

Vampire Wanted

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Chapter One

I met him in a bar. He was every cliché come to life; tall, dark, handsome and looking at me like I was the one he'd waited for all of his life. If I hadn't been so damn lonely and just broken up with my last boyfriend, caution would've kept me away, but I was drunk, maudlin, and did I mention he was gorgeous?

Our coupling was fast, furious and ended with him biting me on the neck. That was the last thing I remember before I lost consciousness.

* * *

"Come on, come on. You have to wake up before he returns." A soft, desperate whispering broke through my sleep-shrouded mind.

Struggling to awaken, I opened my eyes, blinking rapidly, trying to make out shapes and forms from the solid darkness.

"That's it. Open those beautiful eyes. You can do it." The soft whispers continued behind me as I felt hands tentatively touching my body.

Pushing myself up I turned my head towards the voice. A young, slim blond, who looked to be in his early twenties was leaning over me. As my eyes adjusted to the dim morning light I could see his troubled expression.

"Who are you?"

"We don't have time for introductions. We've got to get you out of here."

I didn't stop to ask him why, my mind was too clouded to understand anything more. I flipped off my covers and swung my feet over the side of

the bed. Modesty wasn't a trait I had. The skinny guy averted his eyes and handed over my clothes still not looking.

"Relax, honey. I'm not going to jump you." I slipped on my pants and shirt, and was looking around for my socks and shoes when the door slammed open.

My supposed rescuer flinched as my hook up from the night before strode into the room carrying a bag that looked suspiciously like pastries.

Yum.

"Hey babe." I greeted him with a smile. "The blond here seems to think I should run off without my goodbye kiss."

I had no trouble tossing the blond to the wolf.

My dark haired love god glared at the kid.

"John. Why are you trying to scare my guest?" Damian's voice rolled across my skin like liquid sex. I grew hard at the sound, remembering last night and the hot words muttered against my skin as he plunged into me.

I held back the moan aching to break free. Snatching the pastry bag out of his hands, I placed a soft kiss on Damian's cheek as I passed.

Opening up the sack, I inhaled the scent of flaky, buttery croissants, and this time I let the moan break free.

"Damn those smell good."

"You're just going to let him buy you off with baked goods?" John asked, not bothering to hide his scorn.

I shrugged, not the least offended. "What can I say? I'm easy."

Biting into a croissant I made appreciative noises while eating the crispy, flaky goodness.

Looking up I saw both men were staring at me.

“I think you made those same sounds last night.” Damian said, a smile curving his handsome mouth.

John shook his sandy head. “I don’t suppose I can convince you to go away with me?” He asked with a hopeful smile.

I looked from John to Damian.

“No offense honey, I mean you’re cute and all but my mama raised me with manners. It’s not polite to let a man fuck you and then leave with his friend.”

Damian laughed. A full belly laugh that looked good on the man.

“Anyway I appreciate the croissant, but I gotta go.”

“Go?” Damian’s eyes narrowed. A shiver of unease ran down my spine.

I checked my watch only to remember I took it off before we went at it.

“Looking for this?” Damian dangled my Rolex from one long finger.

“Thanks darlin’.” I said sidling up and letting my eyes rake over his body. Damian was tall and lean with just the right amount of muscles. I liked a man who could overpower me during sex and Damian knew how to do that oh, so well. Thoughts of last night made me hot and needy. Not something I wanted with a stranger in the room and no relief for my quickly hardening prick. The look in Damian’s eyes told me he knew what I was remembering.

As I got closer he held the Rolex out of reach, dangling it above my head, which wasn’t hard as he had about six inches on my five foot ten inch frame. I wasn’t about to leave that watch behind. It was the only thing I had left of my granddaddy.

“Give me a kiss before you go.” He said with a smile.

“You only had to ask.” I told him. Sliding a hand behind the back of his neck I brought his lips down to mine.

He let me.

I felt him smile against my mouth before they parted against mine.

“Mmm.” I hummed against his lips.

“Like a lamb to slaughter.” I heard John whisper before I felt a sharp nick against my lips.

“Ouch.”

“Sorry honey.” Damian said licking my throbbing lip. “But I need breakfast too.”

Not understanding his statement but appreciating the skill of his mouth, I let the gorgeous man kiss the ever-living hell out of me. I didn’t usually approve of being called pet names, but I was willing to overlook it while he was doing incredible things with his hot, hot mouth.

Damian licked my lips, inside my mouth and used his big hands to pull me closer. I wiggled against him letting him know I approved.

Memories of my responsibilities had me pulling away.

“Sorry Damian but I’ve got to get home, Simon is waiting.”

“Simon?” The tone was calm, but the hands were bruising.

“Ouch. Stop that.”

It was odd but it was almost as if there were red flames in Damian’s eyes. Maybe I hadn’t slept as well as I thought.

“Who’s Simon?”

“My cat, and if I don’t feed him soon he’ll rip apart my living room.” I hadn’t nicknamed him hell kitty for nothing.

The punishing grip slackened and Damian placed soft kisses on either side of my mouth. “Sorry. I don’t usually get so possessive.”

“That’s true.” John piped up. I looked over at the blond who looked oddly comfortable on Damian’s couch, despite trying to drag me out of there just minutes before.

“And who are you?” I’ll admit to a splash of jealousy, which was ridiculous considering the man was just a one-night fuck.

“John’s my little brother.” Damian said.

I looked back and forth. “I don’t see a resemblance.”

There was in fact no similarity between the two men.

“I’m adopted.” Damian said, his dark eyes sparkling with amusement.

“Whatever.” If they wanted to claim they were brothers who was I to say differently. It was no business of mine. I’d probably not see either one of them again.

Damian returned my Rolex to me with a smile.

I snapped my watch on my wrist and gathered up my jacket.

“Thanks for a fabulous time.” I told Damian, placing another kiss on his lips. I stepped quickly away before he could grab hold of me, nodded towards John, and headed for the door.

One of Damian’s big hands slapped down on my shoulder halting me in my tracks.

“Don’t forget to give me your number.” Damian said with such sincerity I almost thought he’d actually call me. I rattled off my number and repeated my goodbyes.

Leaving the apartment, I wondered if I'd ever see either of those two again. I rarely saw the same hookup twice but then again my one-night stands weren't usually so gorgeous.

If Damian called, I might even answer.

My apartment looked just like I left it, why I found this odd I don't know. Simon meowed at me and looked me over with a disapproving eye. For a moment I felt like *I* was the disreputable tomcat...maybe I was just projecting.

He hissed at me when I went to pet his soft head.

"I'm sorry I'm late." I apologized while I shuffled to the kitchen to feed my angry animal.

"Meow."

Simon wound around my legs marking me with his scent. He did this periodically. It was one of the few times he let me close enough to pet him. I personally think it was to warn off other cats. Simon knew I was a sweet deal. Prime cat food, soft bed, and an apartment all to his self for most of the week.

He didn't want to share.

I think he instinctively knew that pissing on me would result in instant expulsion, which is why he kept his marking to a minimum.

Deep purrs rumbled up his chest after he polished off his food at an astonishing rate.

"So we're buddies again?" I asked the golden-eyed feline. I had to give Simon points. He was a beautiful cat and if I didn't keep him inside I would probably have a neighborhood of sleek Bengal kitties parading

around the block. Simon had a more feral nature than the average housecat, hence his nickname hell kitty. I know, I know, I should've taken him to be fixed, but just the thought made me cross my legs and had my balls shriveling in sympathy. I just couldn't do that to my furry friend. Since I kept him exclusively inside I assuaged my conscience about possibly adding to the unwanted kitty population.

What can I say? I love the little fucker.

I made sure he had fresh water before I went to check my email. As I got settled, my cell phone went off.

The number wasn't familiar.

Frowning, I flipped it open. "Hello."

"You didn't call me when you got home." Damian's voice rolled across me like soft velvet.

"I didn't say I would."

"You meant to."

"No I didn't. I don't have your number."

"A mistake on my end." Damian admitted. "But you have it now."

"Yes I do."

"Be ready at seven. I'll take you to dinner first."

"First?" Just because I asked, didn't mean I was going to go.

I was a master at rationalization.

"Before I take you home and fuck you until you forget your mother's name."

"If I have any thought of my mamma while you're fucking me, you're definitely doing something wrong."

Damian's low laugh made me smile. Even if the guy was strange, there was something so likeable about him. His outstanding body didn't hurt either.

So sue me, I'm shallow.

"I'll see how far I get. If I finish my work I'll let you take me out."

"You'll let me take you out anyway." Damian said in a confident voice.

"You think so, do you?"

"Absolutely."

"We'll see."

I hung up, not bothering to say goodbye. It was good to make a guy work a little bit. He didn't have my address either, but I didn't think that would stop Damian.

My drafting table sat in the far corner of the studio. They called it a loft when I purchased it, but I think it was just to make it sound nicer than it was. As a junior architect I wasn't exactly rolling in the funds; I was still paying off student loans.

Although most of my work was done on the computer, I still liked to sketch out my initial ideas on paper. It made me feel more connected to my work. Besides, my project for the night was not for my job, it was a bed for my goddaughter. I had a friend who could make anything I designed. He was an amazing woodworker but wasn't overly imaginative, so we worked out a trade over the years. He'd make me whatever I designed for free, and I'd let him use my design for as long as he wanted. So far I'd gotten some very fine handcrafted pieces, and my friend's business had tripled in the past year even with the recession.

My darling goddaughter, Olivia, was the little girl of my friends, Max and Jeff. She was turning four and it was time to transition her from her shortened toddler bed to a full size big girl bed. It was the bed where she'd have her childhood dreams and her teenage angst. I wanted it strong enough to tolerate her little girl bouncing and her teenage flouncing.

I wanted it to be perfect.

Chapter Two

A knock on the door pulled me from my work. I was shadowing in the design so Sal would know how I wanted the engraving on the headboard. Annoyed at the interruption, I walked over to the door and yanked it open.

Damian stood there with a wide smile holding a single white rose and looking better than a man should in a pair of blue jeans and a red button up shirt.

“White?” I asked, accepting the rose.

“I didn’t want to be a cliché.”

My anger at the interruption vanished under his winning smile. Damian looked fine standing in my doorway.

“Sorry I’m grouchy, I was working on something when you knocked.”

“Can I see it?”

“Sure, come on in.”

Damian’s smile went from bright to incandescent. “Thanks for inviting me.”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Really, despite the great sex, the man was strange. A fraction less gorgeous and I probably would’ve told him to bug off.

“A child’s bed.” A strange expression crossed Damian’s face. “You have a child?”

The laughter was probably rude but eventually I was able to catch my breath, wipe the tears from my eyes, and answer his question. “No, I don’t have any children. It’s for my friends’ little girl. I’m her godfather. It’s her big girl bed.”

Damian looked it over with a serious expression in his eyes. “It’s beautiful.”

“Thanks. This isn’t my final design.”

“Why not?”

I shrugged. “It’s not quite right.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe after I get away from it for a while I’ll figure out what’s wrong.”

Damian examined the drawing. “Are you going to build it too?”

“No, I don’t have any woodworking skill. My buddy, Sal, will actually make it. I thought I’d bring it over next week. Her fathers already have the mattress.

“Hmmm. I’d love to see it when it’s done.”

“I’ll take a picture and send it to you.”

“Or you could let me come along when you pick it up and introduce me to your friends.”

I was trying to think of a polite way to reject that obviously stupid idea without hurting Damian’s feelings, when Simon sauntered into the room.

Damian stepped back when Simon flashed him a fang.

“You said he was a cat not a wild animal.”

“He is a cat.” I said.

I know, I know, laughing at the man again probably wasn’t my most diplomatic move, especially if I wanted to end the night in his bed. I was watching hell kitty’s reaction when I heard a hiss beside me.

Simon tore out of the room.

“What did you do?”

The handsome man shrugged. “I explained things to him, one predator to another.”

I laughed at Damian’s innocent look. The man totally couldn’t pull it off.

“You are lucky to have such a loyal protector.” Damian said.

“Hell cat?” I couldn’t hide my surprise. “The only thing that cat protects are his kitty treats.”

Damian laughed. “Let’s get going, sweetness, I don’t wish to miss our dinner reservations. This place is supposed to have the best steak in town. I love a good bloody steak.”

“Let me put my flower in water.” I went into the kitchen. A soft sound had me looking up. Simon squatted on top of the refrigerator, his ears flattened to his head. His madly swishing tail was puffed three times its usual size. “You okay kitty?”

His expression said, “*What do you think moron?*”

Shaking my head I rooted around for something to put my flower in.

I found a tall glass hidden in the back of a cabinet. I filled it up, put my rose in the water, and set it on the windowsill so I could see it when I got my morning coffee. Maybe I was being sappy, but I’d never had a guy bring me a flower before.

I was startled when long arms wrapped around me, and Damian’s head settled on my shoulder. My body reacted to the smell and heat of his body surrounding me. Something insane happened to me whenever Damian came near. All of my thoughts went south, and I wanted nothing more than to have him fuck me against the counter.

“Your wish is my wish also, darling one.” Damian’s large hands spun me like a top. I’d barely regained my equilibrium when his firm lips took mine in a bone-melting kiss. I think I actually felt them dissolving beneath the heat of his touch. No one had ever made me so needy, so quickly, in my life.

Damian tore his mouth from mine so he could pull my shirt over my head. I whimpered at the loss of his amazing mouth.

“Shhh.” Damian soothed, running his hands across my naked back. “I won’t leave you wanting.”

My pants and underwear followed quickly. Soon I was completely naked and pressed against my clothed lover. The thump on the tile told me that hell kitty was making a strategic exit. Maybe watching two humans go at it freaked him out.

“Aren’t you going to undress?” I asked as Damian merely unzipped his pants.

Damian shook his head. Looking into his eyes I could see the desperate need shining through. He wanted me as much as I wanted him. His next words confirmed it.

“Don’t have time. I have to be inside you now.”

“Shit my supplies are in the bedroom.”

Damian pulled out a condom and a single use lube from his pocket. With a surprising show of strength he lifted me up onto the counter, fitting himself between my spread thighs.

A snap had the lube open, and soon slick fingers were sliding inside me. Without warning he went from one finger to three, crooking his

finger inside to stroke me to paradise. I gasped as Damian pulled out his fingers.

“Not before I’m inside.” He commanded.

Surprisingly, I felt my orgasm recede.

“Noooo.” I wailed. I was so freakin’ close.

“Shhh. I told you I wouldn’t leave you wanting. You must have faith in me.”

His voice was calm and soothed me like nothing else could. My body relaxed beneath his touch and Damian took that moment of relaxation to plunge inside my body.

My back bowed as he slid against my prostrate nailing the perfect spot over and over. I lost track of time and space. Hell for a moment I even forgot my name. All I was belonged to Damian as I let the other man possess me and possess me he did, with a power and desperation I’d never experienced with another man.

“Come with me.” Damian commanded.

I came.

There was nothing else I could do. My lover demanded my release and I was unable to deny him anything.

“Ahhh.” I screamed, clutching at my lover as he continued to fuck me through my orgasm. “Damian.” I whispered. I had to whisper, my vocal chords were sore from screaming.

Damian’s head snapped up at the sound of his name. I gasped as I saw the look in his eyes. In that moment I knew that I was his.

Eyes locked, Damian came.

