



SHIELA STEWART

Charming
THE
DARKNESS

BOOK 4 IN THE DARKNESS SERIES

Charming the Darkness

by Shiela Stewart

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*To anyone who has ever felt like they didn't belong.
There is always a rainbow at the end of the storm.*

PROLOGUE

Jacob's Cove, 2005

It was just past midnight when Danny Vega slunk from his bed. Still fully dressed, he crept to his bedroom window. In the bed only a few feet away, his twin brother, Dante, slept soundly. Danny did his best to stay quiet so as not to wake him.

Tonight he would finally be someone.

Cautiously, Danny slid the window open, cringing when it creaked. He held his breath, looking over his shoulder at his still sleeping brother. Letting out a sigh of relief, Danny pushed the window open all the way. Hoping up onto the ledge, he sat there a moment, staring at the old oak tree directly in front of him. He'd shimmed down that tree so many times, sneaking from his bedroom after being grounded. It was a wonder his father hadn't chopped it down yet. God knew he'd given him reason enough to do it. It wasn't that he wanted to get in trouble, most of the time it just...happened. And it wasn't always his fault, still...

Danny just never felt like he belonged. Anywhere.

He knew his family loved him, and he did love them back but there was always something inside of him that didn't feel right. Something was missing. He hoped to change that tonight.

Leaping onto the thick branch only a few feet away, Danny clasped his hands onto the hard bark and looked down. With prac-

ticed skill, he shimmied down from the tree and jumped the last foot onto the ground.

His heart was beating so hard he could feel his chest thumping with it.

Giddy with excitement, Danny hurried across the front lawn. It was so dark out. Wasn't it fitting that the night he'd decided to give up his life there would be no moon in the sky?

"Danny! Danny!"

He stopped mid track and turned to his brother who had his head hung out of the open bedroom window, whisper-shouting to him. Danny simply waved a hand at him and continued on his way. Dante was not going to stop him this time. Danny was determined and even if he was locked in a room he'd find a way to break free and do what he longed to do.

"If mom or dad find out you snuck out again, you are going to be in so much trouble," Dante chastised quietly from the window.

"I don't care," Danny shouted back just above a whisper. After tonight, they'd have no control over him. He heard a noise in the trees at the edge of his property and he knew who it was.

It was time.

"Danny!"

Ignoring his brother, Danny rushed to the bushes and just as he'd suspected, his friend stepped out of the shadows.

His large frame and dark, menacing looks would scare anyone, but not Danny. Danny felt closer to him than he felt with his own father. "I came just as you asked, Chaos."

"Perfect! It seems, though, that we have company."

Danny looked back at his brother who was now scooting out of the bedroom window and onto the tree. "Don't worry about him. Let's get out of here."

"Do you still wish to give me your life?"

Danny's heart sped up just a little more. "Yeah..." He cleared his throat. He looked back over his shoulder at his brother, at the house he'd grown up in. He had a good home, loving parents, a brother who was always there for him and sister he adored when she wasn't being super crabby. He had food in his belly, a roof over his head and never went without anything. Yet he didn't feel like he belonged. Though he couldn't understand why. He and Dante were completely alike in features and body and blood. Yet he didn't feel like they connected. There was always something inside of him that was different.

Dante was the calm one, and Danny was the rebel. They shared the same blood yet they were complete opposites. Danny thrived on bad attention and Dante did everything in his power to prevent it. Danny needed excitement where Dante preferred the quiet. His sister was the same way. She would much rather stay home and watch TV then go out with friends. Not Danny. He hated sitting still. He hated being bored. And no one in his family understood that.

He didn't feel like he connected with anyone in his family. After tonight he wouldn't have to worry about any of that.

Still...he was going to miss everyone. Sure, he hated school, hated the chores his parents made him do, hated that they didn't let him have more freedom. But they weren't all bad. He wondered what his mother's reaction will be when she finds out he's not home? What was she going to do when he didn't come home that night, or the night after that? Would she cry? Of course she will. And it hurt to think that he'd make her cry.

Maybe he wasn't ready for this yet. "Well—"

It all happened so fast. Like a blur in the darkness, Chaos lunged. Danny felt the hands on his shoulders a split second before the sharp pointed teeth pierced through his skin.

It hurt and he wanted to scream, but his voice just wouldn't come. This was wrong, he wanted it to stop now but the more he fought, the tighter Chaos held on. He felt himself drifting as Chaos pulled the blood from his veins and Danny began to weep.

As his vision began to blur, he heard his brother screaming his name.

Danny woke tied to a cot in a room that smelled of must and stale water. He knew it was pitch black in the room because the light overhead was off and there wasn't a window to be seen. Yet he could see with perfect clarity.

Where was he?

He tugged his arms and felt the rope burn into his skin. Why was he tied down?

Then it all came back to him. He'd met Chaos in his yard and given his life. Danny ran his tongue over his teeth and felt the tips of his fangs sharp as razors. He was a vampire.

He was a vampire.

What had he done?

This wasn't right. He wanted to go home. He changed his mind. He didn't want this anymore.

Tugging at the ropes on his wrists burnt like hell but he kept at it. And he began to scream. He kicked his feet, his body bucking wildly as she fought the restraints. He had to get home before his parents knew he was missing.

"Let me go! Let me go!" he screamed over and over as he fought to break free. When the rope gave on his left hand he immediately began working on the other. He had to get out of here. Now!

He managed to free his right hand and the instant he did, he ran for the door. And found it was locked.

Slamming his fists against the steel door, Danny screamed for his life. When he heard someone outside the door, he didn't stop screaming but raised his voice an octave.

"You have to let me out of here. I have to go home."

He heard the locks click and as the door opened, he prepared to make a run for it. He stopped dead in his tracks when Chaos stepped through the threshold.

"What seems to be the problem, my boy?"

This was the man he looked up to, admired, wanted to be like. Yet now, Danny had reservations. "I need to go home. My parents will be worried sick about me."

Chaos closed the door, encasing them both in the dark dank room. "You are home, my boy. This is your home now."

"No, no I made a mistake. I need to go home now." He darted for the door but found it locked, once again. "Please, let me go."

The hand that rested on his shoulder startled him.

"This was just what you wanted. You don't belong with those humans and we both know it. You're different. Like me." He turned Danny to face him and the smile did little to comfort Danny. "We are your family now."

"But I should tell them where I am. I can still be with you and be with them too."

"They won't understand who you are now. They'll try to kill you like all humans do. This is your world now, Daniel."

Not it wasn't. Was it? He was so confused. He loved his family but he didn't feel like he belonged. Still...he wasn't sure this was where he belonged either.

He was so confused.

"They won't kill me. They'll understand."

"Will they? They didn't understand you before now. What makes you think they'll accept you the way you are now. This is your home now, my boy. Now come. You need to feed."

Danny walked back to the cot, reluctantly, with Chaos and as they sat down on the bed, Chaos pulled the sleeve back on his right wrist and using the index finger of his left hand, sliced his wrist open.

The smell of the blood called to him and repulsed him all the same.

"Drink."

Danny looked down at the grey blood oozing out of Chaos' veins and realized what he was supposed to do.

And he couldn't.

"NO!" He ran for the door, and once again pounded his fists against the metal. He's screamed, he cried and he pleaded. He had to get out of here now.

"Enough!"

He was hoisted off his feet and carried back to the bed. As Chaos tossed him down, pinning him with one hand, he shoved the bleeding wrist into Danny's face.

"No! No! No!" Jerking his head from side to side, he refused to give in to the calling and take the blood into his mouth. His body ached so fiercely he thought it might break in two.

"Drink!"

The wrist was shoved against him mouth and the instant the blood touched his lips he felt the need overtake him.

As he pulled the sweet intoxicating nectar into his mouth, the tears fell down his face.

CHAPTER 1

Jacob's Cove, 2025
Five months of total darkness

Darkness, it surrounded him. Once he'd craved it. Now he despised it. For over five months he'd lived with nothing but darkness. There was no sun, no stars, no clouds in the sky.

How could a vampire miss the sun? Yet Danny Vega did. Sure, he didn't vaporize the instant he was touched by the sun's rays like they portrayed in the folklore, but the sun could do a fair amount of damage to a vampire. It boiled the skin. He could walk a block or two in the sun and not sizzle instantly, but any bare skin reachable by the sun would be fried nice and crispy. And the healing time for third degree burns was not quick and definitely not pleasant. Danny knew this from experience. He'd been locked out of his home a time or two by some of his wisecracking, bloodsucking relatives.

He remembered back to his youth when he'd woken up to the stinging sensation of his face on fire. Of course, he'd panicked and had run for the door, only to find it locked. On the other side, he'd heard the cackle of laughter. To this day he had no idea how he'd gotten out there without waking up.

He hadn't been liked by many of his peers but it hadn't bothered Danny much. Then.

Now was another story.

Four months ago, Chaos, the one man he had looked up to, admired above anyone else, had disowned him, and in doing so, had given all those who had hated him reason to not associate with him. Even the people he thought had been his friends didn't want to have anything to do with him.

That hurt.

He'd done a lot of thinking since that day Chaos had shunned him. What else did he have to do but think? And while thinking, he'd looked back at his past, at his life, and wondered if the man he'd looked up to for the past twenty years was as wonderful as he had always thought.

All Danny had done was end up a prisoner of Chaos' enemies, Trinity and Basil. It hadn't been his fault. He'd been tricked by his brother. His twin brother. But Danny had held strong and hadn't given Chaos up.

When Danny had finally been released, Chaos had wanted nothing to do with him. He'd taken the other prisoners back into his fold, but not Danny. Oh, he knew the reason Chaos had turned him away was because of Dante. Chaos didn't like his minions disobeying him, and Danny had done just that by going to see his brother. He wished Chaos would have listened to him when he'd tried to explain that he was still on Chaos's side. But he'd shunned him and it had stung deeply.

