molded around his cock and the warmth of her mouth destroyed every other thought in his head.

Hips flexing, Sebastian's fight with Hope's jeans came to an abrupt end. He buried his hands in her hair as his head fell back against the door in ecstasy.

"That's so damn good," he gasped, barely able to open an eyelid as she managed to work the button-snap and zipper that covered the pike they both desperately wanted somewhere inside her body. Her mouth on him seemed like a pretty grand idea. Just the thought of it about sent him into orbit.

And when her cool fingers reached for the heated spear of his flesh, Sebastian knew he was sunk.

She gasped in awe, as if his cock was the most beautiful sight she'd ever seen. Hell, watching her open her mouth to take him was damned near amazing.

Without preliminaries or further foreplay, her mouth covered him, as much as she could. He wasn't exactly regular human size. The males of his species were all greatly endowed, much more so than the general human male population, which could be quite an advantage where the female humans were concerned. Oh, yeah, his guys were popular, if for nothing else than that reason alone.

The mating habits of differing species flew out of his mind as blood raced from his head to his groin.

"Hope," he groaned, burying his fingers in her hair and pressing her down harder than he intended.

He'd never felt such stimulation. Ever. Human women in the past had tried to suck him to orgasm, but it didn't work that way for his people. His kind got off on their female partner's orgasm, not the other way around. So, he'd always declined.

But this ... this was different.

The sensations were rolling, curling, twisting inside of him. He swelled and elongated even more than usual when about to have sex. This time was different. He actually felt desire. Reveled in it. This had never happened to him before. He'd never felt these sensations rushing through him. His cock had never wanted a human female's body before.

Hope's lips curled around his penis, her long fingers cupping his sac below, as she worked the stem up and down. The pull of her mouth had him bowing over her head, holding her against him, and then dropping back against the door in ecstasy when he could no longer stand the intense sensations.

The roaring in his head combined with the pressure building inside his cock. The wet cavern of her mouth enslaved him until it built and built and built....

With a hoarse cry of need, Sebastian grasped her head and shoved her down, just as she gave a little moan. He pumped his hips fast and hard, loving the sweet, wet warmth enveloping him. The sensation was indescribable. Beyond anything he'd ever known.

"Ah ..." he groaned as a sharp wave, more intense than any other, grabbed at him. His spine tingled. He felt the pressure, a bubble inside his sac, growing and expanding. His eyes widened as she watched him watch her.

"Baby," he cried helplessly, feeling tears well in his eyes. "Please--" He had no idea what he was begging her for. What could possibly happen now? What was that sweet mouth doing to him?

Her heated gaze continued to spear him with fire as her mouth lowered again and she took all of him. He felt his cock hit the back of her throat and the sucking pull of her mouth gave him the greatest pleasure he'd ever known.

Fear shot through him. For a split second, he wondered if he could keep from hurting her. He was so much stronger than she was. The sex was intense--too intense--what if he couldn't control himself? What if he lost it?

Then he did. The control slipped.

Spasming, he felt the beginning of liquid shooting from his cock into her mouth. Unable to stop himself, his hands tangled in her hair, holding her tight against his pumping hips.

He was too rough. He had to slow down. Was he hurting her? His damn cock was too large for her mouth and was probably strangling the poor woman. He could swear the tip of him was sliding down her throat.

But he couldn't stop. Hope didn't ease up one little bit, leaving him lost in a hunger that seared his soul.

Vulnerable, helpless, mindless with the pleasure/pain of the building intensity, he yelled as he pushed forward one last time. He felt the tip of his cock hit the back of her throat again, her greedy mouth pulling, drinking, and devouring him like nothing else ever had before.

Explosions ripped through him, sending his mind into chaos. Another brief moment of fear ricocheted inside his head. This had never happened to his kind before. Any hope for rational thought was then blasted away by the sweet immersion of pleasure as he felt himself reach a peak that had never been his before.

He gasped her name, shouted it, and continued shouting it until he was hoarse as he emptied himself into her mouth. For endless minutes--hours--the spasms continued, jerking inside him until every muscle he had tightened.

He expanded to enormous length and width, overflowing inside her mouth until she could no longer contain all of him. But she didn't stop avariciously devouring his essence, greedily taking every last drop of him until he was completely spent.

The world receded around him. His last thought was the remembered sensation of the wet mouth sucking him into sweet oblivion and the reminder that, at the ripe old age of five hundred and seventeen years, an angel had given him his first orgasm.

Chapter Six

Hope shook with tremors, knowing immediately when Sebastian lost consciousness. Her body reacted to his. Weakness engulfed her. She barely had time to release his flaccid penis from her grip before she collapsed against him, her head nestled against his stomach as she slipped into unconsciousness.

The pleasure woke her.

Hope's eyes opened on the sound of her own moan, carried on a wave of pleasure deep inside the pit of her stomach.

The first sight that met her eyes was Sebastian's handsome face, his lips turned up slightly into a sensual smile. She found herself returning it automatically. A need she'd not realized she had was somehow fulfilled by the boyish grin, the gentle teasing in his dark, dark eyes.

"Finally," he muttered. "I didn't think you'd ever wake up."

Stretching, Hope purred. "Mmm. Who could stay asleep while being touched like that?"

"True," Sebastian admitted ruefully, as his finger took another teasing swipe across her bare nipple.

It took a moment, but Hope soon realized that she was bare-breasted, still wearing her jeans, and flat on her back on a sofa. "Where are we? Why did I fall asleep?"

"The bungalow. And I guess you were sleepy."

Sebastian straightened from his kneeling position on the floor next to the sofa. "You were so out of it you didn't even budge while I carried you in here." A tan finger gently stroked her cheek. "Hell, I barely made it in here myself. You blew my head off out there, sweetheart," he said in amazement. "I've never felt anything like that. I mean, you have no way of knowing this, but I really have never felt anything like that before."

Heat flushed her face, but more than a little pleased, she reached up and touched the dimple in his chin. "Likewise."

His full-fledged grin was invigorating. "Are you okay, now?"

Nodding, Hope sat up as he moved back, then stood and adjusted her bra. In that position, the tenting of his jeans was blatantly apparent.

"You're, uh, hard. Again?" she asked in amazement.

"Yeah." He grinned. "Something to do with you, I'd guess."

Shaking her head, she smiled in pure enjoyment. "But you, I mean, you already, uh, came." She could feel her cheeks heat with embarrassment.

"Uh-huh. Apparently, it wasn't enough." He tangled a hand in her hair and murmured huskily, his lips softening with arousal. "Apparently, you do something to me that is beyond my understanding. My body seems to have a mind of its own and it's fiercely demanding you right now."

Despite the compulsion to give into him, something held her back. He obviously saw it because he straightened, a frown marring the perfection of his forehead. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know you. I mean, I only spoke to you a little last night and even then...."

"We didn't exactly have a conversation," he finished for her. "Look, I'm sorry about that. I don't know what happened to me. I overreacted. You don't have to be afraid of me. I don't hurt women. Just asshole guys."

When she didn't answer, he cupped her face between his palms. "You do believe me, don't you? You know I won't hurt you?"

Did she? "I want to." Hearing his muffled curse, she hurried to explain. "I really want to. It's just that I don't know you."

"You know me," he said meaningfully. "You just had my cock stuck down your throat."

Flushed with embarrassment and anger, Hope tried to pull away, but he prevented her movement, gently cupping her shoulders and urgently murmuring, "I'm sorry, baby ... please ... that was crude. I don't mean to be that way with you. I don't want to be. It's just ... I-I'm in uncharted waters here. I don't know what it is I'm feeling for you, but I have to believe you're feeling it just as strongly."

She couldn't deny it, but that didn't mean it was right or the best thing for her. Yet, she remained quiet, letting him speak. She sensed a deep need inside him to try to make sense of what was happening between them.

"Before I saw you walk into the door last night at the club I knew exactly who I was, what I wanted, and everything made sense. Then I saw you. Now ... nothing makes sense except that I have to have you with me. I can't let you go. The hell of it is I think you feel the same way."

"Yes," she whispered, her chest unconsciously arching into his body in reaction to his words. And what they meant. "But I'm still scared."

"I know, baby." Sebastian crushed her against him and she wrapped her arms around his waist, snuggling into the hard contours of his body.

"The weird part is," she began, breathing deeply of his musky scent. "We've never even been introduced to one another." She pulled back then, frowning. "You're famous, so it stands to reason that I'd know you. But you don't know me. Why would a famous person like you who has people throwing themselves at you day and night let me in like this?"

Sebastian frowned, a wary look invading his gaze. It was as if he'd suddenly put a shield in place. She could see his eyes and he could see her, but nothing was revealed. She couldn't read him.

Resolve hardened her against the desire strumming in her veins. She pulled back from him. "Don't play games with me, Sebastian. There's something freaky weird going on here. It was like we were reading each other's mind earlier. What was that about?"

Swallowing hard, he glanced above her head. "I don't know."

"What are you hiding from me?"

He turned his gaze back to her, leaning down to kiss her forehead. "I'm not hiding anything. I have no idea what caused this. It's weird to me, too. Maybe it was the intensity of the attraction. Who knows?"

"Stop lying to me! That's just plain stupid."

His entire body became still. "You're calling me a liar?" he asked carefully, his voice deep and his body dwarfing hers. Sebastian was a big man. At six three and heavily muscled, he had a lot of power in that sculptured body. He'd already proven how easily he could toss a man through a wall.

A shadow of fear trickled down her spine. Old habits died hard.

He took a step back. Don't look at me like that. I won't hurt you, damn it!

She jerked back at the same time Sebastian did. Their eyes widened with surprise.

"You said that?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"Did you mean to say that inside my head?"

He gave her a 'Give me a break' look.

"Okay," she breathed. "Stupid question. Then here's a better one: Why the hell is it happening? How can you speak to me without opening your mouth, yet I can clearly hear you?"

"It works vice versa, remember?" he reminded her. "Earlier, I heard what you were thinking, too."

"Yeah." Fear curled in her stomach. "What's happening to us?"

He opened his arms and she went without protest into the comforting shelter of his embrace. "I don't know, baby, but whatever it is, we'll figure it out. Trust me?"

Hope gazed up into his intent expression. He seemed so sincere and as confused as she, but unwilling to let it come between them.

Them? When had they become a them? They didn't even know one another.

"How can this be?" she asked suddenly.

Sebastian gazed down into her face and she heard his thoughts as clearly as if they were her own.

I've always known you, Hope. Because you're mine and I'll never let you go.

Hope opened her mouth to respond to his possessiveness just as the sound of a motor could be heard roaring down the driveway.