We stayed clasped together panting, until my legs began to cramp and my butt fell asleep.

“I have to get down.”

“Oh. Sorry.” Damian lifted me easily like I was a doll instead of a man who weighed a good hundred and eighty pounds.

“Get dressed.” Damian slapped me on my bare ass. He gave a rueful look at his clothing. “Do you have a shirt I can borrow? If not we’ll stop at my apartment on the way to the restaurant.”

“Yeah I can find you something.”

I quickly pulled on my clothes, a difficult task with Damian looking at me like he wanted to fuck me all over again. Feeling oddly shy, I flashed him a quick smile.

“I’ll be right back.” I told him patting his shoulder and rushing from the room.

After cleaning up, I put on a pair of nice slacks and a button up shirt I had gotten a few weeks ago and had yet to wear. I left my underwear in the drawer.

I had a feeling Damian would approve.

Thinking of Damian, I pulled out my bottom drawer. For some reason men always left things at my house. It was like they couldn’t come over and have sex with me without leaving a piece of clothing behind. I found a nice black knit shirt that some long-forgotten fuck had left and held it up. Pleased to see it was about the same size as Damian, I went back into the other room.

Damian stood over my drafting table flipping through past projects in my notebook.

“You are very skilled, my darling.” He said with a possessive smile.

“Um. Thanks. I found you a shirt.” I held up my find and Damian’s smile vanished. A cold light entered his eyes that I’d never seen before. Unease shifted to fear as he stalked up to me. Over the years I’d inspired anger in the occasional lover but never like this. It looked like he could happily kill me.

“Where is this other man who lives with my lover?” He hissed. Really hissed like an angry snake or a pissed off cat. “I will kill him and hang his body from the window as a warning to others that you are mine.”

My own anger rose to greet his. Although I was scared of this new side of Damian, I wasn’t the type to let someone else walk all over me.

“First of all, ewww. You can’t just murder someone and leave them as a warning; it’s just a little on the illegal side. Secondly, I don’t have anyone living with me except Simon and you already scared the crap out of him.”

Damian snatched the shirt from my hand. “Then why do you have some other man’s shirt?” He asked, waving it in my face.

“Because once upon a time me and that man had a night of hot, steamy, sex and he left it behind.” I said recklessly.

“He left behind his shirt?”

I shrugged. “Men always leave crap behind.”

“What was the name of this shirtless man?”

I opened my mouth to tell him but my mind went blank. What was the guy’s name? I scraped my brain to figure out who had worn that shirt. Faint memories whispered across my thoughts. Had he been a blond or a brunette?

Soft laughter snapped my attention back to my Damian.

All the anger was gone from his eyes as he looked at me. His familiar smile was back on his face. “You don’t remember him.” He said it as a statement instead of a question. I guess the fact I was still standing there trying to remember worked in my favor.

I thought it just proved that I was a slut.

Shrugging I returned his smile.

I was all for dropping the subject.

Damian stripped off his shirt and handed it to me. “Wash that for me and put it in this ones place. Later when you pull it back out, you will know who it was that gave that one to you. I won’t be a forgotten memory. I will be the one.”

“What one?” I asked frowning. The man went through so many emotions at one time it was like being on a rollercoaster.

Damian stepped forward and kissed me lightly on the lips. “The one you never forget.”

“Hmm. Think a lot of yourself, don’t you?”

“Yes. Yes I do.” Damian said laughing. He pulled the shirt over his head and the plain knit shape took new form across a set of bulging muscles.

Yummy.

Damian flashed me a wicked smile. “This shirt will be good enough for dinner. Let’s go.”

Shaking my head at my mercurial lover I let him scoot me towards the door. I tossed his shirt in a laundry basket on the way out right before I grabbed my socks and shoes.

He must really be hungry.

Damian opened the car door and tucked me into his overpriced car. It was something that probably cost more than I made last year, but I was underwhelmed. I never understood the need for people to own something so expensive. After all, didn't cars depreciate by the second?

"You wouldn't find me as sexy if we took the bus." Damian commented.

Sometimes it almost felt like he read my mind, but I knew I had an expressive face. I've been told that many times, usually in an unflattering manner. I just shrugged and leaned against the buttery leather. Okay maybe I could learn to tolerate luxury.

The smirk Damian sent me was completely unnecessary.

The restaurant was nice. It wasn't a snooty place where you had to watch every move; it was a family restaurant with a cozy feel. The waitress showed us a lovely table with a red tablecloth and candles.

Damian pulled out my chair and seated me.

"You know I'm not a girl, right?" I asked. After all he brought me a flower, opened my car door, and now was pulling out my chair.

"You might not be a girl but I'm still a gentleman." Damian said, placing a kiss on top of my head. "I can't change my nature so you'll have to deal with it."

I couldn't help laughing. Damian, despite the weird moment at my apartment, made me happy.

He nudged me under the table with his feet bringing my attention back to him. I noticed he didn't like it when my mind wandered. He wanted to be my focus at all times.

"Egoist." I said with a smile.

Damian shrugged. "What can I say? I like to be watched by your beautiful blue eyes."

"Flatterer."

The server came to the table and Damian ordered a bottle of fruity red wine and a medium rare steak. I ordered Chicken Alfredo with broccoli and pine nuts. After the waiter came back with our wine and discreetly left again, I had to ask the question burning on my tongue.

"If you wanted a steak why not take me to a steak house?"

Damian stared at me like I'd grown a second head. "Because *your* favorite food is Italian."

"How did you know that?"

"You mentioned it last night."

I scanned my memory, but for the life of me I couldn't remember any conversation from the night before where we discussed favorite foods.

"Try the wine." Damian said, pulling my attention back to him.

I took a sip. Flavors tingled across my tongue. The taste of a full-bodied wine with underlying hints of cherry and clove infused my senses.

"This is really good." I said looking at the bottle.

"I thought you'd like it." His expression was smug as he watched me. Seeing me finish my first glass he quickly poured me another.

"Are you trying to get me drunk?" I asked suspiciously.

“I don’t need to get you drunk, sweetheart. You already gave away the goods.”

I almost snorted my wine. “Warn a guy next time.”

“You have the most beautiful smile.” Damian said. He looked at me with a strange expression I’d never seen in another man’s eyes. It was like I was a source of wonder to him.

I didn’t know what to say. Luckily, the waiter bringing our food interrupted us.

“This looks great.” I said, looking down at my dish with anticipation. Clutching my fork I twirled the pasta and stabbed a piece of chicken to swish in the sauce. Taking my first bite I had to agree with Damian that this was a fabulous restaurant.

“Mmmm. So good.” I said after I’d swallowed. I might not be super classy but I wasn’t a Neanderthal.

“You’re a really sensual man.” Damian commented, taking a bite of his steak. I was surprised that he had isolated his baked potato and asparagus to one side as if they offended him in some manner.

“Not much of a vegetable man?”

Damian shook his head. “I like meat.”

“That’s not real healthy, honey. You should eat a little vegetables to balance out your diet.”

I didn’t know why Damian was staring, but I was starting to feel a little uncomfortable. Shrugging I went back to my delicious meal, pleased when the waiter brought us a fresh basket of bread. “Thanks.” I gave the waiter my best smile.

The waiter tripped on the carpet and almost did a header into another table.

“Poor dude’s clumsy.” I said to Damian. “Why do you keep staring at me?”

“You really don’t know, do you?”

“Know what?”

“How really beautiful you are. I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone who shines like you do.”

“I’m shiny?”

Maybe I’d been wrong about Damian. No matter how hot he was I didn’t really want to get involved with a man who was unbalanced.

Damian ignored my sarcasm. “You have a glow that comes from your soul. It makes you damn irresistible. It was the reason I approached you at the club. I couldn’t resist your light.”

“Um. Thanks.”

I polished off my pasta and considered my exit plan.

“I hear they have an excellent cannoli.” Damian purred. Leaning across the table he took my hand. His long fingers stroked my palm, sending waves of heat across my body.

Maybe I could escape later.

I’d hate to abandon a man before dessert.

Chapter Three

I knew before I finished licking the ricotta off my lips that I was going home with Damian.

Before you judge you should know they were killer cannoli.

His apartment was just as I remembered, a nice place in a nicer neighborhood than mine.

“Where’s your brother?”

Damian shrugged. “He doesn’t live here.”

“Oh.”

That was the last thought I had before heat, and need, and damn clever fingers rendered me speechless. In under ten minutes I was ass up in Damian’s bed and he was doing wicked things with his tongue that made inhuman sounds pour out of my throat like a wounded animal.

“Fuck me, Damian!” I screamed.

“I will, sweetness, I will.” Damian said in a voice so calm I wanted to punch him. Then he went back to working his wicked tongue into my ass and I was willing to forgive him any sin.

Minutes or maybe hours later we lay panting on the mattress. Time blurred together when I was in Damian’s bed. I fell asleep wrapped in my lover’s embrace.

I woke up cold and shivering beneath the chill of the morning air.

“He awakens.” A voice said.

I blinked to clear the gunk from my eyes. John was standing over me with a familiar pastry bag.

“Yum.” I said, sitting up and stretching out my hand to grab it.

John held it up out of my reach.

“The way to your heart really *is* through your stomach.” He teased.

“Gimmee, please.” I whined, batting my eyes up at him.

“Fine, but only because you’re so pitiful it has nothing to do with your gorgeous eyes.”

“Sure, whatever.” I muttered, ripping open the warm bag. The smell of sugary cinnamon wafted upwards. Peering inside I saw warm donut holes nestled like little balls of paradise. “Score.”

I ate three of them before I realized my lover was missing and there was something around my neck. Reaching up I felt it with my fingers trying to determine what it was. I turned my puzzled gaze to John, unable to speak because my mouth was full of sugary goodness.

His eyes widened as he noticed whatever the hell was around my throat. Apparently I wasn’t the only one who didn’t notice it until that moment.

“Crap.” John said. He leaned forward and touched whatever it was. I felt a flash of heat and John snatched his hand back. “He did it. He finally did it...with you.” I didn’t like the look in his eyes. I felt like we were playing blind man’s bluff and I was the one with the mask on while everyone else knew what was going on.

I swallowed my donut. It tasted like ash now anyway.

“What’s going on?”

Ignoring my undressed state, I stood up and went in search of the bathroom. After all I didn’t have anything John hadn’t seen before.

“You have an exhibitionist streak, don’t you?” John asked in a dry voice.

“You have no idea.” I said laughing. My laughter ended when I saw my neck. A narrow, braided leather collar rested around my throat. It was made out of red leather with a gold heart-shaped padlock joining the two ends together. The heart had an intricate filigree design that, if I stared at it long enough, looked like words that I couldn’t quite decipher.

It was cleverly done and completely freaked me out.

“What the fuck is this?” I shouted. “Where’s Damian?”

John cleared his throat behind me. “Damian has been called away for a council meeting. When he told me to come and feed you he didn’t mention he’d claimed you.” Without warning, John dropped to his knees and bowed his head. “Welcome to our clan. As the mate of my brother, I offer you my sword. As the soul of my brother, I offer you my shelter. As the heart of my brother, I offer you my care. Do you accept it?”

“What?” I was so busy trying to figure out how to get the necklace off that I completely missed most of what he was saying.

“Do you accept?” He asked again, still looking at the bathroom tile.

“Will it get you off the floor?”

“Yes.”

“Then I accept.”

“Good.”

“I’m going home.” I said, storming back into the bedroom and quickly sliding into my clothes. These people were insane and I was getting out of the nuthouse. I felt like a tagged wild animal.

I turned to go.

John blocked my way.

“You can’t leave.”

Panic filled me. The sensation of being trapped took away my breath. Instinct kicked in and I punched John in the face. Years of boxing practice ensured I had a solid right hook. John went down, unconscious, with one punch.

“Sorry John.” I felt bad looking at his body on the floor. With a sigh I picked him up and placed him on the bed. Checking that my wallet and keys were still in my pocket, I raced out of the apartment making sure to snag the bag of donuts as I left.

I knew it would only be a matter of time before John was after me again so I caught a cab home, packed a quick bag of belongings, grabbed my sketchbook, and left.

* * *

Sal still had bed head when he answered my pounding on his door. He was wearing a white tank top and flannel bottoms that had sock monkey heads decorating the blue background.

“What the hell, Nick?” He said, staring at me standing on his doorstep with a bag.

“I need a place to hide.” I said. No need to sugar coat things for Sal. I’d known him since I was ten.

Sal immediately stepped aside and let me in. “What did you do now?”

“Hey, what makes you think I did anything?”

“Because I’ve known you forever and you are always doing crap.”

I hated it when Sal was right. My eyes scanned his muscular body. The man was built like a god, a Viking god. Wide shoulders, white-blond hair, and a nice hairy beefy build that made more than one bear lover want to jump Sal's bones. He was also a sweet man. Any gay man's dream, but mine.

I met Sal too young. We grew up together, fought over the same boys (fights which I usually won), and slept our way through college. He was like a brother to me. A really hot brother I would rather gnaw off my arm than sleep with.

"Love the monkeys." I teased as he sat on the couch beside me.

"Don't try to distract me, Nick. What's going on and what the hell is that thing around your neck?"

With a sigh I confessed everything. I never could keep anything to myself.

"He sounds like a nutcase." Sal said with a frown. I had images of Zeus striking Damian down with a lightning bolt.

It was a nice image.

"Too bad the sex was so great." I agreed.

Sal laughed, a sound that always made me smile.

"Can I stay here for a few days? I'd stay with Max and Jeff but I don't want Olivia in danger if the guy comes after me."

"So it's all right if he attacks me?"

I shrugged. "You can take care of yourself."

Sal nodded. "Good point."

"Besides I have the design for Olivia's bed."

I reached into my bag and pulled out my sketchbook. “I’m not quite finished but it’s close.”

Sal took it from my hands and opened the book. A delighted smile crossed his face. “This is a good one. I really like the design on the headboard.”

“Do you think we should engrave her name on the footboard or do you think that’s too Snow White?”

Sal shook his head. “No, I think we should leave it plain. She’d like her name when she was little, but when she got older she’d find it annoying.”

“Good point.”

“That chair design you made me last month has been a big seller. Have you considered going into business with me full-time?”

Sal asked me this at least once a month. For the first time I was considering it.

“Maybe.” The company I was working for was going through an upheaval, and despite my good job performance I was worried for my future employment.

“Really.” Sal picked me up and gave me a big hug. “That would be amazing.” I was basking in the warm feelings of being engulfed in the large arms of my best friend, when Sal’s front door slammed open and Damian stomped into the house.

“Let him go now.”

Surprised, Sal dropped me to the ground.

After all, Sal had made that door and we both knew how solid it was. That Damian could bust it open was shocking. The man was freakishly strong.

“Damian what are you doing here? How did you find me?” I know I never gave him Sal’s address.

“I’m here to reclaim my lover who seems to have wandered off.” Damian reached around Sal, grabbed my wrist, and yanked me to his side. Once his arm was wrapped around me, his anger faded. “Why did you punch John?”

“He said I couldn’t leave.”

I waited for Damian to yell at me but all he said was, “nice to see you can take care of yourself,” while he looked at me with that sappily adoring expression. I resisted punching him, but it was close.