Then Chaos had been abducted by Fritz and no one aside from Fritz knew where Chaos was being held. Or at least, not that anyone was telling him. Which didn't surprise him in the least, given that he was no longer part of the gang. Not that he really ever had been a big part. Sure, they accepted him, but Danny always knew that was because Chaos insisted they do so. He wasn't overly liked among his kind and to this day he didn't know why. He'd done everything he knew how to be a part of them. Yet from day one they'd mocked him, teased him and bullied him.

That seemed to be the story of his life.

As for his brother...Danny still wasn't sure about him. In the past few months, he'd run into Dante several times, and each time, the tension had been thick between them. Dante had played a pivotal part in keeping Danny locked up in Basil's dungeon, that wasn't so easy to overcome. Oh he knew why Dante had kept him locked up. He'd hoped to convince Danny to switch sides. At the time, Danny had wanted no part of it. He was loyal to Chaos right to the end. And he'd been stabbed in the heart.

But there were times, when he and his brother would stumble upon each other, that Danny had felt that familiar connection between him and his twin. That part of him that felt whole when he was near his brother.

He just didn't know what to do about it.

So here he was, all alone in a city that was beginning to become overcrowded with creatures of every kind, from vampires and werewolves to demons and shape shifters. Just to name a few.

Since word had gotten out that Jacob's Cove was encased in darkness, thanks to Chaos' spell, all the night dwellers wanted to see it for themselves. And they'd stayed. Now, it seemed, they were running the town, and like the people he'd thought of as his friends, the newcomers had shunned him. Danny didn't know why and he didn't much care.

He was getting the hell out of Jacob's Cove and all the bad memories that lived inside.

Lifting the collar up on his leather jacket, Danny carried his meager belongings to the flaming red, two-door Laser Coupe he'd stolen two days ago when he'd decided to leave. Since the cloak of darkness had been cast over the city, the days were steadily growing colder. He supposed it was to be expected when there was no sun to warm things up. But he figured the chill in the air was better than the usual bite the December winds brought. Right now, if the sun was out and the cloak of darkness was gone, there would be a good layer of snow on the ground. He kind of missed it.

It was rather interesting to think of all the things affected by the darkness. Trees were dying off rapidly, their leaves wilting and curling against the dark bark as if to protect their life-source. Flowers had died a long time ago and now sat in the ground looking droopy, brown, and shriveled. In rapid succession, birds began to drop, too weak to keep flight, which was good for the cats and dogs and the wildlife that so desperately sought food to keep their lives going. It was a dog eat dog world out there, literally, and mostly the dogs were winning. He'd rescued a mewling little kitten from a pack of hungry wolves a few weeks back. The little guy had looked so pathetic, his gray fur all greasy and matted, cringing in the corner against a dumpster and Danny had felt sorry enough for the little guy that he'd picked him up and taken him home.

Killer was now his best friend.

They got along perfectly, almost as if they'd known each other a lifetime. And the best part was, Killer didn't judge him, nor did he expect anything other than food and water.

Tucking his suitcase into the trunk, Danny headed inside for his friend. As always, Killer was sitting by the door, waiting for Danny to return. He hated leaving the cat for long periods of time because Killer always looked so pathetic when he'd return. The cat had a look about him that turned Danny's heart to mush. He'd tilt his furry face upward, lids shading half of his yellow-green eyes with a look that clearly meant "pity me".

The very look he was displaying now.

"I wasn't going far, Killer, so save the look." Scooping the furball up, Danny headed to the car. "Let's go see what we can find elsewhere." Setting the cat beside him on the passenger's seat, Danny closed his door and cranked the engine. He pressed his foot down on the gas pedal, gunning the engine and laughed. It always made Killer hiss.

Giving the cat's head a ruffle, Danny sent them rolling.

The tinted plastic he'd taped to the windows would hopefully shield him from the torturous sun that he knew would be blinding to him the instant he left Jacob's Cove. He had a kick ass pair of shades in his jacket pocket in any case. He wasn't eager to have his retinas fried, or any part of him for that matter.

"So, Killer, where should we go? North, south, east, or west?"

Killer's response was to curl up on the seat, lift his left leg in the air, and lick his balls.

"Damn, cats are lucky. Let's go north." And so he headed for the outer limits of Jacob's Cove. "This will be great, pal. Just you and me, out there, starting over. Jacob's Cove wasn't that great for us anyway. You gonna miss anyone? I know I won't." Looking over at the cat, Danny saw that he was now washing his legs. "You have got the easy life, pal."

Cranking the stereo up, he slapped his hands on the steering wheel as he drove. The hard thumping base from the heavy metal song on the CD that had come with the car was perfect traveling music. He sang along to the lyrics even though he had never heard the song before in his life. He just made up his own words.

He was finally feeling upbeat.

When he glanced over at Killer, the cat was curled in a ball, sleeping soundly despite the thumping beat of the music. Laughing, Danny ruffled his fur, annoying Killer. He looked up and saw the gray blur a second before it rammed him head on.

Brakes squealed, metal crunched, glass shattered. He hit his face on the steering wheel as the vehicle's connected, then fell back and to the

side when his car bounced upon impact from the other car. The pain stabbed into him with blinding force. He heard Killer screeching as the car came to an abrupt halt.

The alarm system in his car was wailing over the blasting heavy metal music. Above it, his head was screaming. Danny blinked several times, fighting off the black fog of delirium threatening to take him under. Then he felt Killer climb onto his lap, and up his chest. When his tiny tongue scraped across Danny's cheek, he winced.

Then he looked down and saw the blood on Killers fur. Lifting his hand, Danny felt the cool liquid on his cheek.

"You looking to get turned, my friend?" He kissed Killer's head then looked out his spider's web laced front window and saw the gray vehicle in the ditch. "Shit! Wait here, Killer." Setting the cat on the seat, Danny pushed at his mangled door. After a few hardy boots with his feet, the door finally opened with a hard screech of metal.

He stepped out of the car, felt the pavement beneath him waver, then realized the rest of the world was tilting and braced himself on the car. Once everything settled down, he took a step towards the other wreck and noticed it wasn't in as bad a shape as his own car. Maybe because it was a SUV.

"Fuck!" He'd been plowed down by a monster truck. No wonder he felt like shit.

Well, his car was toast. There'd be no driving it now and what a pisser that was. It had been a kick ass car.

He heard the mew and, turning, saw Killer following behind him. "I thought I told you to wait in the car." Killer's response was another mew. "Fine, but stick close." He walked to the SUV and pulled the driver's side door open. Behind the airbag was a tumble of dark red curls and a shapely body that told him it was female. "Hey, can you hear me?" When she didn't respond, he pushed her hair back and felt for a pulse. "She's alive," he told Killer when he pawed up at the car.

Danny pulled the pocket knife from his jacket pocket and stabbed it into the airbag. With a hiss of air and white dust it deflated, and with it, the woman slumped forward. "Come on, wake up."

She groaned, making Killer meow.

"Shit!" He couldn't just leave her here. She'd be an open target for the bloodthirsty, and if they didn't get her, the animals would. So now what?

Killer meowed again.

"Yeah yeah, I know. Damn it!" He supposed his deserting town was going to have to be put on hold. Since her car looked the best out

of the two, he decided it was smarter to use hers. Grabbing his belongings and the cooler, he shoved them into the back of the SUV then moved her to the passenger's side seat and slid in behind the wheel. When he turned the engine over, it started with a whining screech and he hoped it would carry them far enough into the city and to a house where he could leave her in. "Come on, Killer."

The cat jumped up onto his lap, then hopped onto the woman's.

"Traitor," he chastised Killer as he slammed the door and shoved the car into gear, hoping for the best. It rattled, it clunked, and it jerked as he sent them rolling. Beside him, the woman moaned and his cat curled up on her lap. "Good to see you're not injured."

Reminded of it, Danny wiped the blood from his eyes as he drove. He'd heal fast enough.

Since they weren't far from the house he'd been staying in for the past few months, he took them there, figuring it was the safest place.

He pulled into the driveway, engine smoking up a storm and shut the car off. "Home sweet home, Killer." The cat stretched, then jumped on the dashboard as if to see for himself.

The instant Danny opened his door, Killer jumped out and ran for the front door. "I told you to pee before we left." He opened the door and the cat darted inside. Letting Killer do his thing, Danny grabbed the woman from the car. Good thing she wasn't heavy. Not that he was a weakling, he had a lean body, but if she'd been heavier he would have had to carry her over his shoulder instead of in his arms. Giving his head a flick to get the stray hairs that had fallen in front of his face, he made his way to the house. He kicked the door shut, then laid her on the sofa. She sure was a looker. And damn she had a hot body. She had an abundance of curves in all the right places and a set of awesome tits. He imagined what it would feel like to cup each one in his hand.

But it was something else that called to him.

The scent of her blood was stirring his most primal needs. The wound on her head didn't look bad but it was bleeding up a storm. He hadn't had warm human blood in months.

He ran his tongue over his aching teeth and contemplated having a snack before leaving.

She stirred, her eyelids fluttering open. Then they slammed open wide in shock and fear.

CHAPTER 2

She bolted up and Danny had a moment to think *damn* before his body locked up. It was the best way to describe why he had no ability to move any of his limbs. "What the hell?" As hard as he tried to move he just couldn't.

And he had no idea why.

"You're a vampire?" She backed away from him, her brown eyes wide as she glared at him.

"Well...yeah. What the hell is wrong with me? Why can't I move?" It was like his brain had lost communication with the rest of his body. Yet he could feel everything. Weird.

"I froze you. You were going to bite me."

"Once again, yeah. Vampire here and what do you mean you froze me?" He was straining so hard to move that if he wasn't careful he was going to drop a load in his pants.

"I'm a witch."

"A what?"

"A witch."

At least he could use his face and, frowning at her, said, "You're a witch?"

She folded her arms over her chest and cocked her hip to the side.

He corrected his earlier thought. She wasn't just hot. She was *damn hot!* "Yeah, what's wrong with being a witch?"

"Nothing wrong with it. You just don't look like a witch."