Sebastian hurried to the window, pulled back the blinds, and cursed. "Get dressed," he said tightly. "We have to leave. Now."

Hope stumbled to find her top and pull it over her head while Sebastian grabbed his cell phone, jackets for them, then turned to grasp her hand to pull her out the back door.

"Where are we going?" she managed to ask just as they left the house behind.

"Anywhere but here."

He pulled her into a shed where a rebuilt motorcycle was propped against the side of the garage. The motorcycle looked like it had seen better days, but he slung his leg over the seat, inserted a key, then revved it.

"Come on!"

Hope settled behind him, clutching his waist tightly with both arms. Fear gripped her vitals. What was she doing? Was she crazy? This guy was famous, but she really didn't know him.

"Hang on," he called, then zoomed out of the shed into the night air.

They headed down a trail that edged the beach, swerving and turning, barely missing the unevenness of the ground. Were they being followed by paparazzi?

As they left the trail and neared another iron gate, Sebastian slowed.

She could hear him cursing as he halted.

"Can you get through the gate?" she called into his ear.

Nodding, he drove the motorcycle to the gate and reached up into a hidden alcove, then pushed the button. The gate slowly squeaked open, but not before the sound of a motor echoed behind them. The lights of another vehicle curved up the drive ahead, turning into the road leading to the gate.

They were blocked in.

Sebastian mentally called himself every foul name in the book. How could he be so stupid as to bring her to the Malibu compound? He knew the Clan would find them there. It would be the first place they'd look. It'd be the first place he'd look. He'd been too damn horny and it could get them both killed.

He glanced back at his passenger. She looked scared shitless, if that was possible, and she had no fucking idea exactly how much danger she was actually in.

He had no business getting her mixed up with his people. How could he expose her to them, much less endanger his Clan's secrets? The danger of being exposed to the humans was always there, and one his people had dealt with over the years with harsh consequences for the humans who inadvertently found out the Clan's secrets. The Clan took secrecy very seriously. Punishment for exposing the Clan to the humans was death--plain and simple.

"Not ready to die yet," he muttered beneath his breath, gunned the motor, then turned left heading away from the lights and into woods that led to the beach.

Hope clung to him in fear. He really didn't know what she was afraid of because there was no way she could possibly know exactly what was following them. She probably sensed it from him, he realized. The very last thing he wanted was to scare her, but he couldn't allow them to be caught. He shivered at the thought of what the Clan would do to her if they found them.

* * * *

The Pacific Coast Highway wasn't exactly the safest place to be at night on the back of a motorcycle doing ninety miles an hour. Hope clung to Sebastian. He felt her fingers digging into his stomach and winced as a nail bit into the skin.

Poor kid. She had no idea what she'd gotten herself into by getting involved with him.

Just the feel of her arms wrapped around his waist did things to him that he'd never felt before. And forget it if he let his mind wander to their encounter earlier in the Mustang.

Talk about blowing a guy's mind! He'd never experienced anything like that. Having an orgasm wasn't a Clan guy's objective. Getting his human female partner to have an orgasm and siphoning off her energy was the goal. If humans felt the way he had felt with Hope's delicious mouth wrapped around his cock, no wonder human males killed for it. Needing the energy was one thing, but an orgasm went beyond anything he'd ever experienced. It made him want to hold her close and never let go.

Sebastian sensed how wrong it was to need the girl the way he did. She was only a human, beneath his notice, but stopping himself would be impossible now. Marcus had often said he was the most emotional of all the Clan on Earth. Now, Sebastian knew for certain that Marcus was more than right.

He had no idea what to do with Hope or how they'd get out of this mess. She didn't know the danger they were in, and he didn't dare tell her what he was or what he could do. She'd hate him then. Worse, she'd probably run from him, screaming in fear.

The thought of losing her stung his gut as if someone had stuck a knife in his stomach. He couldn't lose her, not when he'd just found her. Whatever need she fulfilled in him would not be denied. Exactly how he planned on going about keeping her was another story.

At the moment, there were more pressing issues. Her drooping body meant the hours they'd been on the road were too much for her. He had to stop soon.

Rest. That's what she needed. What he needed was her.

Chapter Seven

Dozing, Hope barely caught herself from falling sideways off the bike. Sebastian's left arm was there immediately, steadying her. He'd probably felt her slip or the loosening of her arms. She was so tired. Thankfully, Sebastian slowed the motorcycle as they rounded a curve then made a turn to the right. A small, fifties-era motel sat off a little way from the highway, its rear facing the crackling ocean below.

Trepidation filled her as they rode the bike to a stop before they reached the building.

With feet planted on the ground, Sebastian turned to the side enough to face her. "You get off here and hide behind those bushes while I check us in. I'd rather they think I'm alone. You--" he said with a soft smile as he smoothed a strand of wayward hair from the curve of her cheek, "are so pretty they'd remember you."

She grimaced at his comment. With her windblown hair and chaffed cheeks, she imagined 'pretty' wouldn't be a word to describe her. "I'm not the one who's famous. Wouldn't it make more sense for me to get us checked in than you?"

He cursed then reached down to kiss her lightly on the lips. "I think I like smart girls. Are you okay with that?"

Of course she wasn't. "Sure."

Hope struggled to lift her near-dead leg off the bike. Sebastian quickly steadied her, his hand lingering on the curve of her waist.

"What if they ask how I got here?"

He lifted an arrogant brow. "You want to drive my bike up to the front door?"

She cringed at the thought. "Not really. It's just that they might wonder where I came from. Plus, they probably heard the motorcycle."

Glancing around, Sebastian cut off the motor then pushed the bike behind a clump of trees. "I'll wait here. When you check in, tell them you had car trouble and your auto club dropped you off."

That made sense.

Shivering, Hope rubbed at the goose bumps on her arms, despite the thick jacket he'd given her before they'd gotten on the motorcycle. The next thing she knew he was in front of her, clasping her face between his palms.

"Are you sure you're all right? If you can't do this, I can. Chances are they won't recognize me."

Shaking her head, Hope argued, "No. I'll go."

A sensuous smile turned the edges of his lips upward. "Good girl," he whispered, his lips tickling hers. "Go get us a room."

Pulling back, he released her, a promise of sensual delights flaring in the dark orbs of his gaze. He reached into his back pocket, pulled out his wallet and handed her four twenties. "This should get it. The sign says \$59.99 per night for a double. We only need one room."

Feeling wicked and anxious and excited all at once, Hope nodded. "I'll be right back."

"I'll be here." With that, Sebastian moved off the road and out of sight.

The short walk to the motel lobby was done in record time. Hope was freezing and anxious to get this over with. A balding man, probably in his mid-sixties, manned the desk while watching a TV Land rerun.

Looking up, he straightened slowly, and then turned to face her. "Can I help you?"

"Yes. Please. I need a room for one night only."

He eyed her. "Just yourself, young lady?"

"Yes, um, just me."

Surreptitiously, he glanced out the window. "Where's your car?"

"I had t-trouble," she stuttered. "Car trouble. The auto club dropped me off here while they took it into town."

"Newport?"

Confused, Hope stared. "What?"

"Did they take your car to a garage in Newport Beach?"

"Probably. I'm not sure."

He grabbed a form then slid it across to her. "Fill this out while I get your key ready. Did you get a card from the driver?"

"Um, the what?"

The clerk frowned. "I hope the driver told you where to pick up your car. It ain't safe for a woman alone, but depending upon what kind of car you have, some of these guys just steal it, you know? Not a good place to be out at dark like this."

"I have a cell phone." Actually, she didn't. She had no idea what she'd done with her purse. Had she left it in Emily's car?

Hope hurriedly completed the form then gave it back to him.

"That'll be \$68.27, Ms.--" he glanced at the card, "King. Will you be paying with a credit card?"

"Cash."

Darn it! Had she really used Sebastian's last name? What an idiot! If he found out, it would be so embarrassing. Just because they'd had almost sex and planned to have real sex in the very near future, it didn't mean he wanted her using his name. Plus, what if the paparazzi found out? She'd be doubly humiliated.

Once finished with the check-in process and feeling like a complete loser in the cloak-and-dagger game, Hope walked out the door and headed in the direction where she'd left Sebastian.

Almost eerily, he emerged out of the shadows. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah." She held up the plastic motel key as proof.

He nodded then turned to the motorcycle. "Let's get inside."

The inside of the room was exactly what one would expect for \$59.99. One queen bed with a bedspread made of coarse material and a pattern that was prevalent in every other cheap motel room across the country. A single dresser, half covered by a rickety RCA television. A phone on the nightstand--no clock--but a Bible in the only drawer. A single chair sat near a lamp that didn't work. The carpet had probably been around since the seventies, but the walls had what looked like a fresh coat of paint. Hope walked to the tiny bathroom and switched on the light. The dingy room had a shower with a sheer shower curtain. The toilet--she'd rather not go there. The room seemed more like a '\$29.99' room than an '\$70.00' room.

Turning back, Hope saw that Sebastian had pulled the motorcycle into the foyer of the room near the door and propped it on its stand next to the wall.

“Why did you bring that in here?” she asked.

He glanced up. “I didn’t want anyone to see it outside. It’s a way to track us.”

Uneasy, Hope crossed her arms. “I’m a little confused. I know you’re famous, but how would someone know your motorcycle tag number? That’s not something the paparazzi usually have, is it?”

He walked to the dresser and began emptying out his pockets. “It’s not the media that I’m worried about.”

Hope shook her head in confusion. “Then who are you so worried will find us?”

“It’s ... complicated,” he muttered without turning around.

Stepping forward, Hope faced him. “I think I have a right to know.”

Sebastian looked down at her, a worried frown creasing his forehead. “You do. I just don’t want to tell you.”

That took her by surprise. “Why not?”

His lips twisted in derision. “I’m afraid of your reaction.”

A horrible thought occurred to her. “Please tell me you’re not married.”

“I’m not married.” He walked away from her to double check the door deadbolt.

She followed him. “A girlfriend?”

“Nope.” He still didn’t look up. Was he avoiding her gaze?

“Who then?” When he didn’t answer immediately, she demanded, “Who is following us?”

“I’m not sure anyone is.”

“We left your house with people following us. We ran from them. They were inside the gate so they couldn’t have been paparazzi. Who were they?”

“I’m not sure,” he hedged.

“This is ridiculous. Either you tell me who is following us or I’m out of here.”

Sebastian turned to her with sorrow. “All I want to do right now is hold you.”

“I doubt that’s all you want to do,” she snapped, feeling the heaviness of desire settling around them and fighting it.