Sal glared at him. Reaching behind his couch, Sal brought out a shotgun. “If you know what’s good for you, you’ll go back where you came from and leave Nicky alone.”

Amusement wasn’t the expression I was expecting on Damian’s face as he looked down the barrel of a shotgun. “I mean my Nicholas no harm.” His finger traced my neck just below the collar. Shivers went down my spine, my body hardening with his touch. Unable to resist, I closed my eyes to further absorb the sensation. It was like my body was tuned him. I couldn’t say no to him, even if he threw me down and wanted to fuck me in front of my best friend.

“Nicky?” I heard the question in Sal’s voice. If I told him to, he would shoot Damian without a second thought.

I knew I had lost. I didn't want Damian injured. Just the thought brought tears to my eyes. I picked up my bag only to have him relieve me of it.

Sal raised his eyebrows when I rolled my eyes.

"Can I have a moment alone with Sal?"

Damian's eyes did that freaky, glowing thing.

"Listen Damian, if you want to have a relationship with me then you have to know Sal is my best friend. Now I've got to convince him I'm not going off with a maniac before he calls his cop friends to come and rescue me." I could tell by Sal's sheepish look that I'd read his expression correctly.

Damian looked torn. "I will wait in the car." He glared at Sal. "Don't touch him or I will rip out your heart and eat it for dessert."

"Really Damian that's totally gross." I said unable to keep the visual out of my head.

Damian flashed his really sharp teeth at me.

Had they been that pointy before?

"Dude, that man has it hot for you but he's fucking scary. Are you sure you want to go with him?" Sal said after Damian had left.

I couldn't explain to Sal how much I needed Damian. Walking away wasn't an option. Despite my flight from his apartment, when he was here I couldn't resist.

"I'll leave the plan for the bed with you." I said, handing over my sketchbook.

"Call me tomorrow and let me know how you really are or I'll send in the rescue crew."

I instinctively reached to hug him goodbye but Sal stepped back.

“Sorry bro, but I have a feeling your scary man would know if we hugged.”

The loss was like a punch in the gut. I nodded and turned towards the door that now hung on its hinges. “Sorry about the door.” I said, not turning to look at my friend. It hurt too much to know that a special part of our relationship was over. I knew that as long as I was with Damian I had to forgo touching other men, even in friendship. That would be difficult to remember, I was a touchy type of person.

My relationship was doomed.

With a heavy sigh, I walked through the shattered doorframe and straight towards a familiar luxury car. Damian held the door open for me but I didn’t acknowledge him as I slid inside and buckled my seatbelt.

Damian got into the driver’s seat but didn’t immediately start the car.

He stroked my head with one of his large hands, trying to soothe me. “I am sorry, my sweet man, but I can’t stand the thought of you in another man’s arms.”

“Sal is my best friend.” I said with a sniff.

For a moment his grip tightened in my hair. “How close of a friend?”

I looked up, blinking back tears. “He’s like a brother to me. I’ve known him since I was little.”

Damian tilted my face up and placed a soft kiss on my lips. “I will try to be tolerant of your friends. I want you to be happy.”

Nodding I looked out the window. Depression weighed down my soul. I felt more like a kept pet than a man in a relationship.

Pressing my face against the window I hoped I'd made the right choice.

Damian squeezed my knee in a gesture of comfort.

Oddly enough I was comforted. I wasn't surprised to see a few minutes later that we were outside of Damian's apartment.

"Am I living here now?" I asked, strangely apathetic about the entire thing.

"For a little while until I find a place more suited to us. I brought your cat." He said coaxingly.

"Really?" I couldn't stop my smile. "How did you convince him to get in his carrier?"

Damian laughed. "I didn't. I sent John."

"Poor John." I felt a little guilty about punching the other guy. He'd had a really rough day.

I followed Damian into his apartment and stopped at the sight of my cat sitting on John's lap. A jagged scratch crossed one cheek and he had a huge bruise on his eye from where I punched him.

"Sorry." I said with a shrug.

John set my cat on the floor and walked forward.

Damian stepped protectively closer.

John shot him a glare. "Like I would hurt your chosen."

He walked forward and hugged me. I jerked back. A hurt expression crossed his face.

"I just yelled at him for letting another man hug him." Damian explained.

“Oh, you were being an ass.” John said, laughing.

I couldn’t help but laugh with him. John was like the light side of Damian, a perfect foil.

Walking over to the couch I plopped down on the leather surface.

“So what do we do now?”

My stomach growled.

Damian and John laughed.

“I’ll order you some pizza.” John said. “What do you want on it?”

“Pepperoni and mushrooms.”

The evening was oddly relaxing. We ate pizza and watched the football game like we were a bunch of guys hanging out. Little did I know it was not a sign of things to come.

Chapter Four

The next morning I was sitting at the breakfast bar eating food Damian had cooked for me, an amazing omelet with toast. I was surprised when he didn't eat, but he told me he wasn't a breakfast eater. I'd met a few of those creatures in the past, and although I couldn't understand how a person could not like breakfast, I let it slide. I had greater issues to settle. Last night I'd been so focused on relaxing that I let my questions escape me. Now was the time to get some answers.

"Damian, what is it you do for a living?"

Too many things didn't add up. I needed to know if I'd aligned my life with a mobster or a drug dealer or any number of things that would necessitate my changing my name and heading out of the country.

Before he could answer, my cell phone rang.

"Give me a moment." I said, glancing at the number. With a smile I stood up and walked to the opposite side of the room before flipping open the phone. I knew it was Olivia because it had Jeff's number and he always let her talk to me first.

"How's my baby girl?" I crooned.

"Good Unca Nick. When are ya gonna visit me?"

Her sweet voice soothed me like nothing else. Since the day Olivia was born I've adored this little girl. If I weren't such a selfish bastard, I'd have children of my own.

"I'll be there for your birthday party." I promised. Olivia's party had been delayed due to her catching the flu the day before her big event. I was hoping to have the bed ready by then, but if not, I could always pick

something up at the boutique toy store a few miles from their house. The small shop carried the most amazing things and gift wrapped for free.

After exchanging a few more words she hung up. I waited a moment and smiled when the phone in my hand rang. It was my friend Jeff, Olivia's father.

"Hey Jeff." I answered. "Sounds like you have your hands full. How's Max handling everything?"

Max was a bit of a drama king. Everything was a problem until it was over. Last year I thought he was going to have a heart attack before the end of Olivia's party. There was an incident with ponies that we've sworn never to speak of again.

The long pause broke me out of my memories. "Jeff?"

"Max is gone." Jeff's broken voice made my insides go cold.

"What do you mean he's gone?"

"H-he left me for a younger man... he said he was tired of being tied down."

Shock held me immobile for a moment. The last thing I'd expect from Max was for the man to leave Jeff. "I thought you guys were happy together."

Jeff sniffed. "So did I, but apparently we weren't happy enough."

"God, I'm so sorry Jeff."

I could see Damian flinch out of the corner of my eye, but when I looked at him he gave me a reassuring smile. Shrugging I went back to my conversation.

"Is there anything I can do?"

“Do you think you can come early for Olivia’s party and help me get everything together?”

“Sure Jeff. Anything you need.”

Jeff gave a soft sob. “I thought I had everything I needed, but apparently I was wrong.”

“You need anything else. Anything at all you call me.”

I was never good in these kinds of situations. I’m bad at emotional stuff. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to help. It was that I never knew what to say or how to act about other people’s pain. Most of the time I didn’t give a crap about people so it didn’t matter, but Jeff was one of the handful of people I cared about. Max used to be another. I could’ve excused him for leaving Jeff, because sometimes relationships just didn’t work out, but he left my goddaughter.

He was definitely out of the exclusive Nicholas friend club.

“What did you tell Olivia?”

“I told her that daddy had to go out of town, which is true, I just left out the part where he went to Europe with his new guy.”

“He’s a bastard. I’ll be there bright and early. Hopefully I’ll have her bed done by then.”

“She’ll be excited that you’re here whether you bring a present or not.”

“True, but she’ll be twice as excited about Uncle Nick and a gift.”

“Are you bringing anyone?”

I looked over at Damian. In the dimly lit living room, wearing casual clothes, the man looked more elegant than others I’d seen in three-piece

suits. Even my most optimistic vision didn't include him smiling happily amongst the frosting stained fingers of little children.

"I doubt it."

"I just didn't want you to think you couldn't because of me."

"I'll let you know. Don't you worry my friend, we'll find you someone new. Olivia deserves to have two daddies not one daddy and an asshole."

"Thanks." Jeff gave a tearful goodbye before hanging up.

"Problem?" Damian asked. His eyes scanned me as if looking for injuries. It took me a moment to realize tears were dripping from my eyes.

"Max left Jeff. I thought he really loved them." Just the thought of Max's betrayal caused a knot to settle in my gut. "How could he leave his family?"

Damian walked over and wrapped his arms around me. It would've been touching if he didn't talk. "Want me to hunt him down and kill him for you?" It was the tone of his voice that unnerved me, like asking me if I wanted another cup of coffee.

It was chilling.

I looked up at him not the least bit surprised when I saw the look in his eyes matched his voice.

"You know you can't just walk around killing people. Right?"

"Sure, honey." Damian said. The patronizing tone had me jerking out of his arms.

"I mean it. I don't want to have to visit you in jail."

Damian placed a gentle kiss on my forehead and sneakily wrapped me back in his arms. "Don't worry. I promise that you will never have to visit me in jail."

Somehow that wasn't reassuring.

Despite the high creep factor, I still let him pull me closer and move me in a slow dance across his apartment. Damian's soft crooning kept our tempo across the apartment floor. There was something undeniably sexy about Damian that kept me going back to him. If I were smart I'd run screaming in the other direction.

Obviously I'm an idiot.

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for you." Damian whispered as he dipped me low and kissed me gently on the lips. "You are mine for eternity."

It was sappily romantic and I ate it up with a spoon. I should've known it couldn't last. I mean when something looks that perfect it's bound to have a spider web of flaws beneath the glossy surface.

A loud knock at the door had Damian carefully setting me on my feet. "It's John."

I wasn't the least bit surprised when Damian opened the door to his brother a moment later. Damian had a way of knowing things. I was more shocked when hell kitty came and rubbed against me like we were the best of friends. The move must've traumatized my poor cat more than I thought.

Absently I picked him up and scratched behind his ears as I watched John interact with Damian. John gave me a quick look and a bright smile. There was no sign of the bruise from the night before. The man must be the fastest healer on earth. I couldn't even see any signs of makeup covering the black eye I'd given him yesterday.

"Morning Nick."

“Morning.” I replied. From the look John was giving Damian, I could tell he wanted to talk to his brother in private.

“I’ll just go and take a shower so you two can talk.”

“Thanks sweetheart.” Damian said, already turning back to his brother.

Shaking my head, I went to take my shower. I left hell kitty on the back of the couch with a final pat on his little head.

I knew I’d pay for that later.

Halfway through my steamy soak, I had company.

Damian’s hands slid across my slick, soapy skin. His touch inflamed me more than any man I’ve ever been with before. Without warning, his grip tightened.

“Don’t do that.” He growled.

“Don’t do what? I was innocently taking a shower when you came in.”

“Don’t think about other men when I’m touching you.”

How did he know what I was thinking?

“I can think about anything I want.” I answered, sounding a lot more defiant than I actually felt. I couldn’t help getting a thrill over a man who was so possessive. Possessive could turn abusive though so I was keeping a weather eye on my stormy lover.

“You can think anything you like as long as you dream about me.” Damian agreed. He turned me to face him, pressing my back against the chilly tile. I hadn’t been in there long enough to warm up the shower and the contact made goose bumps pop across my skin.

“What did your brother want?” I asked. Anything to distract me from the man’s naked body, otherwise I was a goner. Maybe I could win a world title for the quickest orgasm. On second thought, that wasn’t really something you trotted out to perspective lovers.

Damian burst out laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

“You are the most interesting man.” My dark-haired love god said. Before I could ask him what he was talking about, he lifted me up so I could wrap my legs around his hips as he slid one finger into my hole and smiled.

“You got yourself prepared.” He said in surprise.

“Me, hot water, and slick soap. It was only a matter of time before you joined me.”

“You are a very smart man.”

I didn’t get a chance to respond because he pushed inside me and I forgot what I was going to say. I also forgot how to form words, the shape of letters, and the color purple, he was just that good.

It only took a few thrusts and we were done, after all it had been hours since we last had sex.

At least two.

“You are the sexiest man on this earth.” Damian whispered in my ear.

I would’ve responded, but goo can’t talk, and I was definitely a pile of goo held up by my conscientious lover.

With efficient motions, Damian turned off the water, dried me, and tucked me into his enormous bed like a child.

“I definitely don’t think of you as a child.” Damian said.

I would've wondered how he knew what I was thinking, but I was too sleepy, and moments later I was asleep. Strange, I never sleep during the day.

* * *

"Come on, you have to wake up." John's voice sank into my consciousness. What was it about this guy that he always needed to wake me? If it weren't for his brother I'd punch him. Oh. Right. I already had.

Blinking, I tried to clear out the swathes of spider webs that were cocooning my mind. It felt like one of those old science fiction flicks where the mutant spiders came and covered the city with their silk. I was the little car you could barely see through all the white webbing.

"Damian is right. You do think the oddest things." John's voice was more amused than urgent.

"What are you doing here?"

Once again the blond sat at my bedside. He looked good in a white cotton button up shirt and a pair of crisp jeans.

"We've got to go. Damian told me to take you to a secure location."

"Shit! He's in the mafia or something isn't he?" I knew I should've pinned him down on what he did. Anyone that gorgeous, without a boyfriend, was obviously flawed.

John stared at me for a moment. "Why would you think that?"

"He's secretive. You said he goes to meetings and he has never told me what he does."

“He’s not with the mob.” John said scornfully. “He’s a vampire and so am I.”

I laughed until I saw that John wasn’t laughing with me. “You expect me to believe you’re a vampire.”

“Yes.”

“Oh. Okay. In fact, I was just going to call my mummy friends to go clubbing tomorrow so maybe you’ll want to come.”

It was good to humor the mad. At least that’s what I’ve always heard.

“Didn’t you wonder how I could read your mind, spider boy?”

“Hey that was private.” Shit. He was reading my mind. I was pretty sure I didn’t share the spider image. “That doesn’t prove you’re a vampire, you could be psychic.” I was more willing to believe he was some sort of advanced human than a vampire. I mean there really aren’t any vampires and poor John needed help. I wondered if Damian knew his brother was insane?

“I’m not insane, I’m a vampire.”

Then he did something I will relive in my dreams for many nights to come. The smiling, friendly blond opened his mouth and his incisors grew before my eyes. When he was done his eyes had a freaky greenish-grey glow and his teeth were unnaturally long.

He had fangs.

Real, fucking fangs.

I scooted back on the bed to get away from this creature that had taken over the nice guy I thought I’d known.

“Don’t be afraid.” The creature hissed.

It was time to get out of there. Possessive hot dudes I could forgive, but fangs were a different story.

John's fangs retracted and it struck me that they really had been reading my mind the entire time. They weren't just guessing what I said. They were delving into my thoughts.

Creepy.

I carefully tried to think of nothing as I dressed.

"Running won't do you any good. Damian has taken your blood and bonded with you. He can find you anywhere."