"Why, because I don't have a green face and a pointy nose?" She rolled her eyes.

"No, because...well, you're hot!" There was no denying it, the woman had curves in all the right places and that tight black v-neck t-shirt she wore teased of ample breasts. Never mind the blue jean that looked painted on. "Only children think witches look like that. I'm not that stupid."

She planted her fists on her hips and gave him an indignant look. "I don't like your attitude."

"No problem. Unfreeze me or whatever you need to do to give me back the power of my body and I can be on my merry way. Killer, hurry your ass in there already!" Where was that cat anyway?

"Killer? There are more of you in here?" She spun around, facing towards the entryway to the kitchen.

Oh, this was too perfect. "Oh yeah, there's a whole bunch of us here and we are all going to take turns sucking the life right out of you."

She narrowed her eyes as she turned to face him. Maybe he should have used less sarcasm. "I don't believe you."

"Suit yourself. Come on out, guys!" This was too much fun. Her face went white as snow.

Then Killer walked in, meowed, and wound his body around Danny's legs. How was he supposed to pretend to be mean when the cat was cuddling up to him?

"There's no one else here, is there?"

"Sure there are." He was losing her rapidly.

"I don't think so." Daringly, she inched towards the doorway, peering around the corner.

Danny just couldn't resist. "Get her!"

She jumped, spun around in some sort of karate kick, her fists raised and ready.

It was the hottest thing he'd ever seen.

"I knew it! There is no one else here." She spun back towards Danny. "You lied."

"Can't blame a guy for trying. All right already, Killer, go lay down on the sofa or something." The cat was annoying him only because he was tickling Danny's shins and there was nothing he could do to stop it, being frozen and all.

"Killer? That's Killer?" she chuckled as she made her way to the cat, scooping him up into her arms. "You don't look so fierce. Come here, pretty girl."

"He's a guy." The nerve of her assuming Killer was a girl.

"Aren't you a sweetie pie?" She nuzzled her face into the cat's fur. "Yes, you are."

Killer was loving every minute of it.

"You wanna unfreeze me now?"

"Right, because I look stupid."

"Well—"

"Don't."

"You walked into it, toots."

She narrowed those big, brown eyes at him. "Don't call me that. If I let you go the first thing you'll do is jump me and bite my neck."

"Doesn't have to be the neck and I'd probably do more than just bite you."

Her eyes narrowed a little more. "What does that mean?"

"Just forget it. If I promise I won't bite you, will you let me go?"

"Sure. NOT!!" She laughed at him then took a seat on the sofa with the cat. "What's a pretty kitty like you doing with a big bad vampire?" Her head jerked up and her eyes went wide making them look even bigger than they already were. "Oh my Goddess! Please tell me you don't drink from him, do you?"

That was just the most appalling thing he'd ever heard. "What? No way. Killer and I are tight. We're pals."

"You're pals?"

"Yeah, I saved him from a bunch of hungry dogs a few weeks ago and we've been roomies ever since."

"You're roomies?" Her lips twitch with a grin.

He wasn't impressed. And this was why he preferred the cat's company to humans. Killer didn't mock him. "What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing. It's sweet. You have a kitty as a pet." Snuggling the cat to her face, she flashed a huge smile at him.

"Wanna release me now?" He didn't like the way she was looking at him or being called sweet. He was anything but.

She leaned back and Killer made himself right at home on her lap. "Not yet. So why were you leaving—I don't even know your name."

"Danny."

"Cool. I'm Starla Raine. So why were you leaving?"

"Starla Raine? What kind of name is that?"

"It's a perfectly fine name. Starla was my grandmother's name."

"So Raine is your last name?" He'd thought it was one long name rather than two.

"Yes. Why were you leaving?" she repeated, gently stroking the cat's head.

Maybe if he played nice and gave her what she wanted she'd release him and then he and Killer could go on their merry way. "I'm tired of this town."

"I would think someone like you would love living here where there's no sun to burn you up."

"The sun doesn't kill us. That's just a myth. But it does give us a nasty third degree burn. I've spent twenty years learning to live with the sun, doing so now won't be any different."

"Twenty years?" She frowned. "How old are you?"

"Thirty-three."

"Get out? Wow, how old were you when you were taken?"

"Thirteen. I answered your questions, so you wanna let me go now." His body was starting to cramp up and it was not a good feeling, especially since he couldn't rub the tightening muscles.

"The response you gave to my question was lame. Now tell me the real reason you and Killer," she smiled down at the cat on her lap, "were leaving."

"Why does it matter to you?" She was pissing him off now.

"Just curious. What's the real reason?"

She just wasn't giving up. "If I tell you the truth, will you please release me?"

"You bet." She kicked her legs up onto the couch and Killer stretched out, placing his paws and his face on her knees.

"You are just loving this," he growled at Killer. "Okay, I'm kind of an outcast here. I used to be part of the group of vamps that started this whole darkness crap, but I disobeyed the leader and so he kicked me out. Now no one wants to hang out with me even though Chaos has been taken hostage and is hidden somewhere. So why stay where I'm not wanted?"

"Chaos was the leader?"

"Yep. Now that you know the truth you can let me go."

She stood up holding the cat in her arms. "I don't think so."

"What? You said you would?" This was bullshit! She couldn't just keep him like this. Who did she think she was?

"Yes I did, but that was before I knew you were connected to the darkness." She walked right up to him, her face a breath away. So close he could smell the soap on her skin. "I came to Jacob's Cove to find out everything I can about the ritual that cast the city in darkness. I'm thinking you might come in handy."

She walked off toward the kitchen, cat in her arms.

"What? No fucking way! Get back here. Did you hear me, Starla? Get your ass back here now!" If he had the ability to chase after her she would so be on her face right now. "Damn it, Starla. Let me go!"



Waiting. There was nothing worse than that. Okay, maybe the constant peeing she'd been doing every frickin' minute of the day was worse. As her pregnancy progressed, her bladder became less resilient. But she knew in a few weeks her rapid fire bladder would be back to normal.

Trinity sat in her computer chair, her hand resting on her very round belly as she scanned emails. Thanks to Jonah's ingenuity with electronics and computers they not only had power but internet as well. He'd gone into the power station and though she wasn't entirely sure how he'd done it, he'd rerouted all the town's controls to his computer. Well, the power, water, telephone, and internet at least.

The guy was a computer genius and he loved breaking into computers. He was handy to have around.

It was a good thing her clients understood her absence the previous months though it had surprised her how many had heard about the darkness that surrounded Jacob's Cove now and were fascinated by it. She so hadn't expected people to believe her, let alone be excited about it. Weird.

They should try living with it.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week of complete darkness was not as fun as it sounded. Even her body was feeling the effects of the lack of sun, and she rarely went out in it. For obvious reasons. She was a vampire after all. But the lack of sunlight to her body was of great concern to her given the fact that she was carrying a child. But with Cooper and Raven keeping a close watch on her pregnancy and making sure she took all the right vitamins, her pregnancy was coming along perfectly.

Everything was nearly ready for their child's arrival and they'd picked names for both a boy and a girl. Neither she nor Basil wanted to know the sex until after it was born. They both wanted the surprise.

But the waiting was killing her.

Always waiting.

Waiting for her baby to be born, and waiting for the darkness to end.

In the months since the darkness had begun, they had all done everything in their power to find Chaos. He was the only one preventing the ritual that blotted out the sun from being broken. It really didn't bother Trinity much that the Dark Mystics needed Chaos' blood in order to end the darkness. It was no secret that she hated Chaos. Not only had he played a pivotal part in creating the darkness, but he'd used five innocent lives to bring the king of all vampires back to life once more as well. And he'd turned her best friend into a vampire. Though Jonah was learning to live with his new self, she could not forgive Chaos for turning him into her kind. And she couldn't forgive Chaos for playing a part in killing Jonah's wife and unborn baby. Sure, Chaos hadn't been behind the wheel of the car that had run Dante, Gypsy, Ariel, and Jonah off the road. But he had ordered it. That was just as bad.

Chaos would pay for everything he'd done to her and her friends.

If only she knew where he was.

For several months now, Chaos had been off the scene and, according to the word on the street, he was being held by one of his men, Fritz. Since no one had seen Chaos in the months after he'd gone missing, they all deduced that the word was true.

Only problem was, Fritz wasn't talking.

So in the meantime, Basil, Dante, and Gypsy were doing a full out search underground and in any hidden area of the city for Chaos. And it wasn't easy to do, especially since word had gotten out that they wanted the darkness broken. In the past few months, every creature from every breed had taken up residence in Jacob's Cove. And they wanted it left dark.

Would it never end?

She rubbed her belly when the baby kicked and clicked the mouse and shot the missile she'd aimed at her prey, annihilating them.

At least she could get rid of some frustration by killing things in a game.

CHAPTER 3

Her head was pounding something awful, and her chest was aching almost as much. *Must have bruised it in the impact of the accident.* Starla found some painkillers in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom and decided to take three. She washed them down with a glass of water in the kitchen then set the glass in the sink. When the cat pawed up at her, she scooped him up and rummaged through the cupboards. She was starved and all there was in the cupboards were cans of soup, dry noodles, and rice. Then she spotted the mac 'n' cheese and decided it was better than nothing.

"Does he feed you this crap?" Turning, she saw the cat dish on the floor with what looked like some sort of moist cat food in it. At least the guy fed the cat properly.

She set Killer down by his dish and he instantly began to munch away on the gooey food.

"Now for me." She opened cupboard doors trying to find a pot. Finally spotting one, she took it to the sink and filled it with water. It kind of surprised her that there was running water and power. Since the town was virtually deserted, she hadn't expected anyone around to continue running things.

Lucky for her there was.

She set the pot on the burner, turned it to high, then decided to check on her prisoner.

He was a cutie pie that was for sure. She was a sucker for a man with long hair, and his jet black mane definitely did a number on her. And those yellow eyes of his looked so damn sexy against his black hair and dark complexion. He had a slight Hispanic look to him. If he wasn't a vampire, she might just be interested in jumping his bones.