His grin practically lit up the room. “Yeah, you’re right about that.”

Sebastian moved closer, his palms sliding up her arms until they reached her shoulders. He pushed the jacket off and it fell forgotten to the floor. One hand curved around the back of her neck as he bent his head to touch his lips to hers.

She pulled back. “Stop distracting me! Who is following us?”

His hold tightened on her. “We’ll talk later, okay?”

“What? No!”

He sighed heavily. “We’re both going to be too busy to breathe in a moment, Hope, much less talk.” His mouth softened sensually and she feared she was a goner. “I’m going to lick every inch of your hot body and listen to your screams when I fuck you with my tongue.” His teeth nipped at her bottom lip and her insides clenched at the image his words provoked.

“Sebastian--”

“I want to kiss that sweet mouth until you beg for me.” He took a deep breath, “What I need is to be inside you so hard and deep until there’s nothing between us. I ache for it.”

Despite her confusion, she felt herself falling under his spell again as his tongue soothed the nip on her lip and sucked it gently into his mouth.

His tongue licked the crease of her lips, until she could do little more than part her mouth with a moan to let him in. Their tongues tangled and he sucked hers into his mouth. Fire settled in the pit of her stomach.

The hand wrapped around her neck curved around the back of her head as he tilted her face upward. His other hand curved around her waist, pulling her body into his. The open-mouthed kiss sent her senses into overdrive and Hope balanced on her tip-toes as she lifted her hands, digging her nails into his shirt in an attempt to get closer to the heat of his mouth.

Their conversation slipped from her mind. Her body was on fire, aching, wanting all that he promised. Nothing else mattered but this insatiable need, this burning inside her to have the emptiness filled only by him.

One of his hands lifted to cup her breast and her inner muscles clenched. She thought she would go mad when his fingers first rubbed the engorged nipple through her blouse, then began pulling at it with gentle, tiny tugs that swept heat straight to her groin.

She tried to get closer and protested the loss of heat from his lips when he moved his mouth to her throat briefly before zeroing in on the nipple he'd just prepared. Through the cloth, he sucked. Hard. Hope almost convulsed. Rocking fiercely against him, her hands flew to his hair. Sebastian was bent at an awkward angle, his open mouth devouring her.

"Closer!" she gasped, lifting one leg to get closer to the hardness pressing against his jeans. "Please, ah..." She rubbed against him, feeling the full ridge of him against the seam of her jeans. "Not enough . . . more, oh, please, more!"

A chuckle whispered from the vicinity of her nipple just before he lifted and swept her blouse up and over her head. He quickly worked the snap and straps of her bra. They were lying on the floor within seconds.

"That was fast," she gasped.

His eyes sparkled with laughter and something else, something dark and lustful. "Just doing what I'm told, ma'am."

He pulled her unclothed upper body against his, and then lowered his head to the rigid peak again. Just before the hot heat of his mouth returned to the nub, he rubbed it--almost gently--with his thumb. "So damn beautiful. Like a raspberry made just for me."

The huskiness of his voice, the near reverence he spoke with, had her inner muscles clenching, preparing for the ultimate intimacy.

Feeling like a combination of mush and an electrical wire gone crazy, Hope tugged at his hair. "I need you. There. Now."

He chuckled again and shot a quick glance to her face just before his tongue licked her. She moaned at the electrifying feel of it. Just that one small touch was enough to send her into near orgasm.

Then he shivered and she wondered if he was losing control.

With a groan, Sebastian pulled her lower body against him. His mouth returned to her breast with a vengeance. Open-mouthed, he began to alternately suck and lave his tongue around the tender nipple. While one hand held the breast in place for him, his other hand left her back and went to the other breast, plumping that nipple.

Pure electricity shot from her breasts to her clenching inner muscles. She was almost there. She felt the precipice, with her hovering over the edge, so close yet so far away. Just one more nudge, one more touch or lick...

Her spine tingled as the heaviness of passion settled in her stomach. His hand returned to her back and he began to suck hard on her nipple, the pressure intense and blinding.

Hope clutched at his shirt, pulling him close, then he bit her nipple, little more than a nip, but it devastated her. Spasms slammed into her and she felt the wetness seep into her panties. Her body clenched but, despite the pleasure, it still ached. The emptiness was still there, weeping for his hard cock to fill it.

She heard Sebastian's gasp and husky moan and wondered if he, too, had just climaxed. That thought was dispelled when his hands lowered to her jeans-covered hips and he lifted her, pulling her against the hardness pulsing inside his faded jeans. She wrapped her legs around his waist, loving the feel of the hard ridge against the place she so wanted it to be, yet hating the fact that there was so much between them.

"Yeah. Too many clothes," Sebastian gasped, lifting his head from her breast.

I agree, she thought.

So, let's lose them, came his heavy-lidded response.

Uneasiness began to overshadow the rosy glow the orgasm had given her. This wasn't right, this ... telepathy thing.

Panic flared in his eyes. "Don't think! Damn it, how can you think about anything right now, except fucking me?"

The hands on her ass rolled her against his hips at the same time he rocked forward.

"There is that," she conceded on a gasp, grinding her nub against his cock. It felt so good. So right.

He knew exactly what she wanted. His hands cupped her ass and he rubbed her up and down his hardness. Hope gasped, pressing closer, all thoughts of telepathy, paparazzi, and everything else except satiating this need vanished from her mind as if all the blood inside her brain had settled into that one tiny nub of need.

Sebastian kissed her throat, stringing kisses from the hollow up to her ear. He nipped at her ear then whispered, "You like it, don't you, baby? You like having me ready for you, aching to be buried deep. You'll probably be so tight, I'll have to work hard just to get inside. But when I do--"

Hope whimpered at his words and tightened her legs around him, moving hard against his cock.

He nipped at her ear again. "Answer me," he demanded his voice hard and edgy. "Do you like it, baby?"

"Yes," she managed to gasp as his fingers wandered to the crease in her jeans, rubbing and exploring what she knew was the wetness that had already saturated her panties.

"Mmm. So hot," he whispered. "Do you have any idea what it feels like to know you're so wet for me that it's soaked through your jeans?"

Hope couldn't answer because his fingers had dug in and were trying to touch her through the cloth. She tightened around him, alternately pressing against his hardness and the tickling sensation from his fingers.

Then his finger moved upward and was rubbing at the place which held the ultimate essence of her pleasure. The heat was rising within her, another orgasm beating at the doors of her womb, wanting but not having because their damn clothes were in the way!

Sebastian growled deep inside his throat and practically threw her on the bed. Before she'd even recovered from the first bounce, he was on her, straddling her body with his knees, his fingers digging into the snap and zipper of her jeans. He jerked them with her panties down her legs and parted her.

Hope barely breathed as he looked at her body. His hands held her knees apart and he just stared, as if enraptured with the pinkness and throbbing clit and clenching warmth.

Unable to stand it any longer, she rocked upward, begging for him, for something! She ached so much.

“Please,” she begged. “Sebastian....”

Seeming to come out of his spell, Sebastian moved her knees even farther apart, then lowered his mouth and put his tongue straight inside her as he’d promised.

Hope’s back arched from the bed and she convulsed in a riot of aching, soothing pleasure. His tongue continued to fuck her, like tiny butterflies tickling the inside of her channel, sending the most exquisite sensations through her.

Spasms racked her insides and she dug her nails into the cheap bedspread and arched. It was so good!

“Don’t stop,” she begged, almost incoherent.

His fingers grasped her hips, settling her against his mouth again and continued to torment her with the ultimate pleasure.

He lifted her ass with his hands, settling his shoulders between her thighs. At the sight of his dark head bent over her and, considering what he was doing to her with his tongue, tears of aching pleasure seeped from her eyes to roll into her hair.

Hope’s back arched again as his tongue took a swipe of her nub. She’d never felt anything like this. Her boyfriend had obviously been useless in bed if this was what sex was supposed to be like.

She wanted to die. She wanted to scream, to yell, to dissolve into a puddle.

He’d eased up on fucking her with his tongue and was now tormenting her in other ways. Little tremors shook her as his tongue toyed with her clit, making tiny little circles on it, and then flicking it at the end.

“Sebastian!” She almost came off the bed when he started sucking gently on her nub. Gasping, she couldn’t breathe. Her legs twitched, bowing until they circled his back, digging into his spine.

“I’m dying ... please harder,” she gasped, not even aware she’d spoken.

A chuckle was his response. His hands clutched her closer to him, lifting her slightly, before his lips tightened on her clit and he sucked hard.

Hope screamed as electricity and heat devoured her insides. She exploded into a million pieces of sensation. The most extreme pleasure she’d ever known racked her body. She ceased to exist. The room vanished. Nothing mattered but the warmth flooding her and the man pleasuring her.

She heard him then, a strangled cry from his lips, but she couldn’t see him. Her eyelids were too heavy, as if something was pulling her down to darkness.

Within moments, she had fainted.

Chapter Eight

“Hope? Honey? Are you all right?” Concerned, Sebastian moved from between Hope's legs to lie beside her. Tapping her cheek lightly, he realized she was out cold.

Damn. Sebastian propped his head up with his hand as he settled down next to her. Even against the ugly bedspread, she was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. The energy boost he'd gotten from her orgasm had truly rocked his world--not as much as her mouth on his cock, but it had been a close second.

Leaning over, he kissed her on the lips. “Wake up, sleeping beauty, you're not done yet,” he murmured, nuzzling the hair at her temples, all the while his hands couldn't resist roaming the curves of her body.

The sweet shape of her breasts called to him again and he plumped them. The flat belly beckoned and his hand wandered to smooth over the soft skin until he could no longer resist the small thatch of blonde hair that hid the sweetest place on any planet he'd ever known.

Before long, he had his fingers buried inside her, while he licked at the fragrant skin of her throat, then shoulder.

“Wake up, Hope,” he breathed, the ache in his pants almost unbearable. He wanted to be inside her! Now!

“Listen, babe, if you don't wake up soon, you're going to miss the fireworks because I'm going to be buried inside you and won't it be sad to miss our first time together? Hmm?”

She popped one eye open. With a quirked brow, she challenged, “You wouldn't dare?”

Feeling mischievous, he grinned. “Wanna try me?”

She returned his challenge with a sultry laugh. “I'll try anything once. Especially if it consists of tall, dark, and handsome singers.”

“All singers?”

“Just the sexy ones.”

He licked her lips. “I accept then.”

Tilting her head flirtatiously, she quipped, “Maybe I didn't mean you specifically.”