"Thanks for the warm fuzzies." Annoyance was wiping away my fear. It wasn't like John had changed. He was just more annoying with fangs.

"Come. I'm taking you home."

"What do you mean home?" I was pretty sure he wasn't talking about my apartment.

"To the family compound. It is time for you to meet father. If you're going to be my brother's companion you'll need to pass inspection."

I had no wish to pass inspection. In fact, the more I thought about it, the more I wanted to get the hell out of there, and not with my friendly neighborhood vampire.

"Don't even think of punching me." John said with a smile that was more feral than friendly.

"Wouldn't dream of it." I lied. I flashed him a smile of my own. A click brought my attention to my wrist. The bastard had handcuffed me. With cool efficiency John put the other part on his own wrist.

"You do know that I'm not opposed to chopping off your hand to escape?"

John patted my head like I was his new favorite pet.

I growled at him.

“Come Nicholas, let’s go meet father. I don’t want to be the one to tell Damian I lost his mate.”

I didn’t know which was scarier, that I was handcuffed to a vampire or that I was apparently mated to one. I didn’t have time to think about it as John dragged me out of the door, scooping up hell cat as he went.

The damn creature purred.

Chapter Five

To say the family home was a mansion would give it a great disservice. It was fucking enormous. I don't think I've ever seen a house that large before. Maybe compound *was* a better word.

"All of my family lives here except for Damian." John looked smug as he sat there with my cat in his lap. We were sitting in the back of a limo and I refused to be impressed.

I shook the handcuff on my wrist more for annoyance sake than anything else. I had lost my temporary fear of John. After all the man had come across me sleeping three times now and hadn't harmed me then. I doubted he was going to hurt me now.

"Why not Damian?"

"Huh?" John looked over at me as the car slowed before the mansion's front doors.

"Why doesn't Damian live here?"

"He and father don't get along."

"Great."

This was going to be fun.

The butler met us at the door. He took one look at our bound hands and pulled a key out of his pocket. "Good evening, sirs." He said, as he unlocked our cuffs.

"Have a lot of bondage problems?" I smirked at John.

"On occasion."

"My name is Franklin, sir. Please feel free to ask for me if you need anything." The butler's eyes were kind, but I was certain if he survived by

serving vampires they would have his allegiance first. I wasn't holding out hope that he'd help me with my great escape.

"Is this him?" A gorgeous man that looked like Damian's older brother, but was probably his father, stalked down the stairs.

I stood where I was letting him come to me.

"So you're the one my son has chosen. You don't look like much."

"Ouch. That's not very kind." The closer he got, the better view I got of the man's eyes. They were exquisite. Damian's were similar but they lacked his father's azure blue. A thought of Olivia flashed through my mind. Her bed implanted with chips of azure glass mixed in the wood. It would be enchanting.

I pulled out my phone to call Sal.

John grabbed my wrist.

"What?"

"You can contact Sal later."

"But I might forget." It was one of the reasons I was so impulsive. I had a bit of an attention deficit disorder that no amount of medication could seem to cure me of.

Damian's father was looking at me with a strange expression in his beautiful eyes.

"You're not scared of me?"

"Should I be?" I frowned at the man. "John said he was bringing me here for protection. I figured if this is supposed to be protection, you aren't going to suck me dry and toss my drained body out onto the street."

"But, I'm a vampire."

I slid open my phone so I could text Sal. My fingers flew across the tiny keyboard as I talked to Damian's father. "John and I already had that discussion." I sent my message and looked back up at Damian's father. "I only freak out once a day and frankly at this point I'm just hungry. Do you have any real food around here?"

John went to his knees and bowed his head before his father, releasing Simon as he kneeled. The cat sat on the ground beside him completely ignored by both vampires. "Sire, I present to you Nicholas Bellon, Damian's mate. Nicholas, this is William Jarrenson, my sire."

"I'm not kneeling." I said. My phone beeped and I glanced at the screen. Sal liked my idea. I laughed at his message as to whether I was enjoying Damian.

I tucked my phone into my pocket and looked up into a pair of azure eyes.

"What?"

"You really aren't afraid of me are you?"

"I don't have the energy to expend on fear. I'm starving and I have to get to work in the morning."

"You didn't tell him?" William demanded.

"Tell me what?" I could tell from John's expression that I wasn't going to like whatever he had to say.

"You can't go back to work. Damian will freak if you're out exposed to unknown factions."

"Well then Damian will have to freak. I'm not going to sit around being his kept boy."

“You don’t really understand your position here.” William looked me deeply in the eyes. “You will do what we say.”

“Um, no. But thanks for asking. I’ll tell Damian the same thing. I hate to burst your little vampy bubble but I’ve got a life and I’m going back to it.”

I never saw a person move that fast. One minute he was several feet away, the next he was picking me up with one hand by my shirt.

“Hey.”

“You will do what I say.” William insisted, his blue eyes glowing.

“Sure dude, whatever you say.” I was definitely getting the hell out of here at the first opportunity.

William shook me making my teeth rattle. My phone flew out of my hands.

“Hey.”

A low growl and a hiss were the only warnings before hell kitty jumped up and landed on William’s back, claws out.

The vampire screamed, releasing me in the process.

Simon let out a combatant yowl.

I picked up my phone and smoothed my hair. I just know it was sticking out all over the place.

John stepped forward to help his father and got a scratch across his hand. “You could help here.” He said to me.

“I could.” I watched for a while as William tried to battle the hell cat, and was actually losing. I might have tried to intervene if I was given an apology, but really Damian’s father had ego issues.

“Okay, okay I’m sorry.” William shouted.

I reached into my pocket for the small plastic wrapping. Letting out a low whistle I pulled the package of dried pepperoni out of my pocket.

Simon stopped mid howl and dropped to the floor.

Opening the package, I crouched down and fed him some pieces. The Bengal purred a loud rumbling sound that always made me smile.

“Blast it John, you didn’t tell me he had a protector.”

William dabbed blood from his face.

John looked paler than normal. “I didn’t think he’d attack.” The vampire speared me with a glare. “You said he only protects his kitty treats.”

“True, but then I’m the one who carries them around.”

I always carry cat snacks in my pocket because the stupid cat often got outside and the only way to lure him back in was by bribery.

Damian’s father smiled at me, which made me increasingly nervous.

“I was worried my son had found himself something pretty to look at for a lifemate, but you have hidden depths.”

I didn’t know how to answer that. I’ve been accused of many things, but it was a general consensus, even by my closest friends, that I was in the shallower end of the contemplative pool.

My stomach grumbled.

“Does that mean I get fed?”

“Yes, come with me. I don’t want my son to find out I starved his companion.”

“Yeah, that would be bad. He’s psychotically protective.”

William laughed.

The look was good for the guy. I wondered if he liked men.

“I like both but I don’t think my son would approve.” Williams answered with a pat on my back. “After all he collared you before sending you home. That doesn’t say he has enormous trust.”

I tugged at the collar. I’d forgotten about it for a moment but the reminder had me yanking at leather. “Do you have a hack saw so I can get this thing off.”

“That thing, as you so call it, is a symbol of your commitment with Damian.”

“What commitment? We’ve only had a few nights together. I never agreed to anything longer.”

William turned to John. “Is this true?”

John nodded. “Damian is determined to keep Nicholas. He won’t listen to anyone else.”

“What makes you so special?” William asked, looking me up and down.

“I’m great in bed.” I quipped. We entered the dining room and I saw the longest freaking table in my life. It was filled with beautiful people in beautiful clothes. They all looked up to stare at me with identical blue eyes.

“How many freaking kids do you have?” I asked William as everyone stood up at our entrance.

William laughed again. “I am over five hundred years old.”

Huh.

“You look good for your age.”

With a wide smile William addressed the group. “Everyone this is Nicholas, he belongs to Damian, treat him poorly at your peril.”

Nothing like a warm fuzzy introduction to get a man started on the right foot with the in-laws.

Shaking my head I took the seat John held out for me. I was getting used to men holding my chair.

I have to confess I kind of liked it.

After William was seated the rest of them settled back down.

“So you’re Damian’s companion.”

I turned to my right to see a dark-haired woman with wintry blue eyes.

“That’s what I’m told.” I answered. I would’ve said more but a servant put an enormous plate of food before me. Roasted pork with gravy, mashed potatoes and shiny nuggets of glazed carrots covered my plate.

The smell was divine.

Picking up a fork, I stabbed a piece of pork and scooped up some mashed potatoes with the meat. Taking a bite I closed my eyes to absorb the flavor.

“Mmm. That’s good.”

Opening my eyes I saw the lady on my right was staring at me with wide eyes.

I looked at her plate and saw she had a bloody steak.

“Is that the only food you can eat?”

She nodded.

“That’s too bad.”

I liked a good rare steak as well as the next person, but there were a lot of flavors out there to enjoy. I would probably cry if I were confined to one type of food and blood. I patted her back consolingly.

“I felt that.” She said in a hushed voice.

I took my hand back. "Sorry, are you one of those no touching people?" I'd met a few of them in my life. People who didn't like to be touched. I hadn't noticed that about Damian and John but maybe it was a by the vampire kind of thing like it was with people.

"No. I mean yes, I don't really like to be touched, but when I said I felt that, I felt you eating your food. I could taste the pork and mashed potatoes through your mind."

I smiled at her. "They're good aren't they?"

"Yes, yes they are." She gave me a big smile that transcended her from pretty to truly beautiful.

I didn't freak that she could get the flavor of food from me. I was used to Damian and John reading my mind. There wasn't a lot in there at any time so its not like I had anything to hide.

Purring made me glance down seconds before Simon leaped onto my lap.

"There you are, you bad boy."

I don't usually feed him from the table, but I could tell the poor thing was frightened in his new environment, so I gave him a bite of pork.

"I'm Lila, one of Damian's sisters." The vampire next to me said. Her smile was much warmer than when I first sat down.

"I'm Nicholas as I'm sure you know and this is my hell kitty, Simon."

"You named him hell kitty?" William sputtered.

I shrugged. "I thought it fit."

"It does indeed." William said with a frown at my purring feline. "No one told me that Damian's mate was a witch."

"Pardon me?" I was certain I must have heard wrong.

“You’re a witch. You have a familiar and you’ve certainly placed a love spell on my son.”

I couldn’t help it, I laughed.

I laughed so hard and so long I had to gasp to keep my breath. Simon got disgusted and hopped down well before I was done laughing.

“I’m glad I can amuse you.” William said as I brushed tears from my eyes. “I take it you’re not a witch.”

“Not hardly, no.”

“Then why is my son so obsessed with you? You’re attractive and have sense of humor, and I’ll have to take your word that you’re good in bed, but I would think my son would look for something more in his forever mate.”

I could’ve taken offense at that, but William looked more confused than critical so I shrugged it off.

“You’ll have to ask him. I’d be happy to leave and go back to my life.”

“Sorry you can’t.” John spoke from the other side of the table.

“Why not?”

William cleared his throat. “There is a competing faction of vampires who are trying to take over our area. It isn’t safe for a marked mate to be wandering around.”

“Are you telling me that by latching this collar around me, Damian has painted a big target on my ass?”

“Yes.” William said with no expression on his handsome face. I resisted the urge to punch him, but it was an effort. If he weren’t my boyfriend’s father I probably would’ve given in to the desire, but I was taught to respect my elders even if they don’t look very old.

I was going to respond when my phone beeped.

Popping it open I saw that Jeff had sent me a picture of Olivia. She was standing in the doorway wearing the red dress I'd bought her last month. It was trimmed in lace and had embroidered cherries all over.

"What a pretty little girl." Lila said.

"Isn't she?" I felt an undeserved rush of pride. After all I had nothing to do with how pretty she was, she wasn't even related to me. "She's my goddaughter." I said to the vamp.

"What's a goddaughter?" Lila crinkled her brow as if trying to retrieve a memory.

"It means that if anything happens to her fathers I get custody of her."

"She has two fathers?" William asked.

"Well she *had* two fathers. One of the bastards decided it was too much work and went off with some twink he picked up."

William's face took on the same expression I'd seen on Damian's. "Would you like me to kill him for you?"

"Um. No thanks, but it's sweet of you to offer."

These vampires were a bloodthirsty crowd.

"Yes we are." Lila said with a fang-tipped smile.

I laughed. "I guess I didn't phrase that right in my head."

"Phrase what love?"

I turned my head and Damian was standing behind me in a gorgeous suit.

The events since waking up came back to me in a rush. Fury took over and almost without my thinking I went over to Damian and

punched him in the nose. His head snapped back, but he didn't fall over like John did when I'd punched him.

"What was that for?"

"You tag me, have your brother kidnap me, and then wonder why I'm upset?"

"Ahh, baby, don't be angry." Damian wrapped me in his long arms, pulling me close to his chest. This time I suspected it was to keep me pinned instead of deriving from affection. "I'll take care of you."

I leaned back to look at Damian's father.

"Did you drop him on his head when he was a new vampire?"

Lily choked on her steak. "When you get done with him, can I have him?" She asked Damian with a wide smile. "I haven't laughed so much in centuries."

I was to learn later that Damian was considered one of the most feared vampires of the tribe. A fierce warrior who had never been beaten in battle and was so alpha he couldn't share the same space with his sire.

Damian snarled at Lila. "I did not send him here to be poached."

I squirmed in his arms seeking release, but only ended up rubbing my body against his. I froze. I so wasn't in the mood for sex.

"Nonsense baby, you're always in the mood for sex."

"Remind me to kill you later." I said with a smile.

"Nice." Damian said admiringly. "But next time use more snarl."

Disemboweling was really too good for some people.

The entire table erupted in laughter.

"I'm going to have to teach you to shield your thoughts." Damian grumbled.

“I don’t know. It saves so much conversation.”

“Damian, if you’re done pawing your boy, maybe you can give me a report.”

“I don’t paw father. That’s for werewolves like Dennis.”

“There are werewolves?” I’d always wanted to meet a werewolf. All that growling, yum!

I was immediately released.

“Vampires are sexy, werewolves are not.” Damian enunciated like I was a particularly dim two-year old.

“Yes, dear.” I said patting his chest. Maybe I did need to learn how to block my thoughts. “Where’s the werewolf?”

Damian flashed his fangs. “I think John’s are longer.” I said after a moment’s examination. “Does that mean something among vampires?”

“Does what mean something?”

“Who has the longer fangs.” I wagged my eyebrows at him to show I was teasing.

Damian rolled his eyes. “You’re like a one man comedy show.”

I shrugged. What could I say? I cracked jokes when I was nervous, and being in a room with about a million vampires was enough to make anyone freak a little.

My phone rang.

“He gets like a million calls a minute.” William said.

I flipped open the phone to hear Jeff sobbing on the line.

“Jeff, Jeff, what’s wrong?” I shouted over the line.

“Max is dead.”

“What do you mean Max is dead?”

“Killed in a car accident in Europe. The police just called me because I was on his contact list.”

“Oh, Jeff I’m so sorry.” I was too. I knew that even though they were separated, Jeff was hoping eventually he could reconcile with the love of his life. “I’m on my way over.”

Snapping the phone shut I turned to Damian. “Give me your keys.”

“I’m not giving you my keys so you can run off to calm another man.” Damian said.

“Well you have to. Your father needs your report and I’m not going to leave Jeff crying alone. He’s going to freak out Olivia.” That was something I wouldn’t allow. No one upset my baby girl. She was going to be crushed enough that Max was dead.