Oh well.

She stopped short upon entering the room and began laughing. She couldn't help it. He looked so angry. His handsome boyish face was all scrunched up, his brows curling towards his sleek nose and his thick, kissable lips peeled back to bare his fangs.

Damn, he was a sexy vampire!

"Oh, stop looking at me like that."

"Release me!" he demanded.

"I will. Eventually. Do vampires eat food or just drink blood?"

"We eat," he hissed it.

"Okay. Do you want some mac 'n' cheese? I'm a little hungry and thought I'd make myself some dinner."

"I'm a little peckish myself but not for mac 'n' cheese," he growled at her in a low, husky voice that sent shivers of arousal throughout her body.

"See, now as long as you make threats like that I won't be letting you go anytime soon. Are you getting tired of standing? I could sit you on that chair in the corner. It looks comfortable." She imagined his legs were probably getting sore standing in that same position this long.

"Sure." He smiled at her with beguiling deceit.

Oh, he was a charmer. "If you're thinking I'm going to release you to move you, think again." She marched towards him. "I can move you like this. You're poseable. See." She took hold of his arm and lifted it above his head. The look he gave her told her clearly that he wasn't impressed.

Oh well. So much for having some fun.

"Okay, let's get you comfortable." Walking behind him, she hooked her arms under his and dragged him to the corner chair. "Wow, you don't look heavy, but you sure feel heavy," she panted as she pulled him towards the chair.

"I thought the same thing when I lifted you up. I nearly put my back out carrying you from the car into the house."

She dropped him into the chair with little care, then smartly

rolled him onto his back. "That wasn't very nice. I am not fat." She was proud of her washboard abs. They took a great deal of effort to build and maintain.

She bent his waist, then his knees so he was in a sitting position. "There you go." When the cat jumped up on his lap, she smiled, giving him a little ruffle on his furry head. "You can't be all bad if he likes you. Oh, there's my water. BRB."

She hurried to the kitchen, carefully taking the lid off of the bubbling pot and dumped the box of noodles into the water. She turned down the burner, then let it cook.

It was rather a nice little bungalow Danny had. Cozy. Homey. So not what she would expect from a vampire. Truth was, she really didn't know much about them. Other than they drank blood from innocent victims. Her parents had warned her to be careful in her journey to Jacob's Cove and she'd reassured them she would. They both knew she was more than capable of taking care of herself.

Just like now, keeping the vampire frozen to his spot until she was ready to deal with him.

Stepping back into the room, she saw the disdain he held for her in the steely glare he sent in her direction. She wouldn't be letting him free anytime soon.

"It should be ready in five, if you want some." She ruffled the cat's fur again as he slept on Danny's lap.

"Now how will I be able to eat if I can't move?"

Disdain might be too soft of a description for how he was feeling for her at this moment. Hatred might be better. "You can move your mouth so you can chew. I'll feed you."

"Well, aren't I a lucky son of a bitch," he hissed through gritted teeth.

"Your teeth aren't always long. Do you control them? Like, can you think you want them to get longer and then they do?"

He let out a long breath before responding. "They get longer on their own, when I'm thirsty or near blood."

"Cool! So how often do you need to drink blood?"

"Ten times a day."

She narrowed her eyes as she responded. She wasn't that stupid. "Right. And I'm Marry Poppins."

"She didn't have red hair, or that killer body."

"You like my body, huh? I work out." She lifted her shirt to just below her breasts to show off her abs. "I have a daily ritual...which I suppose I'll have to modify while I'm here. So, let's talk ritual—oh

pooh, the noodles. Hold that thought." Racing into the kitchen, she quickly drained the pasta then added the powdered cheese. Since there was no milk, she made do without it. She wasn't too sure how it was going to taste without it, but food was food when you were starving.

She divided it into two bowls, shoved a spoon in both, then carried them back to the living room. "Here we go." She sat on the arm of the chair, resting her bowl on her lap and holding his in her hand. "Open up?"

He clamped his mouth shut.

"Suit yourself." Grabbing her bowl she went to the couch, placed Danny's bowl on the wooden coffee table, and sat down to enjoy her food. "Tell me about the ritual."

"How do I know you'll keep your word and let me go if I tell you?"

She finished chewing, then swallowed before responding. "You don't. What other choice do you have?"

"You can't keep me like this forever," he challenged and his yellow eyes narrowed, his dark lashes fanning them.

"Maybe not forever, but long enough. Sure you don't want any? It really isn't that bad." or maybe she'd just gone too long without eating. The last time she'd had something was...the night before at dinner and according to her watch, it was well past lunchtime. A day later.

"Even if I give you what you want, you have to know the instant you release me I'm going to rip your throat out."

She dug into her bowl, unfazed. "I think I'll take a shower when I'm done eating. Mind if I use your facilities?" She batted her eyelashes, deliberately, to annoy him.

"Be my guest."

His voice dipped low and dangerous and gave it an added edge that she found incredibly sexy. "If you're thinking I'll let my guard down to shower, then think again." She stood, grabbing both bowls. "I'm stronger than that. He really is a cute cat." She left the room to his rapid fire of obscene names for her and set their bowls in the sink, ignoring him. She'd clean them later but first she wanted to get out of her sweaty clothing.

As she passed through the living room in search of the shower she noticed the scowl on his face hadn't changed much since she'd left the room. Starla left Danny sitting, frozen in his chair, while the cat slept soundly on his lap.

CHAPTER 4

She had some damn nerve!

Fuming in the chair she had not so gently set him in, the cat sleeping soundly on his lap, Danny listened to the water running in the shower. If only he'd left the city half an hour sooner, or even later for that fact, he wouldn't have been run off the road by that...witch! Now he was frozen in a chair without the ability to use his arms, legs, or any other fucking body part besides his mouth. And Starla was enjoying a nice, hot shower.

The first chance he got, he was going to bite her good and proper and suck every ounce of her stupid life from her veins.

He felt his teeth elongate and his body yearning to be fed. Danny knew he needed to feed, and soon. There were packets of blood in the cooler in Starla's truck...which he couldn't get to because the wretched whore of a woman had him frozen to his spot.

Damn it!

The water shut off and with the silence, he could hear her singing to herself. She had a nice voice...and he was going to enjoy ripping it out the first chance he got.

Killer stretched on his lap, using his claws, and Danny was both grateful he could feel it and pissed off because he couldn't stop it.

"Claws, Killer! Claws!"

With lazy effort, Killer retracted his nails, gave his body a shake, then turned and made his way up Danny's chest. When his tongue slid out and over Danny's chin, he flinched, inwardly and was helpless to the cat's cleaning.

"Someone needs some breath mints." But it didn't deter the cat from his cleaning fest. "You know, you could help me out here and claw that pretty bitch's face up. It might be enough for her to drop her guard and release me from this hold."

Killer purred in response and continued his cleaning.

"Aw, that is so cute. He really loves you."

Danny's eyes shifted and the instant he caught sight of Starla, his entire body tensed up. Her red hair was damp and tumbling down past her shoulders. She wore a light gray t-shirt that looked vaguely familiar and barely came to her mid thigh—which he noticed were pretty damn sexy.

And obviously she wasn't wearing a bra because her nipples were pointing directly at him in a taunting stance.

He felt the blood rush to his cock and strained against the tightness of his jeans.

When Killer jumped off his lap, Danny actually regretted it. The cat would have made a nice cover for his hard-on.

"I borrowed one of your t-shirts since my stuff is probably still in my truck. Hope that's okay? Oh, your teeth are out. Are you hungry?"

He was hungry all right, but it wasn't just for food. Maybe he should have mentioned to her that arousal was another reason his teeth elongated. "I am," he growled low and deep.

"Do you want some mac 'n' cheese now?"

"Not food. I need blood." And something else, but he was pretty damn sure she wouldn't be giving him that anytime soon.

"Well, you're not getting mine." She backed off defensively.

At least she was worried he might bite her. That was good. He could just imagine how sweet she would taste. "There's a cooler with blood in the back of your truck parked in the driveway. Just get me some of that." But he'd have to settle for packaged over fresh.

Her eyes went wide and Danny was amused at how much larger they could get. "My truck is here?"

"How do you think I got you back here?"

Her shoulders lifted in a careless shrug. "Never gave it much thought. Goodie, I have my stuff. Be right back."

The view from behind wasn't half bad either, Danny thought as Starla darted out of the house. Even though the baggy t-shirt had covered up most of her ass, it didn't hide the roundness of it. He would love to lift that shirt up and take a nice healthy chomp out of her nice, round, firm—

"As requested."

He gave his head a mental shake and watched her move toward him. He'd been so deep in erotic thoughts that he hadn't even seen or heard her come back in.

He was feeling the need for sex almost as achingly as his need for blood.

"So, now what do I do?" she asked as she held up a plasma bag.

"Rip the top open and put it to my mouth."

"How do I rip it open?"

"With your teeth." Being this close to her, he could actually make out the shape of the areola beneath her shirt. They were large which was perfect considering her breasts were rather large themselves. God how he would love to get his hands on those babies.

"I think not!" She scrunched up her nose, giving the bag a cursory look. "I'll find scissors."

Why were women so squeamish? "Oh, just put the bag to my mouth and let me rip it open."

She hesitated before stepping closer, then slowly extended her arm out until the bag touched his face.

His eyes lifted to hers and he held them there for a moment. It was a challenging stare on both their parts. He bore his fangs, heard her quick intake of breath, then ripped into the bag. He drank the blood down all while keeping her eyes hostage.

If he had the power to seduce her with just a look, he was hoping it happened now.

She blinked, then looked away.

Damn, worth a try. He gulped down half the bag before pulling his mouth away. Her eyes flicked back to him and, when he ran his tongue along his lips, he saw her gaze shift to his mouth. So he purposely took it slow, sliding his tongue first over his bottom lip, pausing before running it over the top. And just before he pulled it into his mouth, he flicked it over his teeth.