Sebastian's hand moved to her stomach. “You'd better mean only me or else I'll have to beat up my competition and that won't go over very well in the tabloids.”

Sensing her sudden discomfort, Sebastian leaned down and kissed her forehead. “What's wrong?”

“What if the paparazzi find us? Will it hurt your career? My dad will freak because he didn't want...,” she halted, biting her lip in obvious embarrassment.

“He didn't want you to see me again?” he finished for her, coming quickly to that conclusion. What human father would want his daughter mixed up with a guy like him?

“The whole wild rocker thing, huh?” he asked, with a tiny smile.

She shook her head. “He didn't really know about you. He just didn't want me going to Downfall.”

As if suddenly realizing her state of undress, Hope moved to hide herself.

Unable to help himself, Sebastian burst out laughing.

“What?” Embarrassment reddened her cheeks.

Leaning down, he kissed her pretty nose. "I've seen and tasted everything you have to offer, sweetheart. It's a little late to be modest."

Her blue eyes flashed. "You're fully clothed. I'm not," she snapped.

Grinning, Sebastian leaned in, feeling the thing in his jeans demanding to get to out. "That can be remedied easily enough."

He moved back and jerked his shirt over his head. It landed in a heap somewhere on the old carpet. He didn't care. Right now, his body demanded attention.

Seeing her so miffed now after watching her climax so beautifully a few minutes before made him want to do it again. He wanted to be immersed in her, to feel her clenching around his cock while he thrust inside her.

It would be hard the first time. Maybe fast, too. Yeah, very fast, if what he was feeling was any indication. He'd last, oh, maybe five seconds once she started clenching around him, milking him. He'd go off like a Fourth of July fireworks display.

He shook his head at the thought. Going off prematurely before his partner had been satisfied had never been a problem before--because it had been impossible to climax. He hadn't cared about it one way or the other. But considering what her mouth had brought him to at the compound, well, it was time to reevaluate.

He stood and jerked his boots, hopping around on one foot. Oh, yeah, he could hardly wait to get naked with her.

She laughed at his antics and it set off something inside of him, something he hadn't known was missing--a warmth, maybe. The feeling of being with her--even though he wasn't draining her energy--was incredible. Her smile settled warmth in his chest somewhere in the vicinity of his heart.

"What's so damn funny?" he growled, but he could feel his smug, shit-faced grin and knew she wasn't worried he was angry with her.

"You!" she cackled. "You're jumping around like a bouncy ball is on the bottom of your feet."

"Very funny. Wait'll I get you, my little pretty," he warned with a menacing growl.

She hooted even louder when Sebastian tossed away the last boot and flung himself on her. He shoved aside her legs and fell full length against her.

Hope gasped, amusement flying from her features to be replaced by a hunger in her eyes. Her lips parted, as if the bottom lip had become too heavy with lust and desire and need, he realized.

"I need, too," he choked, propping himself on his elbows next to her head, while his hands buried themselves in the short blonde strands. "Oh, Hope," he rocked against her, "I need you so damn bad."

"Me, too," she whispered, reaching a hand up to bury it in his thick black hair. "Give it all to me," she demanded and he was lost.

Sebastian surged against her, setting up a rhythm that nearly set his balls on fire. He dug one hand in her hair to keep their searching mouths together, while the other clamped around her bare buttock, squeeze, caressing, pleasuring until she whimpered beneath him. Having her naked skin against him was heaven.

Her hands weren't still either. They unerringly zoned in on his jeans-covered hardness.

"I'm gonna come, baby," he gasped.

"Inside me," she demanded as he reached for the snap and zipper.

"I can't wait, baby ... sorry. It'll be ... fast."

Hope arched against him and murmured at the same time, “Oh, yes....”

The snap gave. The zipper sliced down fluidly. “And hard.”

“Arghhh.” Her body jackknifed against him again.

“That's it, baby,” he murmured almost incoherently, as he released his aching hardness from its confinement. He felt the hot heat of her against the back of his fingers.

This time, he wanted to be buried deep inside her with her inner muscles milking and clenching around him when he came. And he would come. He'd already done so once with her and he'd do it again. Only with her could he actually reach orgasm and now that he'd had it once, he'd die for it again.

As he positioned the blunt head against the sweet heat of her, he felt the tight entrance, the wetness, and groaned as he moved another inch inside. Electricity swirled in the air around them, sending tiny pulses of heat through his bloodstream until he thought he would go mad.

“I'll die if I don't have you,” he gasped, just as the door crashed open.

They'd been found.

Chapter Nine

Clan Compound – Desert near Phoenix, Arizona

They'd had to pull him from her. Sebastian had resisted, almost ready to either cry or tear them apart with his bare hands. Even now, he wanted her enough to die for it.

In his gilded prison, Sebastian sat on the sofa with his head buried in his hands. They would kill her. How could he have been so selfish, so caught up in his own lust to stop at a motel with the Clan so close behind them?

He knew the Clan would be looking for them with a vengeance. He'd known he had to put distance between them and Malibu. Even then, eluding his people would've been almost impossible.

But no, he had to stop a few hours out of L.A. to get his rocks off, he thought with a self-loathing that went beyond anything he'd felt before.

Standing, Sebastian raked a hand through his tangled hair as he paced the room that had become his prison. This was one of the few rooms in the Arizona Compound that had been made specifically to hold one of their kind. Completely windowless, the room held a bed, sofa, chair and an attached bathroom. It could've passed for any other luxurious room on any other luxurious estate anywhere in the country, except that the door leading into the hallway didn't have a knob on the inside. The key parts of the door were made of a special alloy that would defy the strength of a football team.

The room would hold even him.

Hope. Where is she? Oh, God, what have I done bringing her into this mess?

Without success, he'd tried to make that telepathic link they seemed to have work. All he'd managed to do was give himself a raging headache.

The click of the lock had Sebastian flying towards the door. Relief flashed through him at the sight of Marcus walking into the room. That feeling was short-lived as Andrew walked in right behind him.

Even though he'd been expecting it, seeing Andrew--the Clan judge, jury, and executioner--sent a ripple of dread down his spine.

"What's he doing here?" Sebastian demanded.

"Shut up," Marcus snapped.

"Good advice," Andrew drawled. "I suggest you listen to your friend here because you're very lucky to have him at the moment."

Sebastian growled. "Bite me."

"Sorry to disappoint, Seb, but I don't swing that way."

Sebastian turned to Marcus, absolutely refusing to acknowledge the fear settling in his stomach at the fact that Andrew had made an appearance. "Where is she?" he demanded.

"Sebastian..." Marcus began.

He'd had enough. "No, damn it! Tell me Hope is okay. If either of you--" he glared at Andrew, "has hurt her--"

"Cut the crap," Andrew snapped, whipping his black trench coat out before he settled on the sofa cushion Sebastian had vacated earlier. His dark hair was tethered in a ponytail hanging

down his back. "What're you gonna do, huh? You've broken the law. You're a prisoner, man. So shut the fuck up."

The need to kill the menace in front of him struck deep inside Sebastian. Andrew instilled fear and terror in those he met. He had one purpose among the Clan and it wasn't pretty. For Andrew to be brought into the situation could only mean one thing: Someone was going to feel some major hurt.

"You broke the rules." Andrew calmly regarded Sebastian.

"Fuck you."

"Again. You're not my type," Andrew volleyed. "Your actions made the Clan vulnerable to outsiders. You endangered our purpose here and our very way of life."

"What rules did I break? I took a human female. Big deal. There isn't a rule to stay away from human females. Hell, it's the reason we're on this Godforsaken planet in the first place."

"You were told to break contact with this specific human after exposing us to unnecessary scrutiny. You failed to obey."

Andrew's voice had softened on the last words, which sent another shaft of fear striking through him. "She's just a girl," Sebastian said hoarsely, "an innocent food source."

Andrew's hard gaze seemed to pierce inside his brain. "I don't think so, Sebastian. I think she's more than that. She's special in a way no other human female has been to one of our kind."

"What the hell does that mean?" Marcus turned to Andrew.

Andrew glared at the interruption, before returning his steely gaze back to Sebastian. "Your reactions to this female are primal. She makes you react, which endangers us all more than you can possibly understand. The emotions of these humanoids represent our food. But to become emotionally involved ourselves is against the foundation of our laws."

A sinking sensation settled in the pit of his stomach. The memory of the orgasm Hope had given him flashed through his mind. Despite the fear for her, a warmth settled in his chest at how close he'd felt to her at that moment. He'd never been that close to another life form before. It was surreal, cataclysmic, but most of all he'd felt truly connected to someone else for the first time in his life. The orgasm had been more powerful than the energy he'd stolen from other women when he'd brought them to climax, yet, he'd fallen into sleep quickly. A restful, peaceful sleep that was completely amazing.

It had been more than simple lust. That's what Andrew had meant. The feelings, the sensations Hope created within him were forbidden by their laws. But to lose that, or to never have felt it at all, seemed so much more wrong than breaking the laws of the Clan.

"What--" Sebastian hated the need to beg, it almost choked him, but he had to do something to save her. "What can I do to make you forget to kill her?"

Everyone in the room knew who would make the final blow to kill Hope. There was never any doubt as to the outcome.

Andrew cocked his head to one side, considering. "It's rather amazing, actually. This compulsion you have to protect the human. If I were an emotional being I suppose I would be awed by it."

Marcus snorted.

Andrew's smile turned to ice. "But I'm not an emotional being, Seb."

He stood, his trench coat flapping around his long legs. "The human will die, make no mistake about it. Unfortunately, she's from a family of law enforcement and has already

experienced a great deal of attention due to your own notoriety. To harm her now would only draw speculation--"

"You can't kill her because of her family!" A light bulb went off inside Sebastian's head at about the same time Marcus cursed. "Her father's position as a police officer protects her," he surmised. "It wouldn't be as easy to cover up the murder of a police officer's daughter, would it? No, there would be an investigation. You wouldn't dare kill her and you're fucking me over here making me beg for her life when there's not a damn thing you can do to her."

"Fucking unbelievable," Marcus cursed as he slammed out the door.

Andrew raised a brow. "You think you've found a loophole, Seb?"

"I think I've found something."

"A reprieve. Nothing more, I'm afraid." Andrew walked to the door. "She will die once this has all gone away. Quietly. An accident. Nothing too obvious, just something to look like a quirk of fate. Wrong time, wrong place shit. You can't save her, Sebastian."

Anger filled him. Her life meant nothing to Andrew while it was the most precious thing in the world to Sebastian. "She's alive now and you can't touch her."