“I’ll take you.” John jumped up to stand at my side. “You trusted me to bring him here.” He reminded Damian.

“Yes, but it was a short trip and father knew you were coming.”

“So you don’t really trust him?” I asked innocently.

Damian glared at me before turning to his brother. “Of course I do. I just don’t know if you’ll have enough protection with only the two of you.”

“I’ll go with.” Lila said, standing up and tossing her napkin on the table. I watched in fascination as it narrowly missed a lit candle.

William sighed. “How did I know you were going to be so much trouble? Jonathan, pull the limo around.” He called out. Looking at me, he shook his head. “I’ll come along and Damian can give me his report while we are driven there.”

“Cool. Another limo ride.”

Chapter Six

The limo ride was filled with Damian and his father quietly talking and me, John and Lila chatting it up and dousing ourselves in liquor. At one point Damian reached across the car and removed the alcohol from my side of the vehicle.

Totally unnecessary.

I was only a little sloshed.

Ooh, Damian was comfy.

“You’re comfy.” I told him snuggling into his side.

“How are you going to comfort Jeff if you’re drunk out of your gourd?” Damian asked. I could tell by the way his hand stroked my face that he wasn’t truly upset even if I was getting soused while his father watched.

“I’ll give him enough booze that he’ll forget why I’m there. Hopefully Olivia will be asleep when we get there.”

Thoughts of my sweet goddaughter sobered me up quicker than a gallon of espresso.

“She’ll be all right.” Damian said stroking my head. “Children are amazingly resilient.”

“Yeah.” Even as I agreed I still couldn’t bear the thought of my little girl hurting. If I could’ve brought Max back from the grave to kill him again, I would have.

“Bloodthirsty thing aren’t you?” Damian’s father gave me a calculating look that made me more than a little nervous. It just occurred to me that I was bringing four vampires to visit my little Olivia.

“Don’t worry.” Lila patted my leg. “It’s only rumor that vampires like child’s blood, its actually quite repulsive. Without life experience children’s blood is bland and watery. We’ll leave your little Olivia alone.

“Good.” I said relaxing against Damian. Absently I patted his stomach as I snuggled in close.

“For a man he’s really beautiful.” I heard Damian’s father say to Damian.

My lover’s hand stroked my cheek again. “Yes, he is.”

Before I could comment, the limo came to a halt. Sitting up, I saw we’d reached Jeff’s house. Lights blazed through the window proving that Jeff hadn’t gone to bed despite the late hour. I started to move around Damian to get out when my lover wrapped an arm around me, dragging me to a halt.

“What?”

“You don’t just rush right in. You let your bodyguards check and make sure everything is all right.”

“He means us sweetie.” Lila said as she and John slipped out of the limo and headed towards Jeff’s house. I hoped he wouldn’t freak about the two total strangers showing up at his house in the middle of the night.

Through the limo’s tinted glass I saw Jeff open his front door. He glanced over to where the long black car sat before giving his attention to the vampires. Nodding with a smile I saw him move his hands to let the vampires in.

“No!” I shouted, “You don’t invite vampires in. Have you no sense of self-preservation.”

Damian and his father snickered.

“What?”

“My sweet do you remember inviting me into your house?”

“Yes, which is why I know it’s a stupid idea.”

William laughed. “I’m so glad you found your mate, Damian. I haven’t laughed like this for a millennium.”

“So glad I can amuse you father.” Damian said, but there was a flash of fire in his eyes that indicated he wasn’t truly appreciative.

My cell phone rang. The caller id said it was Jeff.

“Hey buddy.”

“Are you going to sit in your fancy limo all night or are you coming in?”

“I don’t know, there’s booze in here, what do you have to offer?”

“I’ve got a bottle of tequila and a basket of limes.”

“I’ll be right there.” I snapped closed my phone and climbed over my lover to open the door. “See ya honey. You can come and pick me up tomorrow.”

“I don’t think so.” Damian said in a pleasant voice that screamed I was in trouble. “I’m not leaving you to spend the night with another man. We’ll all go in there now that my brother has given me the go ahead.”

As I didn’t hear John call Damian, I had to assume it was one of those psychic vampire things. Not really caring, I let my lover help me out of the limo.

Jeff stood at the top of the stairs looking lost. I rushed over and wrapped him in my arms, rocking him gently as he burst into tears.

“Shhh honey, I’m here now.” Rubbing his back, I tried to calm him. His breath was coming in big gasping sobs. “Breathe, Jeffrey, breathe.” I whispered into his ear.

I heard Damian growl behind me.

“Not now Damian.” I snapped at him. I didn’t need my possessive lover to make Jeffrey feel even worse. He’d lost the man he thought he’d spend the rest of his life with. In Jeffrey’s mind, Max had a mid-life crisis and would have returned eventually. Who was I to tell him he was wrong?

“He would’ve come back to me.” Jeffrey said, as if reading my mind.

There was a lot of that going on recently.

“Of course he would. Despite what he might have said, he loved his family.” Right now it was more important to tell Jeff what he wanted to hear than to pound the reality into him. There was no comfort in blaming the dead even if he was a selfish bastard.

“Come on. Let’s go inside and get started on that bottle of tequila.” There was a watery laugh against my shoulder. “I lied. I’m out of tequila.”

“Bitch.” I said fondly.

“I’ll get a bottle out of the limo if that’s what you want, my own.” Damian said.

I thought he was pouring it on a little thick but I really wanted that tequila.

“Thanks, sweetie pie.” I said, fluttering my eyes at him over my shoulder.

Jeffrey laughed like I had planned. “You are shameless.”

“Gotta keep the big man in line.”

“He’s really gorgeous, Nick.” Jeff whispered.

We both turned to watch Damian lean into the limo, his tight ass outlined by his dress pants.

I let out a sigh. “Yeah.”

“Max used to look at me like that.” Jeff said with an odd tone. I turned to see him watching me. “What do you mean?”

“You look at Damian like he’s the center of your universe. Max used to look at me like that.”

“What changed?”

Jeff shrugged. “I guess being a daddy wasn’t what he wanted after all.”

“That’s ridiculous.” I said. “Max adored Olivia.”

“Then maybe he didn’t want me.” Jeff clenched his hands together until the knuckles turned white. “He didn’t discuss it. One night it was I love you, and the next day he was gone. He called me from an airport in Paris saying he’d found someone else.”

Damian returned with a bottle of tequila. “Hey, no frowning.” He wrapped a possessive arm around me.

“Jeff, this is Damian, Damian this is Jeff, one of my oldest friends.”

“I’m Nicholas’ soul mate. We will be together forever.” It was said with a charming smile, but it didn’t touch Damian’s cold eyes.

“He gets it Damian. He’s not going to poach. We tried being a couple many years ago and decided we made better friends.”

“You’ve touched my man?” I could feel the rage building up from the tone in his voice.

“Don’t start Damian. I doubt you’ve been untouched all these years.” I turned and gave him a warning look.

Damian shrugged. "You are right." It sounded like it was dragged out of him through a throat filled with broken glass. "I am sorry." He rubbed his cheek across the top of my head. "I cannot stand the thought of others touching you."

"Then don't."

"Don't what?"

"Think about other men touching me. Jeffrey go inside. I'll be there in a second." I kissed Jeffrey's cheek and nudged him gently towards the door before turning to confront my lover.

"Could you snap out of your jealous self-absorption to realize my friend is hurting and I'm trying to help? He's devastated that Max left him and trying to deal with being a single dad. I'm sorry if his tragedy inconveniences you, but you can just get over yourself." I was so angry I was practically vibrating with it. "I will stop from touching people as much as possible, but I am not going to resist comforting a friend because you have possession issues."

Slow clapping snapped my head around to Damian's father. William held up his hands in surrender. "Back off tiger, I mean no harm." He gave a wide smile to Damian. "I had doubts about your pretty boy, my son, but I can see he has you well in hand."

Damian exchanged a smile with his sire. "That he does." Before I could protest or dump his ass, Damian wrapped me in his arms and snuggled me close. I've decided that it's his way of keeping me in place without me slugging him.

It was a clever strategy because he is physically stronger, and although I am fast on my feet I can't escape the snuggle hold of imprisonment.

“I’m sorry, my heart. I know what this man means to you and it pains me that I am not held in the same regard.”

I leaned back so I could look at his gorgeous face.

“Damian, we’ve known each other less than a week. I’ve known Jeffrey for years. I knew him before Max. I knew him when he went through the adoption process for Olivia. I’m the godfather of his baby girl. I’ve got a connection with him that goes through years. Maybe one day we’ll have that, but it isn’t something you can demand from me. It takes time.” I gave him one of my best smiles. “Besides, its not like you don’t have a lot of it.”

Damian laughed, kissing me on the nose, which was weird and kind of sweet at the same time. A soft brushing against my leg had me looking down to see Simon at my feet.

“How did you get here?” I asked. He gave me a meow that I interpreted as ‘pick me up idiot’. “Jeffrey will enjoy seeing you.” I told him, snuggling him close so I didn’t drop the stupid creature. Jeffrey was one of the few men that Simon actually liked. Maybe that’s why he snuck in a ride.

“Max is a vampire.” Simon said, purring.

Shocked, I dropped my cat.

“Ouch.” Simon said.

My voice shook as I asked my lover, “Damian, did my cat just talk?”

“Yes, my sweet, he did.”

“How utterly fascinating.” William said, eyeing the cat with avid interest. “What are you?”

Simon sat down, curling his tail around his body in that tidy cat way.
“I’m a pooka.”

“What do you want with Nicholas?” Damian demanded. “If you wish him harm, I will kill you.”

The cat laughed, which was kind of creepy especially when his eyes switched from their usual kitty color to glow a phosphorous yellow. “I am his guardian. I am a pooka charged by my kind to watch over him.”

“Why?” William asked.

“Because he is the last of the line of Brian Boru the only mortal to tame one of my kind. My family has been protecting his family for hundreds of years.”

“I thought pookas took the form of horses?” Damian asked.

“It is difficult to keep a horse in an apartment.” Simon said with the contempt only a cat can carry off. “Over the years my kind have adapted to be whatever is necessary to watch over Brian Boru’s descendents. Unfortunately, Nick is the last of his line and as he is gay it will end with him.”

“Hey, I can still have children.”

The thought had never crossed my mind before, but now it seemed a shame to let a bloodline that had a magical connection die off.

“Yes, you should.” William agreed, a frown creased his forehead. “I will look for potential females for you. They will have to be approved by me because they will be part of the clan.”

I nodded. “Understandable.”

“Excuse me.” Damian said. The words were polite, but the snarl accompanying them was less than friendly. “If I don’t even want my lover

hugging people, what makes you think I'll let him have sex with a woman?"

I wrinkled my nose at him. "I don't have to have sex with anyone. She can be artificially inseminated."

"I'll do it." Lila held up her hand like a kid volunteering to help with the prom theme.

"Can vampires give birth?"

Lila nodded. "I can. If I was a changed vampire, maybe not, but I was born this way and I want a kid."

Would a vampire baby be a good thing?

"Come on, Nicky. I'm perfect. I know about your relationship with Damian so I know we'll never be a couple. We both want a child and we won't have to figure out how to tell a stranger that they'll be going into a vampire household." Her big blue eyes begged.

I still wasn't really sure I wanted a child, but I was pretty sure I was supposed to have one. My grandmother had "the sight" and every once in a while a trickle came to me whenever there was a turning point in my life. This moment was screaming that I needed to continue my line.

"Wait a minute, did you say that Max is a vampire?" The shock of my cat talking had dimmed the importance of his message.

Damian grabbed my shoulders and forced me to look at him. "Focus Nick. Do you want a baby?"

I nodded. "I think I'm supposed to have one." I looked back at Simon. "Will my child be looked after by a pooka?"

The cat examined Lila closely. "Is there any Irish in you?"

Lila nodded. “My mother is from an Irish vampire clan. My father is Italian.”

Simon turned back to me. “As long as there is Irish in your baby’s mother than I will see it gets a guardian.”

I looked Lila over carefully. She was pretty in her own way. Not drop dead gorgeous, but she had fine features and a nice bone structure. I tried to combine her looks and mine into another person. What would our baby look like?

William laughed. “Your baby will be beautiful. All vampires are good looking and you are stunning yourself, so the odds are against you having an ugly child.”

“You worry about the strangest things, my own.” Damian said, shaking his head at me.

“All right Lila you have yourself a deal.” Just to push Damian’s buttons, I added, “I’ll force myself to have sex with you.”

Damian growled playfully behind me. Since he read my mind he knew I was just kidding. These days my mind got more traffic than Times Square. I’d worry if I ever carried anything important in it.

“Now about Max.”

Simon swished his tail before taking a deep breath. The cat’s form wavered as an inky darkness surrounded him. I watched in astonishment as the form stretched and grew until it was slightly taller than me. There was a popping sound and bright sparkles of light. Blinking to clear my vision, I was surprised to see a dark-skinned man with yellow eyes flashing a fang-tipped smile at me.

“Greetings Brian Boru bloodline.”

“Greetings Simon. Or whatever your real name is.”

“My name is whatever you give me.” The pooka said. “I listened in on your conversation with Jeffrey. It’s a classic vampire abduction. Some vampire saw Max and decided he wanted Max for his or her own. The vampire enthralled him and took Max to Europe, far away from family and friends so that it was easier to fake his death when the time came to convert him to vampirism.”

My gaze snapped to Damian. “Did you ever enthrall me?”

Damian shook his head. “You are immune.”

“What do you mean?”

“It means that you have a natural magical immunity to vampire enthrallment, perhaps because of your bloodline. It is but one of many reasons I find you so fascinating.” Damian said. I had thought it was my tight ass that caught his attention but apparently, for the first time, I was wanted for my mind.

“You could’ve warned me before you sent him to my house.” William grumbled.

“Tried to bend him to your will, did you?” Damian said with a grin. “Me too.”

“When did you try to enthrall me?”

“When didn’t I?” Damian countered. “I tried at the bar where we met. At first I was just looking to bite a very gorgeous neck, but when you didn’t bend to my will you became even more interesting. I tried at my apartment. I tried the other day. John tried. Apparently, you’re just immune.”

“I tried when he came to my house.” William said with a wry grin. “It didn’t work.”

“Has everyone tried to control me?”

“Yes.” All the vampires around me said. I guess I really am as unaware as people are always telling me.

“How do we rescue Max?” I asked the pooka. It was time to focus on the real problem.

“How do you know he wants to be rescued?” Simon asked reasonably.

“Max loves Jeffrey.” Of that I was certain. I’d never seen the two men apart since they met.

“If he loved him so much, how was he enthralled?” Damian asked.

“What do you mean?”

“A man in love can’t be enthralled.”

My heart sank. Maybe I was wrong about their relationship. What did I know about what happened in my friends house after I was gone?

“He could if the vampire convinced him it was the right thing to do.” Lila piped up. “If the vampire threatened his family or something. Is Max the type to protect the ones he loves?”

“Yes.” The Max I knew would do anything to protect his family. “Do you think that’s what happened? He let someone make him a vampire to protect his family?”

Damian shrugged. “Maybe. We might never know.”

“We will know because I’m going to find out.” There had to be a way to hunt down Max and find out what happened to him.