"I...well...okay." She drew in a deep labored breath, then turned away from him and placed the packet on the coffee table. The blood began to seep from the hole he'd made in the plastic.

Maybe he could distract her with seduction.

"I...um... This shirt is really comfortable. Mind if I keep it on for a bit?"

She was flustered. Wasn't that perfect! "What choice do I have? Not like I can stop you."

"Still, I wouldn't want you to be upset at me for wearing your stuff."

"Okay, if I told you I didn't want you to wear my t-shirt, would you take it off?"

"Of course."

He smiled and if the deviousness showed, she didn't let on. "Fine. Take it off."

"Okay."

When she lifted a black suitcase and headed for the hallway, he was dumbfounded. "What are you doing?"

"Going to change," she added innocently.

Oh man, so much for his fun. "I was kidding." She paused, narrowed her eyes at him. She had such pretty eyes, even when they narrowed in disdain. "Jesus, it was a ploy to get you to take the shirt off in front of me."

She crossed her arms over her chest which only emphasized the magnitude of her beautiful mounds. "That wasn't very nice."

"Yeah, imagine that, a vampire not being nice. Go figure."

Her big, brown eyes narrowed a little more at him. "I think I would like to relax and watch some TV. Any idea what's on?"

"Beats the hell out of me." It had been stupid of him to think she would actually take it off right in front of him. But a guy had to try.

Grabbing the remote from the coffee table, she plunked her butt down on the sofa, crossing her legs at the thighs and clicked on the TV. He watched her as she flicked through the channels, his eyes shifting from her tits to her thighs. The t-shirt had ridden up when she'd sat, revealing even more of her thighs. Damn, he wanted to taste them.

"Oh!"

His heart jumped and this was one time he was glad he was frozen. Her abrupt announcement would surely have had him floundering in his chair.

"I like this movie! It's a classic."

His heart thumped wildly beneath his chest not just from being startled. She was damn lucky he couldn't move. Though, he had yet to figure out which he wanted more. Her blood or her body.

"I have all the time in the world you know."

He blinked, refocusing. "What?"

"I have all the time in the world."

She'd lost him. Had she spoken while he'd been daydreaming?
"For what?"

"To wait for you to tell me about the ritual."

She swung her legs up and onto the sofa and for a brief second he caught a glimpse of her underwear covering up what he knew would be one hell of a sweet hot spot. He swallowed and decided he'd go for the body before the blood. "Why is it such a big deal to you?"

She fluffed a couch cushion behind her neck then settled back, crossing her legs at the ankles giving him an even better view of her legs. "Four months ago High Priestess Essema confided in my mother that a ritual had taken place that defied all the laws of magic and that the Dark Mystics were in charge of it. She asked my mother to help her plead to the mystics to break the spell of darkness before too many lives were sacrificed, but the Dark Mystics wouldn't see her. Well, they actually blocked her, which gave Auntie Essema a nasty headache that lasted for days."

"I take it this Essema and your mother are both witches as well?"

She nodded. "Some of the most powerful, which I am proud to say, runs in my blood. Anyway, neither my mother nor High Priestess Essema could find out any information on the ritual, only that scarifies had been made, though there was no detail as in what that meant."

He kept his mouth shut while she continued.

"So I told my mother I would come out here and see if I could get any information for her and auntie. Hey...I just thought of something." Her eyes brightened as she spoke. "Maybe running into you was fate."

"Come again?"

"Well, I came to Jacob's Cove to find out about the ritual that cast the darkness over the city. Maybe the Goddess was helping me by having us crash into one another."

"You ran into me, remember?"

"Semantics. This is so cool! Thank you, Goddess," she chanted, head tilted to the ceiling.

She was an interesting creature that was for sure. "Okay, so you have all the time in the world to wait for me to give you information on the ritual, but do those people your goddess wants to try to protect have time?" He jabbed hoping he'd hit the right spot.

She lifted a shoulder, let it fall. "I don't think you'll be able to hold out for long. I like this part." She pointed at the TV, and when the cat

jumped up on the sofa she pulled it into her arms and snuggled him while watching the movie.

Danny stayed silent while she watched. He could care less about the show. His mind was solely on that delectable body of hers. He watched each breath she took, her breasts rising and falling and envied the cat. He wished his face was the one buried in those round mounds of hers. When he saw her eyes drooping, he felt his chance at escaping near. To his calculations, it took her only moments before she drifted off to sleep.

Yet he remained frozen.

How the hell was that possible?

She rolled over, her back facing him, and the t-shirt rode up her back, giving him a perfect view of her thong clad backside. Like a deer caught in the headlights, he just couldn't pull his eyes free. Her cheeks were so smooth, so milky white. And the more he stared at her ass, the more his dick throbbed.

He may be thirty-three in human years but he had the libido of a seventeen year old and right now that seventeen-year-old libido wanted to get fucked.

He sat helplessly while Starla slept only feet away from him.

Why was life so cruel?

CHAPTER 5

On a cot in the center of the room, head against the wall, Chaos lay comatose, hooked up to an IV that fed him a steady concoction of fluids. He'd been that way for the better part of four months now and he wasn't waking up anytime soon.

At least not as long as Fritz had his way.

When he'd boldly taken Chaos out he'd put himself at risk. It had surprised him just how many of Chaos' men had grown tired of his plan to kill Trinity and Basil and were willing to defect. Now Fritz was in charge of his race and, so far, he was doing a bang-up job. There were few demands of his men, other than to go out once a week, scoping different highways and capturing humans for nourishment.

Okay, maybe not just for food.

His people needed some fun after all.

In the past few months since he'd taken over, they'd scooped up more than fifty humans from various areas. Since they'd taken up residence in Chaos' old quarters, the very place he had once held the young women used in the ritual to bring on the darkness, there was plenty of room for that fifty and many more. And in that fifty that had been captured, ten had been turned, three of which were females. He always loved watching a timid female find her inner self after becoming a vampire.

And then there were those that went mad.

He kept those locked up in a cell, chained down and used only for feeding. What other use were they?

Standing over Chaos, Fritz watched him sleep. Everyone was better off with Chaos gone, even Trinity and Basil, despite their argument otherwise. They were vampires after all. The darkness should be welcomed by them, but no, they wanted to end it. Thankfully, newcomers had come to the city and they too were more than eager to stop Trinity and Basil from finding Chaos and ending the darkness.

No one would find him because Fritz was the only one who knew where Chaos was.

Lifting the needle he'd brought along, filled with a heavy-duty sleeping agent, Fritz injected it into the battery powered I.V.. He stood back and watched Chaos for a moment as he slept, then stepped out of the plastic dome tent encasing Chaos and zipped it back up. The last thing he needed was some rodent chewing through the I.V. and waking Chaos up. The heavy plastic dome kept them out and kept Chaos safely tucked inside.

Leaving the room, Fritz climbed his way to the top of the dirt and rock stairway to the top of what had once been his boyhood hideout. Pushing the steel door—which he'd put up in place of the wooden one—Fritz stepped up to the surface. He secured the lock and pulled the dried tree limbs and leaves over the door. No one would know it was there and he meant to keep it that way.

He walked the mile to his car—never could be too careful—and as he climbed in behind the wheel he checked the fuel gage. Whoever had taken his car last had forgotten to fill it up. He'd be sure to remind his men of the consequences of borrowing his vehicle and not filling the tank. At least he didn't have far to drive.

Pulling up to the compound, Fritz parked the car and pocketed the keys. When he heard the sound of gravel spitting behind him, he turned and watched the black van with its windows tinted speeding up the lane towards him. They hammered on the brakes, kicking up a dust cloud of gravel, making the tires squeal.

He waited while the occupants piled out of the van. With them were three humans, tied, gagged and looking a little worse for wear. His guess was, they'd put up a struggle.

Good for them. Don't make it easy.

"What have we here?"

"These two were taken on Highway 121 and this one," the vampire jerked the young man forward, his face bloody, his left eye already swelling shut, "nearly got away twice."

Smiling, Fritz walked up to the young man with a head full of sandy curls and pulled the gag from his mouth. "What's your name, son?"

"I'm not your son," the young man spat through swollen lips.

"True enough. Let's try this again." Using the back of his hand, Fritz snapped it across the young man's face. "What is your name?" Pulling out a handkerchief, Fritz casually wiped the blood from his knuckles.

"Dusty...Dusty Ryder," the young man stammered, slumping slightly in his captor's grasp.

"Welcome to the fold, Dusty. Take him away boys. Oh, which one of you borrowed my car?"

"Wasn't us, Fritz. I think Garret used it last." One of the vamps shouted out as he carted his victims to the compound.

"Tell him I wish to see him in my office." He tucked the handkerchief in his pants' pocket as he made his way into the compound. One vampire wouldn't be missed.



How long was the woman going to sleep and how the hell could she keep him frozen to his spot while she was sleeping? It was damn irritating. Not to mention, he had to take a wicked piss. And then there was his best friend who had dissed him for the comfort of the very woman Danny was lusting after.

"Traitor," Danny grumbled to the cat who only stretched out his front paws, then curled right back up into Starla's stomach. She'd moved several times since she'd first fallen asleep and with each shift her t-shirt had ridden up even more. Not only did he get a perfect view of her soft, round, milky white ass, but her crotch as well. Okay, not in the flesh, but through the white cotton panties he saw enough to know she shaved.

He wondered what she would taste like.

She stretched her arms above her head as she slowly came awake and the t-shirt rode even higher, teasing him with what was hidden beneath.

Killer let out a moan in protest, then leapt off the sofa and sauntered from the room.

"Oh...wow...I guess I fell asleep."

And much to his regret, she yanked her t-shirt down.

"Crap. I should have grabbed a blanket."

"I didn't mind the view. It was better than that crap you were watching on TV." Even though it made his loins ache.

Her brown eyes narrowed in response. "I bet you did. Pervert!"

"Hey, I'm a helpless victim. I couldn't exactly get up and leave the room, now, could I?"