"True," Andrew conceded. "For the moment. But there is something you will do for us to fix it for now. She calls for you, demands to see you. We can't hold her very much longer. You must make it clear to Hope Riordan that your love affair is over."

Sebastian turned on his jailer. "Why should I help you? This will only make it easier for her to fade into the background so that you can eventually kill her. I won't help you--"

One moment Sebastian felt the fury of his own resolve. The next moment, he couldn't breathe.

Andrew shoved him backwards against the wall, and knocked his fist into Sebastian's throat. He wheezed, raking his throat with his hands.

With a nonchalance that was entirely fake, Andrew leaned a shoulder against the other wall, crossed his arms over his chest, and waited. "Two minutes, then you're dead and I won't need your cooperation to break up with the little human. Your death will serve that purpose."

Sebastian choked, his eyes wild as dark spots blinked around him. The need to inhale-exhale was impossible to fulfill.

The assassin chuckled in a very non-humorous way and whacked Sebastian on the throat again.

Falling to his knees, he clutched at his throat as he struggled for breath. "Da-mn you," he wheezed. "What the hell...?"

"An old trick I learned on the Maroian planet about a millennia ago. Does wonders for getting a thick-headed Clan-boy's attention."

Sebastian glared at his enemy as he stood, shakily, his head tilted downward in a battle formation. "You might kill for a living, but I won't be that easy to take out again."

"I know you won't. You are truly a worthy opponent. Do not forget that I have fought beside you on many different battlefields, grateful to have you protecting my back. I didn't want to hurt you just now, but you left me with no choice. I will kill you if you get in my way. I am honor-bound to do so."

Nodding with agreement, Sebastian rubbed at his throat. "I understand, but just so you get it too, I will kill you before I allow you to harm her."

"We are at a ... uh, Mexican Standoff, as the American's say, huh?"

Sebastian snorted. "Oh, no, much worse than that. More like a Mexican Standoff with a side of Between-a-Rock-and-a-Hard-Place-over-a-Big-Mess-of-Shit."

Andrew chuckled. "You are very funny. But the time for fun is over. You can't have her. You have to let her go."

His jaw worked as he strove to keep his anger in check. What really gave them the right to stand between Sebastian and Hope? Nothing.

Andrew inserted, "I know your anger. I really do and I understand it to a point. But I also know that you will see the truth."

"Nothing is important without her."

"I know."

"No, you don't! You don't get it. I need her to fucking breathe, man! Air won't fill my lungs without her in my life." He hated revealing so much, but what else could he do? They were going to kill her if he kept his mouth shut.

"You should be grateful that she isn't dead already."

His eyes burned. "Why? So I can be grateful that when you finally do get around to killing her she's been on earth a little longer? Where is the good in that? What can I possibly hope to gain by it?"

"You want something out of it?" Andrew was angry now. "I thought you were all obsessed over this human, but you really want something, don't you? What do you want? Sex? Love? Energy? Is the energy so much more intense when you're obsessed over her than when they're just another empty channel aching for your cock to fuck them? We use them! The energy comes from their orgasm, not their feelings. Do you think they give a damn about us afterwards? Huh? Do you think they look at anything but the size of our cocks and our cars and our money? No, they use us, just for different reasons."

Andrew glared at him until sparks skated in his eyes. "Your fame is a real big draw and you know it. As long as you didn't cause trouble with it, the Clan allowed it because of the draw. You're delusional if you think those women don't get off telling their friends they've fucked a big time rock star. These females will brag to friends about sleeping with you, and you'll be nothing more than a notch on their bedpost, their fifteen minutes of fame. Yeah, I can see how you'd get something out of it. Maybe jock itch cause some of these females have been around the block a few times--"

"I had an orgasm with her."

Andrew stopped mid-sentence. Silence filled the room. "What. Did. You. Say?"

Sebastian swallowed hard, the memory alone providing him with a sizzle of energy.

"The sex. It wasn't just energy. It was ... that and more. When we were together, I climaxed."

"Inside her?"

"No, she, uh, did me with her, um...."

"Oh, hell, don't get prudish on me now! Spit it out," Andrew growled.

Not exactly something Sebastian cared to share. Way too personal, which was intriguing since his kind didn't do "personal" on so many levels. Everything to do with Hope went far beyond that. The experience was special not only for its uniqueness among his kind, but also for the intimacy they now shared because of it.

"Oral sex. I came in her mouth."

Andrew stepped forward, faltered, his mouth opening and closing as if he couldn't form the proper words.

"It was the most amazing thing I've ever known," Sebastian whispered, his voice scratchy and harsh with emotion. "I never knew what love was, what lust was, beyond the most basic need for energy. But this ... this is something different that I can't explain. I didn't want it

to end. I need it, Andrew. I need her like the air I breathe. If I can't have her in my life, I might as well be dead."

Fists clenched, Andrew seemed to gather his thoughts as he spoke slowly, "You have only two choices: You end it with her, drive her away completely and I will allow her to live only so long as it takes for us to find some reasoning behind this. The other choice is very simple. You refuse to cooperate and she dies today. I no longer care about her family. I cut her brake line and she plunges into the Pacific Ocean, it's that simple. Choose."

Panic raced through him. "That's not simple."

"Choose, Sebastian. Now."

Lips tightening with the most intense anger he'd ever known, Sebastian felt the air around him sizzling with it. Between clenched teeth, he demanded, "You know I have no choice. I cannot allow you to kill her."

"Then you choose Door Number One. Good choice. The human girl lives and we try to find out how in the hell you had an orgasm and what it means for the rest of us. You're a fucking scientific break through. Hooray!"

Confused, Sebastian watched Andrew stomp out of the room. The door slammed behind him almost as a vague afterthought. There was never any thought to rush out the door towards freedom. Sebastian knew now that he and Hope could never be free without the Clan's blessing. There was no other choice. He had to make Hope believe he'd abandoned what they'd found together, at least until he could figure out a way for them to be together.

Chapter Ten

High Ruler Residence – Near Mount Hood, Oregon

The room temperature was freezing. All the warmth remained outside in the near seventy degrees. Andrew often wondered if the High Ruler Eriksson used the coldness as a means of intimidating his subjects. Most of their kind preferred warmth. For the High Ruler to choose such a cold place for his personal residence said something that Andrew didn't want to acknowledge, for if he did, then he might have to do something about it.

"Your Imminence." Andrew bowed as the older man walked into the room.

As an Ancient being, the High Ruler looked about fifty years of age in human years, but he was tens of thousands of years old. No one knew exactly how old he was and few dared to guess. His age gave him strength that only those of like years would have.

Andrew, himself, was over three thousand years old and looked about twenty-five in human years. He was very powerful, which made him a very good assassin. He had strength, agility, and intelligence that was unsurpassed on Earth, except for the High Ruler. A few of his guards were of the same age as Andrew, which meant they were comparable to Andrew's abilities.

Other Ancients resided on their home planet, but none dared dispute Eriksson, which made him extremely dangerous.

"You may rise, Andrew."

Rising to his full height, the High Ruler towered over Andrew by at least a foot. Only Ancients were taller than the regular Clan population, both on Earth and at home.

Eriksson walked to the window. Even though it was spring, there was a faint scent of snow on the horizon. Winter was not far behind and in these deserted areas near Mount Hood, snow topped the mountains and it was not unheard of for there to be flurries in May.

"I'm glad you arrived, Andrew."

The High Ruler continued to gaze out the window with his hands clasped behind his back. He wore the red and gold robes of his kind, with his long, silver hair trailing down his back.

"I must confess that I wondered if you would answer so easily."

Cautious, Andrew responded, "Why would you think that? I have always come when you called."

"Yes, but these are trying times, are they not?"

Unease settled in his stomach. "I'm not sure what you mean by that. Our time on Earth has been no different than when we were on other planets in the past."

Eriksson turned to face him. "I have been apprised of the situation with Sebastian King and a human female." He said the word human with disdain. "I understand that he has grown attached to the girl in an unhealthy way that endangers our presence here."

Damn. He knew. "It's nothing I can't handle. The incident with Sebastian has been taken care of."

The High Ruler appeared amused. "So, you have taken care of it? My sources tell me that there might be negotiations and that you have grown soft in your old age. My sources also tell me that you plan to release Sebastian without further punishment."

How in the hell did he know that? Andrew straightened to his full height. "I have no understanding of what your sources are saying about how I'm handling this situation, but I can tell you that Sebastian is being dealt with in a manner appropriate with the crime and his station among our people."

Eriksson nodded, as if pleased by Andrew's words. "That is good. I would hate to think that one who has endangered us will be set free so easily. He must be made to pay for his crimes. It is my understanding that he was forbidden from seeing the human and that he disobeyed. We cannot have our people disobeying orders when it could mean the difference between the existence of our Clan or our annihilation."

Andrew snorted with derision. "I hardly think Sebastian's dealings with Hope Riordan will be the ruination of our people."

Eriksson stepped forward quickly until he glared down at Andrew. "Do not take me for a fool. I know that something is not right in the atmosphere. Something is off and it occurred when Sebastian encountered this one human female. His connection to her is the danger. You will not allow it to happen again. Is that understood?"

Andrew backed down, his head bowed in a subservient manner he did not feel. "Of course, Your Imminence, I shall endeavor to prevent the situation from occurring again."

"Good. I would prefer that this meant the human female's demise. We cannot risk her around to tempt Sebastian again."

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Are you saying Sebastian will live?"

Eriksson said thoughtfully, "I have learned that Sebastian is a very big enticement for human females and is needed to bring them to our Clan. Besides, I am hesitant at this moment to remove him from the general population entirely. There would need to be explanations for the humans. We couldn't dare risk exposing ourselves in that manner. Humans are very curious creatures and they would stop at nothing to find an explanation for his disappearance."

Andrew stifled the relief blooming inside him. "I shall release him immediately."

"Very well, but he isn't to know my feelings on this," Eriksson cautioned. "You must make sure that Sebastian understands that his life will be forfeited if he goes near the human again. I cannot allow such disturbance among our people. As much as I would love to study her, I know that would be impossible, but I would still like to understand what it is about her that draws Sebastian. What could she possibly have to make him go against his own kind?"

"I don't know." And he didn't, though he did hope to find out in the near future.

Eriksson waved him away. "Very well. Carry out my orders, but make sure Sebastian understands the consequences of disobeying me."

"I will, Your Imminence."

"If he disobeys me, he will get the harshest punishment available to the Clan. Have I made myself clear?" The High Ruler's gaze was clear and focused. And deadly as hell.

"Perfectly," Andrew said between gritted teeth.