“Forget it. New vampires are like ravening beasts. He will be too dangerous for you to confront. If he was converted to a vampire it will

take at least a week before he will be able to form a rational thought. We have time to decide what we want to do.” Damian folded his arms like the entire discussion was over.

Foolish man.

I patted Damian on the chest. “Okay honey, you think over what you’re going to do and let me know.”

I flipped open my phone and pressed automatic redial. “Hey Sal, I need you to find out where Max might have gotten to. According to Jeff, Max took off with a European twink and hasn’t been heard from since.” I wasn’t going to bring in little ideas like accidents and vampires into the conversation yet. Sal used to be a cop before he was shot in the leg and taken off the streets. I knew he still kept in touch with his old contacts and could get me the information I needed.

“Stupid bastard. How’s Jeff doing? Does he need me there?”

“No. I’m going to help him through tonight. If you can get me that info I’ll try and get him calmed down. I don’t want him freaking out Olivia.”

“You got it. I’ll check with my old buddies and call you back as soon as I hear something.”

“Great. Talk to you later.” I hung up to see five pairs of eyes staring at me. Shrugging I went inside to see what I could do for Jeff.

Chapter Seven

Six shots of tequila later, Jeff was looking on the blurry side. I blinked my eyes to clear up my vision but the room was spinning too much for it to be effective.

“Hey Jeff?”

I said to my friend slumped on the floor beside me.

“Yeah Nick.”

“I’m sure Max would’ve come back if he could.”

“You think so?” Jeff turned to look at me. His blinking told me that he was having the same focusing problems as I was.

“Yeah, he really loved you.”

“Thanks, Nick. He was always jealous of you, you know.”

“Me?” I burped and fell into helpless giggles. After much uncontrollable laughing I was able to ask. “Why me? He’s the one who had everything.”

“Because your so g-gorgeous. He was always self-conscious about his looks.”

Thinking back I imagined Max’s face. “What was wrong with his looks?”

“Nothing.” Jeff said. “I always thought he was cute, but he never liked the fact that you were better looking.”

“Huh?” The occasional remark by Max was starting to make sense now. “I thought he’d gotten over that. I mean you guys were together for three years.”

“Five.” Jeff corrected.

“See. What’s to be jealous of? I can’t compete with that even if I wanted to.”

“I know. He would’ve loved Damian.”

“Why?”

Jeff leaned over and whispered at me with his liquor infused breath.

“Because Damian would never let you stray and come and seduce me.”

I laughed. “I wasn’t going to come and seduce you anyway.”

“I know.” Jeff said, “But Max always thought one day you’d want me back.”

I shook my head. Men in love did weird things.

My phone rang. I pulled it out and was surprised to see it was Sal. It was too early for a report on Max.

“Hello.”

“Nick, you’ll never believe this.” Sal said by way of greeting.

“I’ll never believe what?” It was hard to concentrate with all that tequila swimming around in my head, but the urgency in Sal’s voice was kicking in.

“I ran a search on Max and I found notice of his death in Europe so I thought I was going to have to give you bad news, but then I got a call from an old cop friend of mine. He said that he just pulled over someone matching Max’s description. The guy was covered in blood and jacked up on something, completely not like Maxwell, but my buddy said the car was registered to Maxwell Carlin. He tried to take him in, but the guy knocked him out. When he came to the guy was gone and they haven’t been able to find the vehicle.”

“Where was he pulled over?”

“About two hundred miles from you. I think he’s heading back to Jeff. Do you need me to come?”

“No. Damian is here with some of his friends. We’ll spend the night and see what happens.” A quick glance at the clock told me that dawn wasn’t that far away. Surely that would slow down the newly made vampire.

“Okay.” Sal said reluctantly. “Call me if you need anything. I mean anything.”

Sal’s sincerity rang across the line. “I will Sal. Thanks for letting me know.”

I hung up and just stared at my phone for a while. I was hoping it would tell me the answer to all of my problems.

“What’s wrong pet?” Damian asked, crouching next to me.

“We think Max is on his way here.”

“Impossible.” William said. “A newly made vampire can’t focus enough to head back home. Besides his master would want to keep him near.”

I shrugged. “There are reports that he’s heading this way and I’m inclined to believe them. Sal didn’t say anyone was traveling with him. Maybe he escaped his master. The sun will rise soon and that will slow him down.”

“Why?” Damian asked.

“Why what?”

“Why would the sun slow him?”

“Doesn’t the sun burn vampires?”

Damian shook his head. "That is an old wives tale spread around by vampires. We learned it is easier to lure people to our side if they think we are only dangerous at night. Most of us actually feed during the day when people are more susceptible. For some reason, humans believe only bad things can happen to them under the cover of darkness."

"Fools." William snorted.

"So he could be here any time then."

Damian nodded.

"What are we going to do?"

"Excuse me?"

"What are we going to do?" I repeated very slowly, as if I was talking to a dim-witted three-year old.

"We, as in anything that includes you, aren't going to do anything. Me and my family are going to wait for Max to show up and then take care of the problem."

"You can't hurt Max." I said, alarm coursing through my body. I glanced over and was pleased to see Jeff was slumped over unconscious. The tequila must have caught up with him. "We need to figure out what happened to him."

William stepped forward. "Nick, Max probably doesn't even know what he is doing."

"He's coming back to his family. We need to find out who it was that converted him in the first place and get that bastard."

"We may never know." William said.

“We have to know because whoever did this will be looking for Max. If he is sneaky enough to blackmail Max to change him, he won’t sit back while Max returns to his family.”

The vampires all looked stunned like I’d come up with an original idea. “It’s not rocket science.” I snapped.

Damian was the first to make a comment. “You’re right, my love. We should’ve thought of that.” He admitted, but I was too focused on the “I” word. When did love become one of the words exchanged between us? Spots sparkled before my eyes. I caught the earth with my ass when it came up to meet me.

“Baby, are you all right?” Damian kneeled before me cupping my face in his gentle hands.

“Am I your love?” For some reason his answer meant more to me in that moment, than whatever was hunting Max and possibly heading toward us.

“You will always be my love.” Damian said. “There is nothing in heaven or on earth that will keep me from your side.”

“You’re a sap.” I told my romantic lover.

Damian gave me a fang-tipped smile. “Only for the one I call my own.”

He kissed me.

The kiss lacked his usual hot passion. This wasn’t a kiss of burning need, like the ones that came before. This was a kiss of commitment, of love, of two souls entwining.

I tried to back away, but his gentle hands kept me effectively trapped. As my heart slammed against my ribs in panic and my stomach did aerial

dives that would put a sky writer to shame, I tried to escape my lover's embrace. He lifted his lips a brief second. "You can fight and struggle and even run but you will still be mine. I can see into your heart, my love, and I know I reside there."

I used the fallback I always had, humor. "You may have started a house but it's still not finished." I protested.

Damian gave me a delighted smile. "Oh, its finished all right. I'm just deciding where to put the furniture."

"You've done one analogy too many." I groaned against his lips. I never knew how intimate a conversation could be until I held one with my lips brushing against my lover's. I closed my eyes because looking into his eyes that close made me dizzy.

"I know all kinds of ways to make you dizzier." Damian boasted. I would've made a snide comment but he took that moment to suck on my tongue, fanning the low embers of desire I always felt around him into a fireball of passion.

"Boys, now is not the time. Damian control yourself." William's voice snapped through the air.

Slowly, as if making a show not to obey his sire too quickly, Damian backed off until we were separated by at least six inches before he turned to his father. "I have my priorities right, sire. Nicholas must know he is mine in order for our relationship to move forward. There are too many others who would snap him up if he declared himself a free agent."

William examined me for a long moment until I felt like a pinned butterfly in a bug collector's room.

A slow smile crossed his hard face. "I concede your point, but we need to decide how to deal with Max when he appears."

"Deal with him?" I asked. "We don't deal with him. We see how he is and trap him until he can function again."

"You can't trap a vampire." William said.

"How do you control your new vamps when they first turn?"

"The master can control them with his or her mind." Damian said, standing up and helping me to my feet.

"Then either his master is allowing him to run rampant across the United States, or something happened to him and Max is returning to the family he loves."

"You people are crazy." Jeff's eyes were open as he stared at us with wide eyes. Fuck. I wondered how long he'd been listening. He turned his gaze to me and it narrowed accusingly. "What are you doing with these people Nick? Are you in trouble?"

My heart melted at my old friend. Jeff's first concern was that I'd gotten mixed in with a group of crazies. Even with all his problems he was focused on me.

Damian growled beside me.

I smacked his chest with the back of my hand.

"Come here." I held out my hands to Jeff.

Trusting me he got up and walked into my arms.

"I'm going to tell you something very unbelievable but I need you to trust me, do you trust me?" I leaned back and looked Jeff deep in the eyes and hoped that our friendship was strong enough to weather this storm.

Jeff gave me a tentative smile. “Nick I’ve trusted you since we met all those years ago and you swore to me if I let you fuck me my life would be so much better.”

I smiled at the memory. “Did I steer you wrong?”

Jeff shook his head. “I trust you Nick.” His gaze cautiously looked at the others. “They’re a little scary though.” He stepped closer into my arms for comfort, and I wrapped him tight into my embrace rocking him back and forth in a soothing motion. “These people are here for me. We think Max has been turned into a vampire and is returning home.”

Jeff struggled to get free but I kept my grip tight. “We think Max let himself be converted in order to save you and Olivia from the vampire that changed him. They want to be here to protect you from Max in case he’s violent. Apparently newly born vamps tend to be a little crazy.”

I allowed Jeff enough room to look me in the eyes. Damian’s low growling was getting annoying anyway.

“Nicky, there are no vampires.” Jeff said. His eyes glowed with sincerity and not a little fear. “Did they give you drugs?” He whispered.

Stroking Jeff’s hair in a soothing gesture I turned to my lover. “Damian, show Jeff your fangs. Jeff, watch Damian.”

I turned my head in time to watch my lover open his mouth and let his fangs slide out. Luckily, my reflexes were good enough I was able to catch Jeff before he hit the ground. Damian grabbed him away from me.

“I think you’ve done enough snuggling with your ex-lover.”

I opened my mouth to argue but John patted me on the back. “Let it go Nick. Damian will growl a little bit and it will blow over.”

Sighing, I had to agree with John as Damian carried Jeff to the couch.

I followed.

I didn't want Jeff to be alone when he woke up.

"Unca Nicky." A little voice screeched.

Before I was prepared, a small body slammed into me. I stumbled a bit but a hand on my back kept me upright. I turned around to see Lila smiling at me.

Vampires were handy.

"How's my hunny bunny?" I asked her, rubbing noses together like rabbits.

"Where's my present?" She asked with the directness of a four-year old.

"It's coming. Sal and I are making you a big girl bed. In fact, shouldn't you be in bed right now?"

"A bed?" She pouted, completely ignoring my other comment with the fine disdain of a child. "I wanted a doll."

"I'll get you both. We'll go to the toy story tomorrow morning and get you whatever you want."

A big smile crossed her face.

"I love you Unca Nick."

"Who is this?" Damian's voice spoke behind me.

"This is Oliva. Olivia this is Damian."

"Is he your husband?"

"No." I said.

"Yes." Damian said.

I turned to look at Damian.

Olivia giggled.

Damian gave her a wide smile. “Your Uncle Nick is still getting used to the idea.”

I glared at my lover letting my eyes tell what I thought of that without dropping the little girl or using words that weren’t polite for her to hear.

He could make up any story he wanted, but I knew the truth, and I wasn’t going to let him railroad me into saying we were married. If I was getting married I wanted the entire formal wedding. This was one thing I wasn’t going to be short-changed on. I made sure to send my thoughts to Damian.

“We don’t do formal weddings.” William said, walking into the room. Back in cat form, Simon followed the vampire leader and rubbed against my legs. It creeped me out a little now that I knew he was a pooka.

“That’s fine,” I said agreeably, “then I’m not going to be married.”

“Come on precious. I’ll take you to bed.” Lila said, taking Olivia from my arms.

“You’re pretty.” Olivia said, stroking Lila’s hair.

“Thank you, sweetie.” Lila said, snuggling the little girl as she carried her easily up the stairs.

“You brought vampires into my house.”

I spun around to see a slightly hysterical Jeff standing in the doorway.

“I brought people to protect you from your psychotic husband.” I corrected. How did I become the bad guy here?

“Max is not a vampire.” Jeff said firmly.

“Wouldn’t you rather he be a vampire who allowed himself to be converted to protect his family, than a scumbag that ditched you for some twink?” I didn’t understand Jeff’s logic. I knew which one I would choose.

Jeff rushed over to me, grabbing my arm he forced me to face him. “You really think that’s what happened?”

I shrugged. “It’s one theory. We won’t know until we talk to Max. We think he’s on his way here, but the consensus is that he’s a little crazy right now.”

Looking me over critically Jeff asked, “Are you a vampire?”

“No.” I said with a laugh. “I’m not a vampire. My boyfriend is, but not me.”

“Not yet.” Damian said. “Someday I hope to make Nicholas just like me.”

“I’ll convert him.” William said coming closer. “It’s never good to let your mate have that kind of control over you.”

“Does your maker control you?”

William nodded. “When you are young, after that you can pretty much control yourself unless you’re a really weak vampire.”

“But vampires are young for the first two hundred years,” Damian said with a growl, “and you have enough vamps to look out for.” He told William.

“Let’s not worry about who’s going to convert Nick and focus on Max’s upcoming visit.” I reminded them.

“This discussion isn’t over.” Damian said with a snarl.

“It is for now.” I told him.

The sound of a car door slamming brought everyone’s attention outside.

Walking over I peeked out the window. The dark silhouette that came out of the car screamed danger.

Max. I didn't realize so much time had passed while we were arguing.

When he came into the light I gasped at his appearance. Gone was the well-dressed metro sexual who cried at every wedding, including his own. In his place was a rumpled man with shaggy hair and a determined walk who moved like a cold predator.

"Jeffrey." Max shouted.

"And here I thought Damian's human companion was going to be dull." William quipped from his position beside me.

I jumped a little when Lila came up beside me. "Where's Olivia?"

"I put a spell on her to keep her asleep." She muttered, her eyes were glued to Max who was quickly approaching.

"Thank you."

"Any time." Lila said. The squeeze she gave my shoulders told me she meant it.

"Jeffrey." Max yelled again.

"What do I do?" Jeff asked. His eyes were wide with panic.

I put my arm around him. "You don't go out and meet with the homicidal vampire alone."

"Jeffrey." Max yelled again. My old friend's voice was ragged and heart-broken, and I could feel Jeffrey clenching his muscles to resist the urge to go to his husband.

The strain it took on him to deny his lover's call showed in his face. Jeffrey's skin was pale and his eyes shone with tears.

In reality, I had no clear idea of what we were going to do. However, one thing I did know was that Max defied his master's power to come back to the man he loved, and I wasn't going to abandon Jeffrey until they

were reunited. Olivia would have both of her parents again, even if one of them were now a vampire.

“I think Jeffrey should go outside.” William said. “If we go outside he’ll get spooked, run off, and we might never find out who changed him. We need to be able to tell the Council that there is someone out there randomly changing vamps.”

“You have a Council?” I asked. Right after I said that I remembered Damian had gone to a council meeting the other day.