Those big eyes of her narrowed even more. "I think I'll put my suitcase away and see if my clothes are dry in the bathroom yet."

"You know, there is a dryer in the basement," he informed her with a wicked smile. He rather liked the way her eyes narrowed when she was pissed off.

"Why didn't you tell me that earlier?"

"What? And miss out on seeing that scrumptious ass of yours? I think not."

"Jerk!"

"You did it to yourself by keeping me frozen. And on that note, how the hell can you keep me like this while you're sleeping?"

"It's a spell, and until I break it, you don't move. I'm going to change."

"Break the damn spell already," he hollered out to her as she left the room. "I have to take a piss."

She came out no more than two minutes later, dressed in jean shorts and a red striped sleeveless t-shirt, and he couldn't have been more disappointed.

"I'll help you to the washroom," she stated on her way toward him.

"Excuse me?" Here was his opportunity to break away from her and she was telling him she'd help him to the washroom. *I think not!*

"I'll take you to the washroom so you can do your duty."

She slipped her arms under him, sliding him from the chair. Then she slid in around him, hooked her arms under his, and began dragging him to the washroom.

"How the hell am I going to take a piss if I'm frozen like a board?"

"Don't worry. I have it all figured out."

"If you think I'm letting you hold my willy while I piss, you've got another thing coming, woman." He'd piss his pants before he let her help him pee. A man had to have some dignity.

"Please! Like I would. Ew!" She shuddered, then came to a stop by the bathroom door. "You can take care of your own business." She

plunked him on the floor then stepped from the room, closing the door.

He heard her chanting something but couldn't make it out through the closed door. Then like a lead weight had been lifted off of him, he felt his body come to life.

About damn time!

He got to his feet, a little unstable, and went right for the door. But grabbing the door knob wasn't such a good idea. The jolt he felt was like a bolt of lightning entering his fingertips and it coursed through his entire body. It was a good thing no one could see him because the little dance he did was not becoming of him.

And to boot, he pissed his pants.

"Fuck!"

The door opened and a pair of jeans came flying at him. He lunged for the opened door only to have it slam shut on him. *Fool me once.* He yanked his hand back before grabbing the doorknob.

"Bitch!"

"You're welcome. Why don't you take a nice hot shower while you're in there? Oh, and if you're thinking of sneaking out of the bathroom window, I put a spell on that as well. I'd be careful not to touch it while you're wet."

"Goddamn fucking bitch! I am going to kill her," he grumbled to himself as he stripped out of his soiled jeans. Tossing them on the floor, he pulled the button up shirt he wore off and dropped it beside his damp jeans. Reaching out to turn the hot water on, his eyes darted to the tiny window and he thought...what the hell. Standing up on the edge of the tub, he reached out to the window, and was zapped just as hard as when he'd grabbed the door. His body twitched, slipped, and fell into the tub with a thud.

"I warned you," she snickered from behind the door.

Danny lay panting in the tub, his body tingling from the high voltage zaps he'd just received, water spraying his face.

Oh yeah, she was going to pay.

CHAPTER 6

Trinity longed desperately to get outside, to feel fresh air on her face, to have some freedom to move about...and kick some ass. She seriously missed fighting. It had been five months since she'd done some serious ass kicking and she couldn't wait to be able to get back to it after the baby was born.

It wouldn't be long now, she reassured herself.

According to both Raven and Cooper, the baby was approaching the final stages of pregnancy and had dropped to get ready for birth.

And because the baby was so low, she had to pee all the time.

Coming out of the washroom, Trinity saw Raven flipping through a magazine while lounging on the sofa. She really was good for Jonah. Trinity had been skeptical of the relationship, given the fact that Jonah had fallen for her so soon after his wife's death. But they seemed genuinely happy, and Raven knew how to make Jonah smile. That was the most important part.

"I thought maybe we could drive out to the castle and check out the baby's room and see if there's anything else we need to get before the birth," Raven stated as she looked up from her magazine.

"I want to know the sex of the baby."

"Okay." Raven drawled, setting the magazine down as she stood. "What brought that on?"

"I don't know. I just feel a strong need to know the sex before it's born." She couldn't explain it to herself let alone to Raven. It was just a sudden need to know.

"Okay. We can do that. I'll set up the sonogram so you can see."

"You already know what it is so just tell me."

Raven hesitated. "Shouldn't Basil be here when you find out?"

"He doesn't want to know. I do. Just tell me."

Raven let out a long breath before responding. "You're having a girl."

Trinity could feel her face lighten as her heart did. "A girl? I'm having a girl?"

Raven's face lit with a wide smile. "You're having a girl."

Wrapping her arms around her swollen belly, Trinity smiled. "It's a girl." She looked down at her belly. "You're a girl, Felicity Rose." And she couldn't be happier.

"That is such a pretty name, and so sweet to name her after both your mother and sister. I'm sure they would have been proud."

Yeah, they would have been, if they'd lived to see the day. Her heart didn't ache like it once had when she'd lost her family in that horrible car accident. But she did still miss them and, at times like this, she wished they were here to meet their granddaughter and niece.

"Are you going to tell Basil he's going to have a daughter?"

"I don't know. Probably not. I wish she could have my red hair."

"She can, if you dye it." Raven laughed, giving Trinity's long, red dyed pony tail a tug. "What was your natural hair color?"

"Kind of a tree bark brown. I hated it all my life but I never had the nerve to dye it. Until Basil sired me." She smiled fondly, remembering that lovely night she gave not only her virginity to him, but her life as well.

"Well, since Basil's hair is black, and you had dark brown hair, I'd have to guess her hair will be dark. Anyone in your family have fair hair?"

"My father had black hair and my mother had light brown. My sister's hair was a shade lighter than mine. Guess you'll have dark hair, baby." As if she understood her mother, the baby began to kick about in Trinity's belly. "It's almost like she understands me."

"Maybe she does." When Trinity lifted her eyes to Raven, she expounded. "Well, you are a superior being now, since the queen gave you new powers. And Basil is the only blood heir of the two original vampires. With both of you having powerful blood, it stands to reason

your child would as well. She may very well be linked to you through your blood in more ways than just for survival."

Was it possible that her daughter could understand her? If that was true, had she sensed her fear in the beginning when she'd first learned of her pregnancy? Trinity hoped not.

When the apartment door opened and Basil walked in, everything inside of her lit up. He was the most gorgeous man she had ever seen. His black hair hung past his shoulders like silk, framing a face that was built with strength and devastatingly gorgeous. He was the love of her life and every moment they were together was the best of her life.

And now they were going to have a child.

"I know what we're having," she blurted out, giggling.

Basil's crystalline blue eyes shifted to Raven. "You told her?"

"She begged me to."

"I'm sure she did." His eyes shifted back to Trinity. "I thought we both agreed not to find out the sex."

"We did, but..." She walked to him, wrapping her arms around his neck, her full belly pressing between them. "I just had to know."

"Why all of a sudden?" He nipped at her lips three times before taking her in a full blown kiss.

"I'll just leave the two of you now. Congrats!" Raven whispered to Trinity before she left.

"I don't know," Trinity began, running her fingers through all that gorgeous black silk. "I just feel the need to know."

Basil ran his index finger along her face, stopping when he reached her chin. Then, slowly, he tipped her face up until her eyes met his. "It's the dream again, isn't it?"

For three months she'd had the same nightmare that the moment she gave birth to their child, it was taken from her by some unseen force. It was always the same and she always woke feeling as if her heart had been ripped from her chest.

Until she felt her child moving inside of her.

Her daughter.

"I'm trying not to think about it, but..." she sighed.

"I know. And like Cooper and I have both stated, it's normal for a mother-to-be to have fears of losing her child." He cupped her face in his palm and kissed her nose. "I won't let anything happen to her."

She knew that, and neither would she, still... "Want to know what we're having?"

"I already know."

Her eyes narrowed. "Cooper told you?"

His smile lit up his handsome face. "I dragged it out of him. So Felicity Rose it is." He laid his hand on her belly and the baby kicked.

Trinity laid hers over his. "Are you sorry she isn't a boy?"

"Never!" He laid his cheek on her belly. "I am going to take great pride in spoiling daddy's little girl."

Laying her hand on Basil's head, Trinity knew he'd do exactly that.



The shower had felt good but it hadn't done anything to ease his anger. Or his nerves. Who could blame him for being nervous when he was running water only inches from the damn electrically charged window. He'd stood sideways in the damn shower, staring at the window, attempting to wash himself.

Starla was definitely going to pay and pay hard.

Drying his hair, Danny glanced into the mirror at his foggy reflection. Using his fingers, he combed through his hair, scattering water droplets behind him that hit the wall and slid slowly down to the floor. He could probably use a shave, but that could wait.

His main priority now was breaking the hell out of the house and away from Starla's hold. The instant she'd opened the bathroom door to allow him out he was going to make his move. And she wasn't going to know what hit her.

"Yo, Starla! You wanna let me out of here now?" He didn't dare hammer his fist or attempt to kick the door to get her attention. He'd done enough funky dancing for one lifetime.

"Back away from the door," she called out.

The smile that rose on his lips was filled with deviousness. "Okay, I did."

"Liar."

"I'm as far back as I can get. My heels are touching the tub."

"Bull!"

"Fine, don't believe me. Leave me locked up in here but you're the one that's going to suffer more than I am. This is the only washroom in the house."

"Shoot!"

His smile widened. Victory was his. "How long can you hold it, Starla?" he taunted.

"Okay. Fine!"

Like a cougar waiting to attack, Danny stalked the door, watching it with steady eyes. When he saw the doorknob rotate he inched just a bit closer. The door opened and he seized the opportunity.

He yanked the door open, she screamed, he grabbed hold of her by the neck and shoved her against the wall directly behind them. "Stupid move, lady. You should have frozen me before opening the door."

"I can't hold two spells at once," she panted, glaring at him in wide eyed fear.