Chapter Eleven

Clan Compound – Desert near Phoenix, Arizona

“It’s over.”

“No,” she whispered. Please don’t....”

Sebastian tucked the silky strands of her hair behind one ear. “Listen to me.” He kissed Hope’s forehead. “This isn’t going to work.”

She jerked her head up. “Don’t say that. Please don’t.” Tears flowed down her cheeks.

“You have no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into.”

“I don’t care! I love you!”

“You barely know me. You said so yourself.”

“I know enough,” she argued, desperate to make him understand, but feeling totally inadequate in how to do so.

He pulled back from her then and she tried to reach for him, but he pushed her hands away.

“You’re wrong,” he said with a shake of his head. “My kind will only hurt you. I’ll only bring you pain that you don’t need.”

“How can you say that? There’s nothing about you that I don’t love. The way we are together is special. When we touch, we’re like fire.”

He looked at her sadly. “Fire burns those who get too close, Hope.”

“You can’t mean that.”

“I do.”

She reached for his hands, but he turned away from her.

“The telepathy--” She was grasping at straws and she knew it.

“What?” Sebastian turned back to her.

She gazed at his beautiful face, the boyishness almost stole her breath. “We connected with our minds,” she explained. “I don’t know how or why, but we did and it’s important. It has to mean something.”

Sebastian dug his hands in the front pockets of his jeans. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Don’t you think it strange neither of us has connected like that with anyone else?”

“It doesn’t mean anything.” He looked away, his jaw moved, as if the words hurt him to say. Of course, they hurt him, because they weren’t true. It did mean something to both of them.

“It made every touch, every kiss special,” she persisted. “You won’t find that with anyone else. You can’t. It’s not possible to find that more than once in a lifetime.”

“You’re reaching.”

Hope’s mouth twisted. “And you’re lying to both of us!”

His harsh laugh struck her like a knife to the gut. “Believe me, I’m not lying to myself, damn it,” he said between gritted teeth.

Raking his hand through his silky, black hair, Sebastian moved to the door. “Look, one of the guys will fly you home, okay? A private plane. They’ll make sure you get home in one piece. But ... I have to go. The band’s going on tour and there’s a lot to do before we leave.”

Hope frowned. “A tour?”

"Yeah, sort of."

"But you don't tour."

Sebastian looked away briefly and shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah, well, things change. Look, I'll be away from the club for awhile. Hope, promise me you won't go back there again, okay? It's not a good place for you."

Crossing her arms over her chest, she murmured mutinously, "Why should I promise you anything? You're walking out on me, remember? You're throwing away everything we have and could have for some idiotic reason that you won't explain to me. So, why should I do anything you want me to do?"

"You won't be admitted to the club again," he said simply. "The bouncers have orders, so don't even try it."

"You can't dictate where I go or what I do."

"You will damn well stay away from that place or I'll call your father myself."

Hurt slammed into her. "That's low."

"Do I give a shit? You're not welcome in that place, so keep your pretty little butt out of there."

"Asshole!"

"Damn straight. I'm not bluffing, Hope. If I hear you've gone anywhere near Downfall, I'll personally call your father."

"He won't let me leave the apartment at all then," she muttered bitterly.

"You got it, babe," he said harshly. "Now, maybe you're getting what I've been saying. It's over. Get on with your life, okay? Forget about me. I have an amazing career that's about to take off big time. This is my chance to have the rock star life I've always wanted." He glanced away, as if the contemporary style of the room held his rapt attention. "I never meant to hurt you, but you don't fit into my world. Look, I'm sorry I took advantage of your feelings."

Tears sparkled in her eyes. "Next thing you'll say is it was fun."

"Oh, sweetheart, it was far from fun," he said heavily, still unable to look at her.

Hope couldn't breathe. The pain caused by his words was so sharp her gut clenched.

Obviously seeing the distress in her expression, Sebastian frowned. "Are you okay?"

Her chin trembled. "I'm fine," she said as she swiped at the tears on her cheeks. "Just fine, asshole."

"Baby--" he reached for her, but she shoved him away.

"Stay away from me! Do you think I need your pity? You are such a loser! What did I ever see in you?"

She turned and ran, leaving Sebastian feeling as if someone had slapped him in the face with a two-by-four. "Man, was that fun or what?"

"Or what," Marcus answered as he walked around the corner. "It had to be done, man. Tough, but necessary."

Sebastian grimaced. "Easy for you to say. You didn't just break up with the only girl to get you off."

"At least you got off." Marcus tucked his hands in the front pockets of his faded jeans, his body slightly hunched. "Yeah, about that. Um, how's it work anyway? You know, where you actually enjoy the sex? Seems a little, I don't know, messy to me, I guess."

Chuckling, Sebastian slapped his friend on the back. He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that this intrigue on behalf of his Clan-boys was the best thing for his cause. He was determined to have a life with Hope and the way to do it was to entice them with the knowledge

that they might be able to have the same kind of sensations for themselves. It was too foreign for them now, too new a concept, but it would eventually catch on. Andrew was bound to come to that conclusion at some point if he hadn't already. He'd done it, so it stood to reason that it could happen to others of his kind and that thought alone would not only save Hope's life, but would be his ticket back into it. Permanently.

Chapter Twelve

Community College Campus - Los Angeles, California

The need was bad. It was even worse to think that during the small window of time they'd been together they hadn't completely made love in the most old-fashioned sense, face-to-face, skin-to-skin, with him burning inside her.

Whatever sunshine was left in the world, it had entirely gone out of Hope's life. Nothing seemed to matter. She was forever on edge, as if waiting, biding her time for something to happen, anything to take away the pain.

She'd go to class, sit through a lecture, even participate, but never really be there. It was a simple matter of going through the motions, not really living, and it was grating like hell on her nerves.

"You've got to snap out of it." Emily chomped on a cheese puff, all the while watching her warily from her seat at the table in the Student Union.

"What do you mean?" Hope asked, knowing the answer, but not having enough energy to really care.

"He dumped you. I'm sorry, but where did you really think it would go with Super Hot and Sexy? Hello! He's a rock star and there are like a gazillion girls after him. Look, your dad almost had a heart attack when you disappeared like that. I covered as best I could, but I know he's made it difficult for you since you've been back."

When Hope didn't respond, Emily continued in a softer tone. "I know it hurts, but it's probably for the best anyway. Your dad wasn't going to let you see him and it's not exactly something you could hide considering how famous he is. It's better that he let you down easy now instead of stringing you along and you finding out about him and his roadie bimbos in the tabloids."

Emily eyed her warily as she took a sip of soda. "Your dad would poop bullets if you brought him home anyway. I mean, like, what are you going to say? 'Hey, dad, here's my boyfriend, the Super Bad Rock Star who threw Dylan through a wall and probably does drugs and booze and lives a wild rock star life. Yeah, dad, how about we invite him to Sunday dinner?'"

Unable to resist, Hope smiled. "Okay, okay. I get it. You're incorrigible. I can so see me introducing Sebastian to my dad."

Emily snorted. "Yeah, right. You're afraid to tell your dad you got a parking ticket. Since he had forbidden you to see Sebastian anyway, I don't think it would've been a very good idea to take that boat unless you were happy never leaving the apartment again." Emily reached over and covered Hope's hand with her own. "I know it hurts, kiddo, but Sebastian breaking up with you probably saved you a whole heap of trouble with your dad."

"You're right. I know you're right." Then why didn't it feel that way?

"But?"

"It ... hurts. I really felt something with him. A connection..."

Man, she so couldn't tell Emily about all the telepathy and the lightening frizzing in the air around them. So, instead she chose to explain as much as she could. "We had a connection like I've never had with anyone else. When we were together and when we touched--" She

shook her head. "I can't describe it. I've never felt anything like that before. It was scary, and frightening, but I know in my heart that it was right. It was right, Emily. We are supposed to be together."

Her face softened. "But you just met him, sweetie."

"Don't you think I know that?" Hope jerked her hand away from Emily's.

"Hey, I'm as up with lust as the next girl, but don't you think it might be a combination of things? He's a sexy, rich rock star..." She trailed off, leaning forward on her elbows. "Maybe there's even a little obsession thrown in there, too. You've been crazy about him as a singer for a long time."

Hope snorted. "Jeez, it's not like I'm some teenage groupie or anything."

"I never said that."

How could she make her understand? "There was a connection that I can't describe to you because it's not something I can put into words. It has to be felt. Sebastian felt it too. I know he did. We shared things. We both felt it. I just don't know why he's chosen to let it go. To destroy it before it even had a chance to begin." Tears stung her eyes and she tried as best she could to hold them back. She'd already cried enough to fill Lake Michigan as it was.

Emily reached over and grabbed her hand again, only this time the grip was stronger. Hope saw the sympathy in her friend's gaze and it did help just a little.

"I'm sorry." Emily shook her head. "It sucks that you found true love and can't keep him. To find your one true mate and it be forbidden is kind romantic, but it's sad, too, because you don't want it to be that difficult. A little spice is nice, but when you can't really have him, it only makes it that much harder."

Hope released her hands and reached for her backpack. "I think I'll go home. My mind's not on school today."

"Tired?"

"Exhausted."

"Get some sleep. Pull a Scarlett O'Hara and think about it tomorrow. Bad stuff always seems a little more bearable after you've had a good night's sleep."

Hope stood and maneuvered the strap of her black backpack onto one shoulder. "I'm not sure I'll feel any differently. I just don't understand why it had to end this way."

"Ours is not to understand why, it's just to accept that it is."

That drew a reluctant smile from Hope. "Ooh. Impressive. Browning?"

"Fortune cookie. Chinese take-out last night."

They both collapsed into laughter.

Chapter Thirteen

Clan Compound – Desert near Phoenix, Arizona

Andrew moved among his people like a flash of darkness, seeming to blend, yet not blending at the same time. There was a bit of a crowd today, more so than usual and he knew exactly why so many Clan boys were in residence. Sebastian's little revelation about the intense sexual emotions he'd experienced with the human female Hope Riordan had caused quite a spectacle. He'd known the boy wouldn't keep his mouth shut.

Why should he? That was his ace in the hole for escaping his own imprisonment and for canceling permanently the death sentence against his human female.

Sebastian wasn't stupid. He played the human role well, sometimes too well. He seemed to relish this world and that alone was enough cause for resentment against him by some of the Clan.

Most, if not all, Clan hated Earth. Living here and getting physical with the humans was a necessity of life, but it wasn't one their kind relished. Perhaps it was the pure dependency upon the humans or perhaps, more strongly, it was plain and simple jealousy.