William shrugged. “Doesn’t every civilized society have a government to oversee its people?”

“I’ve never given it much thought.”

“As vampires there are rules we have to follow or we can put our entire species at risk. Someone changing humans by either blackmail or force doesn’t do us any good as a community. He must be stopped.”

“We have to save Max.” I told him. It was all well and good to talk about stopping the out of control vampire master, but my first concern was for my friend. “If Jeff goes outside, I’m going with him.”

“Like hell.” Damian said from behind me. “There is no way I’m going to let you go out there. Who knows what an immature vampire will do? That’s why we keep them contained for several months after transition, they aren’t in their right minds.”

“So what? We’re just going to let him stand outside all night? Jeffrey might not have close neighbors but eventually someone is going to notice a man shouting on his lawn.”

“I’ll go out there.” John said.

I spun around to face John. “And you think he’s going to respond well to finding a strange vampire in his house in the middle of the night? If anything that is more likely to send him over the bend. It’s best if it is only me and Jeff.”

“You can talk to him from the doorway.” Damian decreed.

I would’ve argued but that was actually a good idea.

“Call out to him Jeff. You can talk to him from the safety of your house. Just don’t invite him in. You’ll regret it.” I sent a pointed look towards my lover that he pretended he didn’t see.

I knew the real reason Jeff wanted to confront his husband. He wanted to know the true reason Max left him and their daughter.

Jeff ripped open the door but wisely didn’t step outside.

“I’m here Max.” He said. I could hear the sadness in his voice. I didn’t need to see the tears to know this was tearing Jeffrey apart. I was glad Olivia was sleeping through the entire thing.

Max stepped out of the shadows until we could see him clearly from the porch light.

“I’m sorry I lied Jeffrey. There has never been any other man for me. He said that he’d kill you and Olivia if I didn’t go with him. He had pictures, addresses of your work and her pre-school. I had to protect my family.”

Max looked surprisingly like...Max, which made me conclude one thing.

I spun around to confront my lover. “You were that gorgeous when you were human?”

Damian's sensual mouth quirked at one corner and his eyes warmed at my surprise. "I have always looked as I am, lover."

"Damn you were fine!"

"Could we focus?" John snapped. "We have more important issues."

"Ask him who changed him." William prompted.

"Max, who changed you?" Jeffrey shouted across the yard.

Max's mouth opened but nothing came out. He tried again. With a gasp, his hands came up, clutched his chest and the newly made vampire toppled to the ground.

"Shit."

Brushing off Damian's restraining hand, I rushed down the steps to Max's side. With effort, I rolled him onto his back. Pressing my ear to his chest I listened for a heartbeat.

"He won't have a heartbeat." Damian said. "He's a vampire."

"Oh, right." I knew that. "What's wrong with him?"

William leaned over Max's body. Reaching into his pocket he withdrew a green stone and placed it on my friend's chest. Within seconds the green stone turned ruby red.

"What does that mean?"

"It means his master placed a spell on him. It probably prevents him from revealing his maker."

"Shit. Now what do we do?"

"We at least know his master is still alive." Lila said. "If he'd died the spell wouldn't be effective any more."

"But how are we going to stop the bastard from hurting Jeffrey and Olivia?"

William's handsome face, hardened. "I'll post guards at Olivia's day care. I don't approve of endangering children."

"Do you think he'll come back for Max?"

William nodded. "A powerful master wouldn't appreciate a newly-born getting away. Max is a strong vampire if he can break away from his maker while under a spell. His master will want to re-capture him as a lesson to others if nothing else. We will post guards and eventually his master will appear or send one of his vampires to retrieve Max."

Things weren't adding up for me. "Max didn't appear insane. I thought you said newly-born were crazy."

William nodded. "We'll have to talk to Max when he awakens. I want to know exactly when he was made into a vampire. The quicker you recover, the stronger the vampire." He nodded towards Damian. "It took Damian one hour to recover, the shortest conversion on record. I lost control of him almost immediately."

Damian laughed. "He hasn't let me forget it ever since."

"Will Max be all right when he wakes up?"

John stepped in looking Max over with an experienced eye. "Do you have a basement?" He asked Jeffrey.

Jeff nodded.

"We should tie him up and see if he wakes up rational. I don't want him somewhere where Olivia might run into him before he's tested. Lila can't keep her asleep forever."

"Tested?" I wasn't sure I really wanted to know.

"We must test his mind and body and make sure his conversion is complete. We will also need to get him lots of blood." He turned to the

blond vamp. “John, go back home and bring us two cases of blood. I want Max to be fully blooded before we do his evaluation. While we’re waiting let’s get some sleep.” William said, looking at all of us. “We’ll tie up Max and take care of him in the morning.”

My life was officially weird. I was involved with a vampire, had somehow become part of their family, and now one of my friends had turned vamp.

I wasn’t sure I wanted to see what happened tomorrow.

Damian wrapped an arm around me. “It’ll be all right beautiful. I’m here for you.”

Yeah, like that was a source of comfort.

Shaking my head I followed my lover back into Jeffrey’s house. Maybe everything would be better with a little sleep.

Chapter Eight

I woke up, hot and unable to breathe. It only took a moment to realize I could attribute both of those things to my lover. Damian had me wrapped so tightly in his arms it was amazing I could take a breath.

At least this time he was there when I woke. Blinking I scanned the room to make sure John wasn't lurking about. Once I was certain we were alone in Jeff's guest room, I wiggled until I was facing Damian.

I wasn't the least surprised to see he was awake and watching me.

"Good morning." I whispered.

"Morning, my love." Damian said. I couldn't handle the tender look in his eyes this time of the morning. Who was that lovey dovey when they first woke up? I slid under the covers seeking my chosen play toy of the morning.

Bingo.

Thick, long and definitely awake, Damian's cock waited for me beneath the covers. My mouth watered as I inhaled his musky scent. I didn't know if it was a vampire thing, but Damian smelled better than any lover I'd had before.

Moving my body between his thighs, Damian obligingly spread his legs so I could get to the object of my obsession. With a needy growl I wrapped my lips around Damian's thick, hard shaft.

"Bloody hell." I heard Damian shout as I swallowed his dick, letting my throat massage him. Hard hands grabbed my hair holding me in place as I lavished attention on my lover's body.

It wasn't long before Damian gave it up and I could feel his wetness slick my throat. I eagerly swallowed it all.

I was all about the high protein breakfast.

Damian's husky laugh sounded above me seconds before strong hands slid under my arms and yanked me out from under the covers.

"Hey, I wasn't done with that." I protested.

My gorgeous lover kissed me, licking the inside of my mouth to taste.

Damn, that was hot. When we finally broke apart I was hard and needy.

"I need you to fuck me." Damian said.

"Really?" I didn't bother to hide my shock. He would just read my mind anyway. It was the last thing I expected from my alpha vampire lover.

"We can't be true lovers if I'm not willing to bottom now and again. Besides, I'm anxious to feel you inside me."

I knew many men who only pitched or caught and were still what I'd consider "true lovers," but who was I to argue about a chance at his hot ass.

Reaching into the side table I retrieved the tube of lube kept there for guests and for when Jeffrey was in the doghouse. "Do you want to be on your back or stomach?"

An uncertain expression crossed Damian's face. A look I'd never seen on him.

"I don't know. Which do you think would be better?"

I froze.

"Damian, you have bottomed before haven't you?"

Damian shook his head. "I was waiting for my mate."

I almost laughed until I saw that he was completely, freaking serious.

"What about before you died?"

Damian shook his head. "It wasn't a time where men admitted they liked other men. It wasn't safe to sate your lust in the small town where I lived."

This man had waited hundreds of years... for me.

No pressure there to make things perfect.

"Hands and knees." I told him. "It will make it easier."

"But then I won't be able to see your beautiful face." Damian protested.

"You can admire me next time."

Reluctantly, Damian turned over and presented me with the finest ass I have ever seen. I moaned as I slicked up my fingers. Shit, I wanted that ass so bad. Unable to resist I licked up his crack.

Damian let out a shout. "I had no idea that felt so good." He admitted, panting.

"Why do you think I like it?" I slowly put in one finger with a lot of slick, waiting until he relaxed around me before adding another. Feeling around I searched for that magic spot. Damian's entire body jerked.

"Found it." I slid my finger back out and slicked up the second.

"Forget the warm up just shove your cock inside and fuck me through the mattress!" Damian shouted.

I looked at him in surprise. When Damian fucked me he was the most careful lover on earth.

"I don't want to hurt you."

“I’m a vampire, I’ll heal, but I’m going to die a second time if you don’t fuck me.”

Laughing I slid in another finger. “Patience, my love.”

Damian stilled. “What did you call me?” He asked in a quiet voice.

Shit.

Ignoring his question I shoved in three fingers making sure they hit him just right.

Damian yelled as I fingered his hole with perfect precision making sure I brushed across that sensitive spot over and over. When I was certain he was ready, and I was unable to wait any longer, I covered myself with at least half the tube of lube and slowly pressed inside.

At least I tried to make it slow. Feeling me at his entrance, Damian shoved backwards impaling himself on my cock.

I gasped at the sensation of tight, hot, wetness surrounding me.

“Oh fuck, Damian.”

“Tell me you claim me.”

Damian’s words echoed in my sex-drugged brain.

“I claim you.” Shit, I’d say anything if he kept that up.

As soon as the words passed my lips, fire burned across my skin. Screaming from pain and pleasure, I pumped my essence into my lover.

“Yes, mate. Mine.” Damian growled.

A flash of light spread across Damian’s shoulders as flowing script appeared across his shoulders.

“Damian.” I whispered as I slowly slipped out of my lover and collapsed next to him on the mattress. “What the fuck was that?”

My vampire lover turned his head and gave me a fang-tipped smile.
“That was us, officially mating.”

“What?”

“Vampires aren’t officially mated until they each claim the other and are blessed by the goddess.”

“So when you said I needed to claim you, I really claimed you.”

“Yep.” Damian gave me a slow pleased smile.

I was so angry I couldn’t breathe. I had trusted him, and now I was trapped in a relationship that would last forever, literally.

The sense of betrayal bit deep. Unable to speak to him without saying words that I might regret later, I slipped out of bed, put on my clothes, and left the bedroom

“Nicholas.” I heard him call behind me. Blinking back furious tears, I slammed the door behind me, not bothering to look back.

Everyone was sitting around the dining room table when I came down. Olivia leaped into my arms. I forced a smile to my lips.

“Unca Nick, Unca Nick, my birthday party is today.” She screamed.

I gave Jeffrey a panicked look but only got a shrug in response. A passle of little kids were going to invade the house and we had a vampire tied in the basement who just happened to be one of the birthday girl’s fathers. Not to mention a master vamp might be on the way. Unfortunately there was no way we could cancel Olivia’s party. There were some things you just didn’t do, and canceling a four-year old’s birthday party was top of the list.

“Daddy said Poppa wasn’t going to be here for my birthday.” Olivia’s eyes dripped with tears even as her little face tried to put up a brave front.

“He was out of town on business, poppet.” I told her. “I’m sure he’ll be home soon. You’ll have lots of people for your party.”

Her solemn face looked up at mine and I felt my heart squeeze tight. “Why don’t you go and help your Daddy blow up balloons.”

A wide smile crossed her face and she happily let me put her down so she could help Jeffrey with the helium tank.

Spinning around I saw Lila and Damian watching me. I was so distracted by Olivia that I hadn’t even heard him come downstairs.

“What?”

Lila sighed. “You’ll make a good daddy.”

“I look forward to helping you raise our son.” Damian said, as if it was his idea all along.

I glared at Damian. The feeling of betrayal still lingered when I looked at him. Turning my back on him I gave attention to Simon who was rubbing against my leg. I picked up the pooka masquerading as my cat.

“What’s up?”

“Make sure to smuggle me some birthday cake.” The pooka said with a Cheshire cat smile.

“You got it. Do you think we can get Max straightened out enough for a children’s party?”

“Let’s go see.”

I didn’t really have any hope that Max was suddenly healed, but I’d be damned if I didn’t at least give it a try.

Looking around I saw Damian talking to Lila. Making sure he was still occupied, I made it over to the basement door without being spotted.

I was halfway through the door when a hand came down on my shoulder. Glancing back I saw John standing behind me.

“You’re not going down there without backup.” John said. There was a determined set to his mouth that let me know he was serious.

I looked back at my lover.

“Damian is still busy, you’re in the clear.”

We exchanged conspiratorial smiles and went downstairs.

Max sat on the ground wrapped in ropes like a mummy. My heart went out to the man. Max was usually dressed like he was going to step out on a runway, now he looked like a homeless person. His meticulously layered hair was a rumpled black mass, his usually smooth cheeks were peppered with whiskers, and his warm brown eyes were frightened and red-veined.

“Nicky.” He whispered. “Make them release me.”

I went to stand beside my friend but John put his body between us. “If he so much as nicks you, Damian will snap his neck.”

“Good point.” After surviving a vampire conversion it would be cruel if my boyfriend were his downfall.

“Who’s Damian?”

“My boyfriend.”

“His lifemate.” John said simultaneously.

“He’s a vampire and so is John.” I said, pointing at my companion. I wasn’t even going to address the lifemate comment.

“I’m a pooka.” Simon said.

Max stared at my cat for so long for a moment I thought he had checked out.

“Nick, when did your cat start talking?”

“Apparently he’s always been able to, but I never heard him until yesterday. He’s my guardian.”

“Huh.” Max continued to stare at Simon. “I think I’ve lived my entire life fast asleep. I never knew about vampires or pookas or any of that stuff. Now I’m a vampire, and I broke the heart of the only man I’ve ever loved.”

“Can you describe the vampire who converted you?” John asked.

“Clever.” I said turning to Max. “If you can’t say his name maybe you can describe him.”

“He was beautiful.” Max said. “I felt guilty talking to him because I thought he was hot. He had red hair and sea blue eyes. But I never would’ve left Jeff for him.” He gave me a frantic look. “Nick, you have to believe me.”

“Where did you meet him?” I still wasn’t ready to forgive Max. I didn’t care how gorgeous the vampire was, he shouldn’t have sold out his family for the first pretty man he encountered.

Max continued his story ignoring my disapproving look. “He walked into the office for a private consultation. He was looking for an accountant.”

“Did he give you a business card or anything?”

“Yes.” Max’s smile was brilliant and a little pointier than before. “It must be in my desk at my office.”

“Doesn’t matter.” John said. “He’s bound to use a fake name. No vampire is going to use a name they can be traced by if they are planning an abduction.”

“Good point. Anyway you said he had red hair. Anything else?”

Max’s eyes rolled back into his head and his body started shaking.

“What’s happening?” I asked John clutching his arm.

“His master is suppressing him so he can’t give him up.”

“Can you stop it?”

John shook his head. “I’m not strong enough.”

“I am.” William said, coming up behind us. He grabbed Max’s head between his long fingers. I didn’t see him do anything but stare at Maxwell, but as quickly as they started, his convulsions faded away, and Max was looking at us again like he really saw us.

“It won’t last unless I can overcome the master mark with one of my own.”

“So I would exchange one master for another?” Max asked bitterly.

“Yes.” William offered with no apology. “Every vampire has a master. As a fledgling you won’t be able to live without a kiss.”

“A kiss?” I asked.