"Well, that just sucks for you, doesn't it? Now, which do I want first? Your body?" He skimmed his free hand over her breast, taking a moment to enjoy it by giving it a light squeeze before sliding his hand down her chest to her crotch. "You are hot!" He cupped her and took great pride in watching her eyes widen a little more. "Or do I want your blood."

He bore his fangs and was ready to scrape her neck when he felt his body lock up on him. "Damn it!"

She shoved him back. He bumped into the wall, then like a wooden plank he fell flat on the floor, coming to a rest on his side.

Damn that hurt.

She knelt down beside him, leaning her face down to meet him. "I said I couldn't hold two spells at once but you failed to take into account that I released the spell on the door." She stood up, gave her shirt a tug then walked off.

"You can't just leave me like this."

"Wanna bet?"

"Starla! God damn it, Starla, let me go." He heard the TV click on and the volume raise. He laid there on his side, his hands frozen in the pose they'd been before she'd zapped him, and the one that had touched her crotch could still feel the heat.

If he didn't get laid soon he was going to burst.

CHAPTER 7

"Is it a full moon out tonight or what?" Dante called out over the ruckus of party music blasting from someone's stereo system as he ducked the blow that a burly vampire threw at him.

"Must be." Basil slammed his fist into the werewolf charging at him. All the crazies were out tonight. "This is the third *were* I've hammered and they keep coming."

"We don't want you here, Basil," a beast cried out from the crowd.

"Yeah, well, that's just tough shit because I'm not going anywhere soon." Lifting his leg to the side, Basil kicked the beast as it charged him. The groan he let out was minimally satisfying, but when the beast tumbled backwards and was impaled by a board sticking out of a broken down shed, Basil felt satisfied.

"Behind you, baby," Gypsy warned Dante as she ran at full speed toward the vamp headed toward Dante.

Dante turned just as she slammed the stake into the young man's chest, sending him to dusty heaven. "Thanks, sweetness!"

"Anytime." She leaned in, nipped his lips for a quick kiss, then spun around, ready to fight. "Man, fighting gets me hot!"

"Everything gets you hot, Gypsy. Just keep your mind on the job," Basil chastised her, taking on the next animal that came his way. He wished now he'd called in a few of his men to help patrol this sec-

tor. But instead, he had two of them guarding his home which seemed to be constantly invaded by one lifeform or another. The others were scattered about throughout the city, patrolling and attempting to prevent the newcomers from taking over what didn't belong to them. Eventually the sun would return and with it the greater population of Jacob's Cove. He wanted to return home with his love and daughter with their property somewhat intact.

And last and most importantly, he had four men on the Digital Domain protecting Trinity and unborn daughter along with Jonah and Raven. Basil wished he could be the one to protect his family all the time, but he knew he was needed on the streets as well. He'd done a poor job once, ruling his people, and look what had happened? His arch enemy, Chaos, had abducted five virginal girls and used their blood and their life to bring forth the most heinous of all vampires.

The king.

His father.

Basil hadn't been able to stop the ritual, or stop his father from rising. Though Trinity had been the one to banish him back to his tomb, Basil often wished he'd been the one. He had after all, killed the love of his life. But despite Trinity coming back from the dead, Basil was still enraged with his father for killing her in the first place.

So here he was, five months later and the city was still encased in darkness, the night creatures ruling his town and Basil doing his best to control them.

It was not going well at all.

"This is getting us nowhere," Basil shouted and knew if he didn't control the situation now, they would be outmanned in no time. "Take cover."

"Shit!" Dante shouted.

"What?"

"Just trust me." Dante grabbed Gypsy by the arm and began a dead run away from Basil. "Keep your eyes closed and your mouth shut."

"What's going on?" Gypsy panted as she was tugged along.

"Ready?" Basil shouted out above the noise, his body primed for what he was about to do.

"As we'll ever be," Dante shouted back as they dove behind a car.

Closing his eyes, Basil focused on the earth and everything around him. He pulled in the energy beneath him, absorbing the power. Then let it loose.

The vortex formed only feet from him, but he stood stiff as if it had no effect on him whatsoever. The bystanders however, were not so lucky. One by one, bodies were flung about by the power of the tornado Basil had created, tossing them as if they were no more than a children's toys. There were screams, howls, cries. Metal crunched, glass shattered, and wood splintered. In the span of only three minutes, the vortex destroyed everything in its path.

When he was through, Basil tamed the beast and calmed his mind, body, and soul. When the vortex was finally gone, the space around him looked as if it were a war zone just blasted by enemy fire.

"Sweat Jesus!"

Basil turned just as Dante and Gypsy headed toward him and, to his relief, neither was injured. But he still asked, "You two okay?"

"We're good. They, however..." Dante pointed to the mess of bodies and debris scattered about four feet around them, "...are not. That is one scary ass piece of power you've got there, Basil."

"How do you do that?" Gypsy wanted to know, her mouth gaping.

"I focus on the earth's energy and use it to my advantage. I want to get back to the Domain and make sure everyone's all right there." Not waiting for them, Basil started off toward home.

"When you told me what Basil did to Jonah's shop I didn't really believe you. But seeing what he did just now...shit!"

"Told you he was powerful."

Basil smiled inwardly. He was powerful. Then the smile faded. If he was so powerful, why hadn't he been able to take out his enemy yet?



Fritz watched as the prisoners were taunted and tortured. He so enjoyed watching, more so than he did participating. He didn't mind playing his hand at torture when necessary, but watching was less messy. How was it a vampire could have an aversion for blood? It was something that had baffled Fritz for years. Though he had to live off of the substance to survive, he preferred not to drink it like his fellow bloodsuckers. Instead, Fritz had his blended into food and drinks. As long as he couldn't see it or taste it he was happy.

He hadn't drank from a human—or vampire—since his first days as a vampire and he planned to keep it that way. There was no law that stated a vampire had to drink the blood from the vein.

He watched as one of his men stepped out of the room they were holding the human's in, saw him wipe his brow as if he were sweating from his efforts.

"That one, in the corner, keeps trying to talk us down. Thinks he some sort of therapist."

Fritz angled his head to his left, acknowledging Devon's comment with a careless nod. Devon was desperately trying to finagle himself into Fritz's good graces, he was sure, to ensure him the position of second in command. The man was in for a rude awakening. Fritz had no intentions of claiming anyone as his second in command. He knew better than anyone, what happens when you give that kind of control to one person. They eventually they turn it on you and take over. That's precisely what he'd done with Chaos.

"It doesn't matter how much we pound on him, he just keeps talking. Saying things like, he understands our plight and how hard it must be for creatures like us to fit into the real world and shit like that. It doesn't matter how hard we hit him, he doesn't give up."

Fritz could see that. The young man...what was his name again... Darren...Douglas—Dusty, yes, that was it, Dusty. He had defiance in his eyes, and determination. Did he think he could convince them not to hit him or not to turn him? If that was the case, he could hold his breath because the inevitable was coming. He would be turned.

"The compound is beginning to fill up. We need to start telling the newcomers to find homes elsewhere." For weeks now the night creatures had been showing up at his door, begging to be allowed in, allowed refuge. Fritz had no idea why. They'd come to Jacob's Cove for the darkness and now something was spooking them into wanting to take cover. Could it be that Basil and his gang were out more and more, patrolling, scaring them into believing he could do them harm—which Fritz knew he could. Basil was one scary motherfucker when he unleashed his powers. Still, Fritz couldn't explain why they wanted to come to him for protection. He had no beef with Basil or Trinity and had told the newcomers on more than one occasion that he would not fight Basil or Trinity. Not that Trinity had been present much these past few months. Fritz suspected she was keeping to herself for fear that someone close to Chaos would take her out for his sake. Fritz had no desire to kill her, he actually liked her, or liked what he'd seen and heard about her. But he knew Chaos wanted her dead and since Chaos was missing perhaps she was afraid he was just hiding to lure her out.

He wasn't about to tell any of them that he had Chaos drugged up and that Chaos couldn't harm anyone.

"I can do that. I'll get them out of your hair, Fritz, sir!"

Fritz grew tired of the man sucking up but to acknowledge that he had no intentions of making him his second in command would only open him up for trouble. So he kept silent. "Thank you, Devon."

As Fritz walked off he wondered if it was too ask for the brown-noser to happen to fall upon misfortune and end up dead.

CHAPTER 8

Danny was positive fury was painting his face a bold, killer red. His face certainly felt hot. If he'd calculated correctly, he had been lying in his awkward position for the better part of two hours now. He heard the TV blaring, and several shows had ended and new ones begun. But every time he called out to Starla, she hadn't responded. Had she left him?

Then he heard the footsteps nearing him and if he could angle his head back he would have been able to look at her as she approached him. But no! She had him frozen so that nothing in his body aside from his face, eyes, mouth, and voice worked.

Damn bitch!

She stepped into his line of sight and he was rewarded with a glimpse of her snatch from the baggy shorts she wore. His temper eased like a slow wave heading out to sea.

"Have we learned our lesson?"

Her voice was like a soft caress aimed directly for his dick. Slowly he sent his eyes cruising up her long gorgeous legs, past the scrumptious hot box of hers and over her hips, to those mounds of delectable flesh he so desperately longed to taste, and finally up to her face. Those dark eyes of hers glared down at him and all he could think was, "Fuck me now."

"What?"

He jumped inwardly and from the expression on her face he determined his thoughts had not been so much inwardly as blurted out, "Shit!"

"Obviously you haven't learned a thing—"

"Starla,"

"I think I should leave you laying here for another few hours and then maybe you'll learn."

"No! Stop! Okay, that was uncalled for but, damn it, you stand over me and I get a glimpse of all that pink between your legs and you don't expect me to have sex on the brain. Please! I am a man."

"Who looks very much like a boy. And what do you mean you caught a glimpse of—oh my!" Her head snapped down to her crotch and her hand darted between her legs. "How rude!"

"Hey! I'm frozen here with no other choice but to look up when you stand in front of me. Not my fault your shorts are cut so high and are so baggy in the leg that I can see your—"

"Don't!" she warned him sternly.