The human emotions that generated the intense sexual completion was food to the Clan. They stole the energy, yet never felt the emotion themselves. They were virtually dead inside otherwise, like an addict going from one human to another to get their energy fix, yet never satisfied. Though many would not consider this search for food an addiction, the fact that they were never full was perhaps the most telling.

Something was missing. It had been since they'd landed on this planet a couple of decades ago.

Maybe now there was the potential for the chance to feel something, anything. But if this was a break-through in the evolution of their species, and it meant that their kind could feel the actual emotions of sexual completion--not just the resulting energy--then the Clan would definitely view that as extremely enticing.

Andrew smirked to himself. Apparently, all species of males shared that same genetic flaw.

The compound's unusually high activity drew him to the inside vestibule where he could overhear the thoughts and words of his kin.

I'll be damned. It was true. Nearly every mind he touched was curious about Sebastian's revelation. His theory was correct. The Clan wanted to know more, and more than one mind revealed a strong, almost compulsive desire to experience the same earth-shattering feelings Sebastian had. To be able to have a physical completion along with the energy infusion was too tempting.

Andrew had to do something and fast or else the Clan-boys might just take it into their heads to start fucking every human female they saw without any discipline. There was no telling what kind of chaos could result.

Damn Sebastian! The male was a worthy adversary when it came to getting what he wanted and he wanted Hope Riordan.

Although it might appear he wandered, Andrew knew exactly where he was going. Slipping through the doors to the holding room was easy. Ironic, almost, because he had full and easy access to Sebastian. No one could bar him from visiting the prisoner.

The difference now was he did not wish for curious eyes to observe their meeting. No, this was better done beneath the veil of secrecy or else he'd have a hell of a mess on his hands later. He had to get it under control and the only way to do that was with Sebastian's cooperation.

Damn the bastard.

* * * *

"You're back."

"You knew I would be." Andrew observed Sebastian's lackadaisical lounging on the bed. With his hands propped behind his head and his full six feet three inch frame filling up the twin bed, he was an impressive specimen of their species--at least on human terms. As far as their home planet was concerned, Sebastian was a Barney. But here on earth, he was considered model-perfect. Oh, the ironies of life.

Moving forward, Andrew settled into a chair and propped his ankle across his knee. With his arms crossed, he considered the best way to approach this situation while maintaining the necessary secrecy. Preserving the species was first and foremost the main priority. Anything else came second.

"You lied," Andrew said abruptly. "You lied about the sexual orgasm shit."

Sebastian grinned. "You know I didn't."

"Yeah, but you're going to tell otherwise."

"Why should I? What's in it for me?"

Andrew's eyes tightened. "Negotiating, bro?"

"Of course," Sebastian chuckled, settling in more comfortably, obviously pleased with the tone of the conversation. "You have something I want and I have something you want. Well, you ain't getting yours for free, bro, so get on with getting me what I want first."

It was a good thing Sebastian had never decided to enter politics. He would've been assassinated. Andrew wanted to kill him at the moment for putting him in this predicament. He absolutely refused to believe that it had anything to do with his own interest in the thought of the sexual fulfillment Sebastian talked about. He had a species to save and this was just as dangerous as some human plastering information about the Clan all over the New York Times.

"You confess that it was all a lie," Andrew continued, striving to appear unperturbed. "You made it up to get out of trouble because you disobeyed the rules and knew the consequences."

Sebastian sat up. "Okay. What do I get out of it?"

"You die."

Sebastian laughed, easing back on the bed. "Nope. Dying isn't beneficial to me. Do better."

Gritting his teeth, Andrew swore beneath his breath. "You pretend to die. Both you and the girl have to fake your own deaths. Yours I'll handle because it has to be made to look like I punished you. In fact, I'll handle the girl's as well. I need it to look like I took care of you both."

Sebastian frowned, but Andrew could see the tiny wheels in his manipulating little mind working overtime. The little shit. "I thought you said it was too dangerous to kill Hope because of her father."

Andrew really hated explaining himself. "It is, but you've left me with damn little choice. My guess is the girl isn't stupid and she's probably already figured out something weird went on between the two of you, which means we can't just let her go. We have to do it soon."

Sebastian seemed to consider it for a moment. With wariness in his eyes, he said cautiously, "Okay. I'm all for a fake death as opposed to a real one, but what do you get out of it?"

Silence filled the space between them. "Andrew?" Sebastian prompted. "What's going on, man?"

"You won't like it. I want to ... observe ... you two together."

Taken aback, Sebastian sat up. "You want to watch us have sex? Forget it. I'm not into that shit."

Andrew smirked at Sebastian's prudishness. "None of our kind have been necessarily concerned about others watching in the past."

Sebastian stood and began to prowl the room. "That was different. I won't allow what's between Hope and me to be nothing more than a science experiment." Andrew had known that. Still....

"What if your cooperation was the means to saving you both?"

"I won't let you watch us have sex, Andrew. It's not going to happen." His fists clenched and Andrew could almost see the fire coming out of his ears.

"So, let me get this straight. What exactly is your opposition? Do you not want me to see the human naked and vulnerable, or is it your own vulnerability you don't want observed?"

"What happens between us is private," Sebastian growled. "Not for anyone else's eyes. I can't describe it anymore than I can explain what it's like to have an orgasm. It's beyond description, and I'm done talking about it. Like you said, this is a no-win situation for you. You have no choice but to let us go. We'll cooperate with the fake death stuff, but I need to speak with Hope before you go through with her so-called death."

Suppressing a smile, Andrew knew he had him where he wanted him. "All right," he capitulated, standing up. "We'll do it your way."

Sebastian frowned. "That's a first. My guess is you're just saying that, but in the end you'll get something more out of it. I just won't know what or when it will happen."

Andrew allowed a small smile of satisfaction. "Ignorance can be bliss."

"It's a price to pay."

Andrew knew that the price would probably be higher than Sebastian anticipated. He was too dangerous to allow to live among the rest of the Clan. He had to die.

Andrew stuck out his hand. A very human gesture, but one their kind had adopted over the years. It served its purpose. "I'll take care of the details."

Sebastian accepted the handshake, then stepped back. "How long before Hope and I are together?"

Cocking his head to one side, Andrew again marveled at Sebastian's dogged determination to have the human female. "Soon. You must be patient."

"Patience has never been my forte."

"It must be now. If this isn't done right, we're all dead. The Clan Council will not like being deceived. It is far better that no one is aware of any of this. Only the three of us should ever be privy to what has happened and even then your human should not know everything."

"Yeah, I get it. I'm just ... anxious to see her. You have no idea."

Noticing the bulge beneath Sebastian's zipper, Andrew shook his head. "Actually, you're giving me a pretty clear picture there. Get yourself under control, all right? TMI, bro. TMI."

Sebastian smirked as Andrew exited the room. The changing of the guard could be heard in the background, but he slipped out silently, none the wiser. His presence in the prisoner's room that evening might never have happened.

Amazingly, he found himself excited about the plans he was to make. Planning the escape and comfortable exile for anyone was not something Andrew had ever thought he would be doing, much less looking forward to with anticipation. Exile was not something relished by the Clan. Usually, they just killed the Clan-boy who had pissed someone off or had broken some rule.

That would be a waste in this instance. There was far too much to learn about Sebastian and Hope's relationship and Andrew intended to know all about it, much more than Sebastian would ever realize he would be privy to.

Ignorance might be bliss, but Sebastian would have no idea exactly what lengths Andrew would go to in order to obtain his information, nor would he care as long as he had his human female and they lived in peace.

Chapter Fourteen

Los Angeles, California

Something was horribly wrong. Emily stared at the television screen, her throat closing in horror as the reporter relayed the sickening information....

“This is Cecilia Mercury with Today's Entertainment News. This just in. Sebastian King, enigmatic lead singer for the up-and-coming rock band Fingers 3, was found dead this morning in his Berlin hotel room from an apparent drug overdose.

“Authorities are saying they believe the singer took a mixture of barbiturates, sleeping pills, and alcohol. The lethal combination, whether intentional or not, was most likely the cause of death. The group's management team is blaming the singer's recent depression and despondency as a possible cause, but authorities are not ruling out suicide at this point. Further testing is pending toxicology reports. In other news....”

Emily pressed the “Off” button and the screen turned black again. As black as the dress she wore. They were both dead. Hope ... and now the rock singer her friend had been in love with was dead, too.

Emily had attended Hope's funeral only hours ago. Her friend's untimely death had been devastating on more than one level. She hadn't seen her in over a week. The last time they had visited there had been something strange about the whole thing, like Hope was hiding something, almost giddy with the need to tell, but she never had.

Emily suspected Hope had been seeing Sebastian again, but her friend would never confess. In her tone there had been rebelliousness against her father, which, alone, was unusual enough, but there had been something more that Emily could not quite put her finger on. The first cup of coffee hadn't even gotten lukewarm before Hope had been off again. She'd hugged Emily fiercely, and during the last three days Emily had been grateful for those final moments with her best friend.

Hope was free now. Apparently, so was Sebastian. Another rock singer dead in a foreign country from a drug overdose or suicide. Something so sad. Something almost too predictable.

Such a common way for a rock star to die.

Just like a car accident. Such a common way for an ordinary person like Hope to die. Going too fast on a rain-slicked road. Taking a curve at the exact moment a tire blew. The only unusual thing about it was the fact that she had hit a gasoline truck and her compact car had burst into flames. All that remained was a scorched skeleton and dental records were the only identification possible.

Common things. Common ways to die.

Death.

Emily suddenly smiled. She burst out into laughter, crying until tears flowed from her eyes, a mixture of joy and sorrow for the friend she'd never see again.

“What a fucking coincidence.”

She fervently prayed that what she suspected was no coincidence. Their deaths, within days of each other....

“How absolutely fantastic,” she whispered to an empty room. The laughter continued until tears of happiness filled her eyes.

Chapter Fifteen

Hook Island, Queensland Region, Australia

The setting sun could be seen through the flash of curtains surrounding the bed. The smell of jasmine and desire filled the air as the bodies twisted and turned on the sun-warmed sheets.

Sebastian reached out and touched her face with his forefinger. Rising above her, he lifted his head and gazed upon the only true thing that had ever meant anything to him.

"I love you," he whispered softly, seductively. "I'm sorry for what you've given up for me."

"I didn't give up anything important." She reached around and lightly ran a finger down the curve of his spine. He shivered. "This is the only thing that matters to me. What we have together."

"What about your family and friends? You can't ever see them again."

She frowned at that. "You know, I don't completely understand why we had to go through all that pretending we're dead. We're both over twenty-one...."