“That’s what a family of vampires are called.” John offered.

“It must be because you guys are so hot.” I said with a smile.

John and William laughed.

“What is Nicholas doing so close to a newly born vamp?” Damian’s deep voice broke through the darkness.

“Busted.” Simon whispered beside me.

“I was just talking to Max.” I protested, as I turned to see my lover coming out of the shadows. “John was here the entire time.”

“Wow.” Max said just loud enough for me to hear.

Damian flashed a fang in Max's direction before grabbing my hand and pulling me into the shelter of his body. He wrapped a possessive arm around me. "In case no one told you, Nicholas is mine."

"Yeah, it was mentioned. I'm going to have it tattooed on my ass next week."

"I'd rather it was on your arm. I don't want anyone close enough to see your gorgeous body naked."

I rolled my eyes. I'm not sure why I even tried. The man had absolutely no sense of humor when it came to me.

"Yeah, Nicholas has a gorgeous body." Max agreed unwisely.

Damian grabbed him by the throat and shook him like a rag doll.

"Put him down." I shouted at my lover. "He only saw me naked because I posed once for an art class he was taking."

"I thought he was an accountant?"

"It was an elective." I told him. My tone must have conveyed my annoyance because Damian dropped Max to the ground with a thud.

"We need to get you signed up with anger management classes." I told my lover as Max groaned in pain.

"He's a vampire now, he'll heal quickly." Damian said indifferently.

"I was wondering if he would be well enough to go to Olivia's party."

Damian looked Max over with a clinical expression that had me concerned he was thinking about dissection.

"William has offered to be his master."

"Why would you do that?" Damian asked.

"Because we don't know who his master is and your lover will be concerned for the safety of his friends if we don't take care of this

problem. Besides I don't like the thought of strange vampires in my territory."

"As you will father." Damian was done with the subject from the way he pinned me with his blue eyes and cradled my face in his hands. "Your friend Sal is here with Olivia's bed."

"Ooh, he got it done in time?" Brushing past Damian I raced up the stairs. The blond-haired Viking was talking to Jeffrey.

"Sal!" I shouted, throwing myself in his arms. I got the briefest hug in history before I was set back on my feet.

"Damian." Sal said, his eyes scanning the room.

"Oh yeah."

"At least one of you has some decorum." Damian said behind me. I wasn't even surprised when he showed up anymore. It was like I had my own personal vampire stalker.

"Where's the bed?"

"I took it up to her room."

"Did you tell her it was from both of us?"

Sal nodded. He grabbed a brightly wrapped package off of the counter. "We also got her a doll."

"You rock."

We tapped knuckles like goofy teens.

Damian growled behind me.

"What is your problem now?"

"Next time you give a joint gift it had best be from you and I."

I was about to blast him for his possessiveness when it struck me that perhaps this time he was right. “It will be.” I said patting his muscular chest. “This was planned before I met you.”

“Sorry man, I didn’t mean to step on anyone’s toes.” Sal said, holding his hands palms out.

“It isn’t a problem this time.” Damian said rubbing my back. “I just wanted to let Nicholas know that I’d like to be included next time.”

“You will be, babe.” I knew Damian saw us together for the long haul, but only time would tell if it worked out or not.

A scream from the basement had us racing back down the stairs. William was hovering over Maxwell with blood dripping from his mouth.

“Is everyone okay?”

Max lay on the ground, blinking slowly. The gash in his neck healed as I watched.

“The mark was difficult to remove and replace with my own. His master was stronger than I suspected.” William looked Max’s throat over carefully. “That looks to have done the trick. Maxwell, I believe that you and your family need to find a new place to live. Your master is more than likely aware of your address just as he knew the location of your office.”

Max nodded. “If it weren’t for Olivia I wouldn’t move, I love this house.”

“Damian, why don’t we stay here and capture the vampire master when he arrives. He’s bound to come here and this place is nice and isolated. When the trouble passes, Max and Jeff can move back in with Olivia.”

Damian nodded. "It is a good location. I don't have to travel often, and it isn't that far from the family home. But what about your work, my love?"

"Damian, I haven't been to work in days. I didn't even call in. I doubt I even have a job. They were looking to lay off most of their junior architects anyway. I think I'm going to go into business with Sal and help him design furniture. He's been asking for years."

Damian smiled at me, a warm expression that heated me to my toes. "I'd love to move in with you, Nicholas. It is a good step for mates to make. I don't approve of putting you in danger though. I'll have this house guarded by some of our best warriors so you will always feel safe."

"Ummm, thanks." What else was there to say? I could put up with a few guards if it meant we would be together. Slowly I was getting used to the idea of Damian in my future.

"Father, release Max and we'll have a birthday party. Olivia will be thrilled that her father is home."

I watched William release Max and everyone trudge upstairs. A hand held me back by my arm.

"What?"

"Tell me." Damian demanded.

"Tell you what?"

"Tell me you love me."

"You're kind of needy for a vampire." I informed him.

"I'm needy for you." He said. "I may be a vampire, but I'm still a man, and I need to hear the words from your beautiful lips."

I let out a loud sigh so he would know how put upon I felt. “I don’t like how you tricked me into bonding with you.” I wasn’t willing to completely let my grudge go.

“You never would have on your own. You’re a commitment phobe.”

“That’s my prerogative.” I declared, folding my arms across my chest.

“Forgive me?”

“No.”

“You can’t hold a grudge forever.” Damian said with a sexy smile.

“Watch me.”

Damian walked over and wrapped his arms around me. Snuggling me close he placed soft kisses on my neck, evilly melting my spine. He was a sneaky big bastard.

“Tell me you forgive me.”

I resisted for an entire seven minutes as he continued his torturous assault upon my innocent neck.

“Tell me.”

“I forgive you.” I said with a huff.

“And you love me.”

I wasn’t going to say it, I wasn’t. I don’t care how good his hard body felt against mine or how happy my body was about the closeness. He was a sneaky vampire who didn’t deserve my love.

“I might not deserve it, but I will do anything to get it.” Damian said gently into my ear. “Now tell me you love me. I can read your mind, I already know you do.”

“Fine, I love you. Happy?”

“Ecstatic.” He said with a contented smile. “There will never be anyone else for either of us, we are bound for eternity.”

“Wonderful, now can we go? I hear there’s cake.”

Damian sighed. It was better done than mine because I knew he didn’t need oxygen. “I will have my hands full with you won’t I?”

“I thought that’s how you liked your hands.” I said. Leaning closer I placed a long hot kiss against his lips. “I love you Damian, and yes we have eternity to love, laugh and argue, but there are ten little kids up there and only one cake. I hear it’s chocolate.”

Damian laughed. “I can’t eat cake, but I’m sure you’ll enjoy it. Today cake, tomorrow we trap a vampire.”

I kissed him on the cheek. “I’m glad we have a plan.”

Chapter Nine

The next morning William took Jeff and Olivia away to a temporary home. Luckily, Olivia wasn't in school yet. Max stayed at the house so his former master could track him back home. He didn't want to go with his husband and child only to have the psycho vampire hunt them down, not after he went to so much trouble to make sure they were safe.

"Do you think they'll be all right?" I asked Damian. We were cuddled together on the porch swing. John sat on a wooden chair a few feet away, and Lila was walking the perimeter to look for strange vampires. William had returned to his house after sending ten vampires from his kiss to patrol the area.

Max came out of the house. He looked very serious. "Nicky, come walk with me."

Damian tightened his grip for a moment before reluctantly releasing me. "Don't wander far."

"Where am I going to go?" I asked, placing a kiss on Damian's cheek. "You have this place guarded better than Fort Knox."

"Yes, but you are more valuable to me than gold." He said sappily. Shaking my head, I followed Max down the steps. We walked to the side yard. I saw in the corner of my eye that Simon was following us, but I didn't mention it. If the cat/pooka wanted to play spy who was I to argue. I doubted Max was going to do anything super secret.

"Do you know how I escaped my master?"

I shook my head. "I didn't ask because I didn't know if you were traumatized."

Max gave me a strangely gentle smile. “Nicky, do you know why I’m now a vampire?”

“Um, because a vampire master bit you?”

“Because I believed a vampire when he said he could help me and my family with our problems.”

“I didn’t know you had problems.”

“Everyone has problems, well almost everyone. You always seem to come out all right.”

I was surprised by the amount of bitterness in Max’s voice.

“Max, I never knew you disliked me. I thought we were friends.”

Max ran a hand through his hair.

“It isn’t that I don’t like you Nick, it’s that I don’t think it’s fair that one man has everything.” He looked at me and his eyes glowed with a feral light. “You even had Jeff. Do you know that when we first started sleeping together he used to call out for you in his sleep.”

Shit.

“Even if he did. I’m sure it’s been years since he’s done that. He adores you Max. He was devastated when you left him.”

“Yeah, I know, but this vampire said he would make everything perfect.” Max stared into my eyes. “Did you ever want something so badly you were willing to do anything?”

I took a step back from Max. “No, I can’t say I have.”

Max gave me a sad smile. “Yeah, that’s what I thought. I told the vampire about you and I showed him that picture of the three of us. The one taken of us in Barbados.”

“That was a good vacation.” I said, taking another step back.

“I saw the way his eyes went straight to you. I agreed to become a vampire because he said he’d do the one thing I’ve never been able to do.”

My throat went dry, the metallic taste of fear heavy on my tongue. “What was that?” I asked, even though I was afraid I knew the answer.

“You Nick. He promised he’d make you go away. He also said he’d brainwash Jeff and Olivia so they never remembered you.” He gave me a dreamy smile. “It would be as if you never existed at all.”

This was definitely not going how I thought our walk should go.

“Why? I’ve never tried to cause problems.”

“That’s just it.” The sad smile on Max’s face was scarier than anything I’d ever seen before. “You don’t even try, but after a visit from you, Olivia can talk of nothing else and Jeff has that far away expression in his eyes like he’s remembering from before. I’m a visitor in my own home and I’m tired of it.” Max took a step towards me as I took another one back. “I didn’t escape, Nicky, he let me go. He let me go because I promised him I’d bring him you. Like everyone else he wants you.”

“Well, he can’t have me.”

“Why not?” A red-headed man strode from the shadows. “I’m Quinn Mallers and I did all of this for you, my pet.”

I shivered at the tone of possessiveness in the vampire’s eyes. Unlike Damian’s gaze that made me feel loved and protected, this guy just gave me the creeps.

I glanced around and realized Max had led me into the shadow of the trees. The other vampires were probably trying to give me privacy with the man I thought was my friend because I didn’t see one in sight.

The new vampire was almost as big as Damian, and there was a light in his eyes that I didn't trust.

"You can't have me because I'm already claimed."

"Nonsense. Max said you weren't seeing anyone." The redhead looked genuinely confused.

"Damian claimed me."

"And I intend to keep him." Damian came out from behind a tree to stand behind me. His large hands wrapped around my shoulders, giving me comfort and support, even as I could feel his rage in the clenching of his hands.

"Damian." The redhead stepped back a pace. "I had no idea this was your part of the world. You must know I wouldn't come between you and your mate."

I almost felt sorry for the guy. After a great Machiavellian plot he doesn't even get the guy he was working for. While the two vampires exchanged glares, I said the one thing I still didn't understand. "I don't get why you told Jeff you were going off with some guy."

Max shrugged. "Quinn said it would take a few months to acclimate to being a vampire, and I didn't want to come up with excuses. I knew Jeff would take me back if it was only a few months. He's loyal like that."

It was like someone else took over my body as I broke away from Damian's hold and punched Max in the face. "You broke Jeff's heart and that's all you have to say? Why the hell did you come back if you care so little about them?" I'm ashamed to say I was screeching like a betrayed woman, and I wasn't even the one betrayed.

“You would like that wouldn’t you?” Max shouted. The blood oozing out of his nose slurred his voice. I hadn’t knocked him down like I had John. The bastard was still awake. “Standing in the wings, ready to console Jeff and cuddle Olivia. I wasn’t going to leave them to you.”

“Then why fake your death?”

Quinn stepped forward keeping a cautious eye on me. Damian wrapped me in his snuggle hold of containment. I was getting used to that grip, like I was a loose cannon that had to be held back. I have to admit, I kind of liked the thought that among three vampires and one human, I was considered the dangerous one.

“That was actually an accident. While we were in Paris there was a car accident. Some drunk human was behind the wheel and hit our car. Both of us were knocked unconscious, and since we have no heartbeats, we were proclaimed dead at the scene. We had to break out of the morgue before they cremated us.”

I have to admit I laughed. The thought of them escaping from the hospital was like something out of a bad comedy. “What did you do for clothes?”

“They hadn’t gotten around to removing them yet.” Max said with a scowl. “But thank you for going there.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Behave.” Damian whispered in my ear. I’m sure it was supposed to calm me, but pressed up that close to my lover while he whispered in my ear made me unbearably hard.

“Damn. I really wanted him.” Quinn said wistfully.

“I can’t believe you bartered to have someone get rid of me.” I shouted at Max. The betrayal hit me all over again.

“Neither can I.” Jeff stepped out of the bushes and approached us, but he only had eyes for Max. “We’ve been together for years, and I thought we’d put this issue behind us. Instead, I find you traded your humanity to some vampire so you can get rid of Nick who never did you any harm.”

“But we’ll now have eternity together, as soon as I turn you.” Max protested. “It will be so much better.”

“Maybe you should’ve asked if I wanted eternity with a back stabbing liar. I came to see if you needed help, but I see that I was the one who needed help all along, I just never knew it.” He turned to the redheaded vampire. “I have to thank you for changing Max. If you hadn’t, I might never have understood the kind of man I married.” Jeff gave Max a sad smile.

“Goodbye Max, don’t bother looking for me and Olivia. I’ll tell her you died in a car accident on the way home. That was what you wanted me to think anyway.” He looked over at Quinn. “I guess I don’t have to move now.”

Quinn shook his head. “You never had to. I’m sorry I caused so much upheaval.”

Quinn gave Jeff a brilliant smile. I briefly wondered if maybe Jeff could find a love connection among vampire kind. That idea was nixed when Jeffrey demanded that both Max and Quinn get off his land.

Both men protested, but when the other ten vampires arrived, they left without a fight.

“What’s wrong, my love?” Damian’s hand rubbed my back in slow soothing circles.

“That was kind of anticlimactic. I was ready for a big battle between good and evil. Big bad vampires clashing.” I waved my hands like claws to show how the battle was supposed to go down.

Damian laughed.

“Baby, if it makes you feel better, we still have a warring faction of vampires after my family. Eventually, I’m sure you’ll see a battle. Not to mention William is now Max’s sire so it will be his job to get him in line.”

“It’s not like I want to see you get hurt.” I felt compelled to say. I didn’t want my lover to think I wanted him injured.

Damian leaned over and placed a whisper soft kiss on my lips that made me want to jump his body and strip off his clothes.

“Come, my love. Let’s go back to the house and you can show me how much you appreciate me unharmed.”

The teasing look in his eyes told me I was forgiven for my careless words. I don’t know how the future is going to go with my vampire mate, but I know it will never be dull.

“And you can show me the advantages of being yours.” I said with a smile.

I turned away from him and walked back to the house without looking back. If there was one thing I was certain of, Damian would follow. He always followed.

Because as much as I am his. He is mine.

The End.