"You just turned twenty-one, babe." He flicked her chin lightly with a smile.

"You know what I mean," she said, wrinkling her nose. "It seems a little drastic to leave everything and everyone."

Sebastian knew where this conversation was going. The same place as when he'd first talked with her about running away with him. He had no idea how he was going to explain the truth to her, but for some reason it didn't really matter how or when. They were together and he had to believe that she'd never leave him no matter what she found out. They were too connected. She'd understand what he was and she wouldn't hate him or be afraid of who he really was.

But that wasn't something he wanted marring their first perfect day together in paradise.

He linked their hands together. "I told you that my family is dangerous and that there are things you don't know, there are some things I can't even tell you."

Her gaze narrowed on him. "You will tell me someday, right?"

"Of course. Just not now. What we have is too new and fragile. I don't want to mar it with the bad stuff."

"I have a right to know if I'm in danger. Are we in danger?"

That was a good question. Sebastian knew without a shadow of a doubt that they were dead meat if any of the Clan knew they were alive.

"Not right now. You're not in danger of anything right now except being loved senseless." He leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

"Marry me." Damn. "That could've been more romantic, I guess. Scratch that. Bad timing."

She just stared at him, her eyes wide and mouth open as if in shock.

"Hope? Hey, I'm starting to get a little nervous here. I'm sorry it wasn't a romantic proposal. In fact. Forget it, okay? Forget I said anything. We don't have to go there now or, um, ever, I guess, if you don't want to...."

“Argh! Forget it! Not on your life!”

Shocked, Sebastian found himself flat on his back with a laughing Hope sprawled out on top of him.

“Of course I'll marry you! Now? Here? Wherever you want.” That thought ended with her plastering his face with kisses. His lips, eyes, nose, cheeks, chin . . . His Hope left no patch of skin untouched, which heightened the interest of another important organ a little south of his face.

“Yeah, well, maybe later because I'm busy right now,” he whispered huskily against the side of her neck. Oh, man, the feel of Hope's soft skin against his rough cheek was heaven.

All playfulness gone, Sebastian's arms abruptly encircled her, one hand going for the curve of her buttocks, the other buried in her long, brown hair--courtesy of extensions and hair coloring they'd done themselves. A nose job was next on the list for them both.

Feeling an urgency that had begun to seem almost normal for him now, he crushed her mouth beneath his. Warm, yummy sounds came from her throat as their lips touched and their tongues tangled. Desire raced through him, raw and elemental, something he'd never known before her.

Yet, something else tempered it. Love, maybe? He was sure it was love, even though he'd never experienced the emotion before she'd walked into his life. Perhaps it was his love for her that had given him the ability to feel emotions for the first time. Perhaps it was Hope alone. He doubted anyone--human or Clan--could ever feel like this. And he didn't care if they did. He only knew that he couldn't lose this. He couldn't lose her. She was it for him and nothing and no one else mattered but holding her in his arms.

With his arms braced around her back, he switched places without breaking a beat. Their mouths still locked and the only change was the feel of Hope's long legs circling his hips. The heels of her pretty little feet dug into his thighs.

Sebastian jerked back, breathing heavily and gazed at her with what he knew was a totally sappy look.

“What?” she smiled, her own breathing rasping inside the otherwise quite room. The sound of gently crashing waves could be heard beyond the open double doors of the patio leading to the beach.

He reached a hand out and touched her cheek. “I didn't exist before you. I don't know what I was, but it wasn't real. It was emotionless, empty ... nothing until you.”

“I complete you?” she whispered back with a saucy grin.

“Not funny. I'm being emotionally open here. Give a guy a break.”

“I'm sorry, sweetheart,” she laughed, reaching up to give him a completely forgivable kiss. “I know how emotionally vacant your family tends to be. Believe me, I understand.”

She didn't understand because she had no idea who or what his “family” really was. She didn't know what he was, for that matter, but that was something for another day. Fortunately for him he'd learned almost immediately that he could control which thoughts of his she had access to. But right now, all he wanted to do was revel in the fact that she was his, that there weren't any eagle-eyed assassins on their tail, and they were in their own private heaven.

He bent down and kissed her softly, sweetly. “I love you,” he whispered against her lips. “I'll always love you. And you do complete me in more ways than I could ever explain to you.”

She didn't laugh this time. Instead her hand trailed down his bicep, to his chest, his side, then lower.

Sebastian gasped aloud, lifted slightly and closed his eyes against the intense sensation of her cool hand circling him. She explored him, then pumped him gently and his head roared back with an almost agonizing ecstasy. "Oh, baby, that's so good," he choked.

"I'm glad." She nipped at his chin and he met her mouth with his own.

As much as he loved the feel of her hands on him, he wanted to savor her as well. He wanted to feel her. His fingers plumped her breasts, bending to take one extended nipple in his mouth, sucking, pulling, until she arched, the steadiness of her rhythm on his penis faltering.

He reached down and removed her hand and placed it on his ass where she readily went to work trailing her fingers down the crack of his butt cheeks, almost sending him into orbit.

"Stop that," he warned with a growl.

"Make me," she smiled before attacking his neck with her tongue.

At the feel of her lightly sucking his neck, he rubbed his throbbing cock into her belly. A sensation that he'd known only once before settled in his spine and he could feel the energy building in the room.

Glancing up he saw the shimmering movement of the electrical bolts. They were small, certainly beyond Hope's human vision, but he knew they were there and he relished in their ability to make this.

Sensing he had only a small amount of time before he lost it, Sebastian went to work. He was nothing if not a detail-oriented man.

Scooting down, he buried the curve of his cock in the crease of her, settling his hard rock against the nub of her pleasure point, and then he buried his mouth in her breasts, alternately torturing one nipple at a time with his mouth.

Between his movements against her nub and his mouth at her breasts, Hope writhed against the sheets. "Please ... Please," she whimpered.

"I want nothing more than to please you and be pleased by you, my love," he whispered, his voice hoarse with emotion.

He moved upwards, settling his arms on either side of her face, cupping her cheeks. "Open your eyes, Hope. I want you to see me when I completely make love to you for the first time."

She obeyed, teardrops falling from her lashes. He kissed them away then planted the most seductive, sweetest, loving kiss he could manage on her lips. "I want us to remember this moment for the rest of our lives. Don't ever forget it. We can't ever forget it, my love."

"I won't," she choked. "Oh, Sebastian..."

"I know, love."

With one hand he reached down and settled the blunt head against her opening. He propped himself up with an elbow against the mattress. His gaze bore into hers, linking them together.

As he moved forward, inch by inch, he felt it. Tiny pin pricks of electrical charge. Minor though they were, the sensation was like sticking his cock into an electrical socket one slow inch at a time--only in a very good way.

They both gasped, her eyes going wide, not with fear--thank God--but with wonder and joy. More tears settled on her lashes and her lips parted with pleasure.

He couldn't take it. He couldn't stop. The compulsion to merge, to mate, was too strong to be denied any longer.

With one firm push, Sebastian seated himself fully inside her, his head falling to her neck to rest against the softness of her skin.

“Heaven,” he choked, knowing it wasn't an inane compliment. It was the truth, for no other word could describe the most intense feeling of homecoming and pleasure he felt.

Suddenly, the energy soared within him, Hope arched against his body, a rough moan leaving her throat. “Now!” she screamed as if her body was on fire for his. Perhaps it was.

Sebastian reached down and clasped her hips in his hands. The need to thrust was overwhelming, the force of it his undoing. He found himself pounding into her without regard for anything but the moist warmth enfolding his cock, sucking him into the sweetest place in the world.

Thankfully, she was with him, thrashing against the bed sheets, her hands clawing at him, pulling him closer, while her body moved--oh, did she move--against him until he couldn't see straight. He couldn't think. He couldn't breathe. He could only feel. The emotions inside and outside of him were taking over as he thrust heavily against her.

Reaching beneath her, he grasped her ass with both hands and pulled her upward until there was nothing but him pounding against her warmth. The bed springs strained with their movements. Hope's cries were now screams, his own thoughts a jumble of ecstasy.

Their eyes met at the same moment her body clenched around his.

Orgasm. He felt it against him, inside him, filling him until something broke again—just like it had the other time when she'd sucked him dry.

They merged. Connected. Heat punched his groin, setting it to fire as an electrical bolt flashed near his nose.

He exploded, emptying himself inside her as he shouted her name, screamed it loud enough for it to be heard on Mars. He poured himself into her, his hips pumping until there was nothing left. Unable to hold back, his head dropped to rest against her neck. He felt her arms encircle his back and hold him close.

The world ceased to exist. Nothing mattered but the woman he held in his arms.

Hope was everything.

* * * *

What felt like hours later, Sebastian lifted his head to gaze down at her. The look on his face was more adoring than she could ever imagine.

“They told me it was wrong to love you,” he began, his voice hoarse with the shattering experience he'd just had. “That what I felt for you didn't exist. I wanted to believe them because it would've been easier for everyone, but I couldn't stop myself from it. It might not have been real to them, but it was real to me. I know what I feel and I know what happens between us is something amazing.”

Hope watched a tear slide down his cheek, but she didn't stop him. For whatever reason this seemed to be something he needed to say and if it didn't make any sense, well, that was okay, too. She loved him enough that nothing else mattered but his happiness.

“But I don't care,” he continued, gently rubbing her cheek with his fingertips. “If loving you is wrong, I don't want to be right.”

She laughed, couldn't help it, despite the tears streaking her own face. “I think that's an old country music song.”

“What?” he frowned.

“If lovin' you is wrong, I don't want to be right' or something like that.”

He laughed then, too. Hugging her tight, she could feel the rumbles of laughter from his chest where her cheek was pressed. “That sounds so good,” she murmured aloud.

“What?” he asked, pulling back to see her face.

“The laughter. I didn't get a lot of that growing up. My dad was difficult ... an alcoholic.”

“Then laughter is definitely on the menu from here to eternity for us.” He smoothed a strand of hair behind her ear. “Whatever happened in the past for both of us is over. All that matters is that we're together and we're going to stay that way. I'm going to give you a life filled with happiness and pleasure and more laughter than you can imagine.”

She believed him.

“In fact,” he said, his forehead leaning against hers. “I think we need to get started on the laughter part right now.”

With that, Sebastian proceeded to tickle the daylights out of her. Not long afterwards, with him clutching her desperately to his body as he spilled himself inside her, she could have sworn the room lit up like a Fourth of July fireworks celebration at about the same time they both found their physical release.

Then again, it could just be her own heightened emotions playing tricks on her.

The End