"Oh, don't play all innocent when I know better."

She crouched down to a more level viewpoint with him. "You don't know anything about me."

"I know you like to wear thong underwear," he challenged with a slant of his eyes. "And you don't mind parading yourself half naked in front of me."

"I was not parading!" she insisted.

"Right," he snorted in response.

"I wasn't. And so what if I like to wear thong underwear? Doesn't give you the right to gawk at me."

"When I have nothing else to look at...yeah, it does. Especially when it's practically in my face, which I really wouldn't mind right now." His eyes drifted to her breasts with a desirable glint.

"You're sick." She stood up in a huff, arms crossed over her chest.

"Yeah, stand up baby, I like that view."

She growled, threw her hands in the air, then marched toward his head.

When she knelt down at the top of his head he wished his eyes could roll all the way up to the top. "What are you doing?" She slipped her hands under his arms and hoisted his upper body off the floor. What the hell was she doing to him now.

"Setting you back in your chair."

He smiled brightly, savoring the sweet taste of victory. Then she plunked him down on the chair hard, with about as much gentleness as a person tossing a stone. Even when she rearranged him so he was faced forward and sitting somewhat straight she was rough. *Guess she was pissed at him.* Well tough shit.

"How long do you plan on keeping me like this?"

"Shut up."

"Bitch."

"Bite me," she snarled.

"Oh honey, if I only could."

Her eyes narrowed to small slits until Killer jumped on his lap and instantly began making himself comfortable. Danny liked the way Starla's face lit up when she saw the cat. "I won, you know."

Her eyes shifted to look into his and there as the anger again. "What?"

"I'm back in the chair, aren't I?" he mocked with a devious tone in his voice. And the look on her face when it registered was better than anything—okay, almost anything—in the world.

"Why are you such a jerk?"

"Hello, vampire here."

She threw her arms out at her sides. "So what? Just because you've been turned into a vampire doesn't mean you have to become a jerk. You drink blood, blood that comes from normal human beings. Why does that make vampires into bad guys?"

He had to think about that one for a minute. There were some decent vampires out there, so it wasn't just becoming a vampire that made a normal person a—as Starla put it—jerk. "I was raised by an evil man," he blurted out when it finally came to him.

"What?"

"Chaos. He made me a vampire when I was thirteen. An impressionable age. I grew up with evil so, therefore, it made me evil. You know, like a kid that's raised by abuse has a higher chance of growing up to abuse."

Crossing her arms over her chest, she cocked one hip to the side and tilted her head as she glared down at him. "Are you for real?"

"As real as you are."

"I don't drink blood."

"I could change that?" He bore his fangs in a mock smile. He could imagine how it would feel to penetrate her flesh and drink her dry.

"Not even if I knew I only had a week left to live." She crossed her

arms over her chest again. "So you're saying because you were raised by this Chaos guy that you're a jerk?"

"I prefer evil."

"Any man who takes care of a helpless kitten, feeds him expensive cat food, and appears to actually care about the cat, isn't evil. No, you've just got attitude." She reached down to scratch the cat's head, bending at the waist and gave Danny a glimpse at some nice cleavage.

"Wanna scratch something else, honey?"

She yanked her hand back, disgusted. "See, that's not evil. That's just jerkish."

"I've got something you could jerk."

"Stop it!"

Oh, this was too much fun. He was getting to her. "Why don't you plant that sexy ass of yours right here on my lap and rub that gorgeous—"

"You're repulsive." Throwing her arms in the air, she marched from the room.

Danny's laughter woke the cat, who took out his dislike at being woken on Danny's crotch. "Hey, watch it, Killer."

He sat back, imagining just how nice her body would feel naked against his.



He has some nerve!

Running the tap good and cold, Starla scooped water into her palm and threw it on her face. She splashed it several times before shutting the water off and drying her face. Then because she was still warm, she wet the cloth and blotted her chest to relieve the heat she was feeling all over her body.

How on earth could she be attracted to such a...Neanderthal? The man was crude, vulgar and...he was a vampire. Enough said. Yet her loins tingled with arousal. It was unnerving. She needed to get away from him...but he was the only one she knew who could help her figure out the ritual. Damn!

What she needed was to convince him she would make it worth his while if he helped her. And since he had sex on the brain, she could...no, she couldn't. Yet...what other choice did she have? He wasn't giving up the information.

Tossing the damp towel into the washroom sink, Starla drew in a deep breath.

It was time to charm the vampire.

CHAPTER 9

Danny stared down at the cat as Killer meticulously cleaned each and every toe on all four paws. He had nothing else to do, couldn't get up and leave, so he sat and watched the cat wash himself.

"You do know where those toes have been, right? Seriously, Killer, think about it. You step in your own crap, kick it about, and now you're licking those very toes. That's righteously disgusting." Then the thought struck him. "Oh, fuck, you lick my face with that tongue." He wished he could shudder because he was thoroughly disgusted. "Well, no more, pal. Got it? You keep that tongue to yourself."

"I think it's so sweet the way the two of you get along."

Danny glanced up to see Starla standing in the hallway that led to the bedrooms, one arm raised up and resting on the wall beside her, bent at the elbow. Her fingers were playing with her hair. She wore a black satin vest, which he was pretty sure was most likely meant to be worn over another shirt. It was tight and the tiny white buttons down the center dipped low enough to show off the line between her breasts. Along with a fair amount of soft, plump flesh. She hadn't changed her shorts and in the way she stood, with one leg bent, her foot rubbing the ankle of the other leg, made her legs look even sexier.

He swallowed the drool before it had a chance to dribble down his face.

Then she sauntered toward him and his mouth went dry.

"He really loves you." Her eyes shifted to meet his and he felt his heart speed up. "And you love him."

"Yeah...well..." He swallowed the lump in his throat. When her hand came down onto the cat's head, everything inside Danny's body tensed.

"Neither of you have anyone in your lives. It's nice that you have each other."

He wished with all his heart he was that cat right now. Killer was getting the rub down of his life. "We have things in common."

"Like, being an outcast?" Her eyes met his with a sultry look.

He drew in a deep breath. "There's that, and not really getting along with our family."

"You have a family?"

She leaned over a little more, awarding him a very close view of her ample cleavage. The scent of some sort of perfume found its way to his nose and tickled his already sensitive senses. "Most everyone does."

She knelt down between his legs and he nearly swallowed his tongue.

"I suppose so. Do you have siblings?"

"A twin brother and an older sister." He was having trouble catching his breath. Kneeling between his legs, Starla rested her left elbow on his right knee while her right hand caressed the cat. With her close proximity to his dick all she had to do was shift her hand slightly and he'd be as happy as the cat.

"You have a twin brother? That's so cool. Is he a vampire too?"

"No. Jesus, woman, are you trying to turn me on?"

She looked up at him with complete innocence. Then she smiled. "Maybe."

He certainly hadn't been expecting her to say that. "Huh?"

She twirled her fingers along the cat's fur in a very seductive manner. "I figure, I want something from you and you want something from me. Maybe we could...work something out."

"Really?" he asked with skepticism. What was she pulling now?

She stopped petting the cat and instead, sat up a little higher and rested her arms beside him on the chair. She was close enough to his face that he could feel her breath on his mouth. "Really."

"What changed your mind? I thought I repulsed you?"

"You don't repulse me. You're crude and a jerk, but you most definitely are not repulsive."

He could see tiny flecks of gold in her brown eyes. "Is that so? You think I'm hot?"

Her lips curved up in a sly smile. "A little. You have all this long, dark hair..." she ran her fingers through it. "which is so appealing. You have such a strong handsome face, and your body's not too bad either." She slid her hands from his hair all the way down his arms.

Everything inside of him came to life when she ran her index finger along the center of his chest. As if repulsed by it, Killer jumped from his lap with a hiss. "You've made claims before that you haven't followed through with. How can I trust that you'll do what you say this time?"

She stood up, much to his dismay and took a step back. Then she undid the first two buttons on her vest. "Now do you believe me?"

His mind was mush. Before him was the soft, milky flesh of two very ripe tits teasingly trying to burst free of their satiny jail. "Uh huh."

"Good. Tell me about the ritual."

His eyes remained glued to her breasts. "I want to see more."

"You'll see more when you give me something."

He pried his eyes from her chest and smiled deviously as he looked up at her. "Oh, I've got something for you all right."

"Danny," she warned.

He sighed. "Chaos learned two years ago that a ritual to raise the vampire king was in existence. You see, Chaos used to be Avadur's right hand man. Though Basil was the one who sired Chaos, he preferred to think of himself as Avadur's."

"Who is Basil?"

"Another button."

She let out a long breath and released another button on her vest.

Danny licked his dry lips and continued. "Basil is the only son of the first two vampires. Basil had his father banished back in the middle nineteen hundreds or something because Basil wanted to rule his kind. Thing was, he did a piss poor job of it so Chaos started claiming his own warriors, building his army. Chaos hates Basil for banishing the king, so when he found out about the ritual, he knew raising the king would destroy Basil. Another one," he urged her on.

Hesitatingly she released another button. "Go on."

Only two more buttons and he was going to be witness to some very nice tits. It was worth it. "I don't know where he got the ritual. He went out of town for a few days and when he came back, he had

it. No one knew where he kept it, but he told us all what was needed. Five virgins' blood on the total eclipse of the sun."

"How did the darkness come into play?"

"Last two buttons." He wasn't about to give her more until she gave him everything. Or close to it.

She chewed on her lower lip which was incredibly sexy, then slowly released the last two buttons.

"Yeah, baby, now we're talking." But just when he thought she would remove the vest, she let her hands fall at her sides. "Um...I think you forgot something."

"Nope. Go on."

Now she was just being cruel. "Come on! Take it off."

"Give me something more and I will."

Damn woman! "I overheard Chaos telling Fritz that he'd had to bargain with the Dark Mystics in order to get the ritual. I should have known Fritz would take over. The bastard!" His temper flared and if he'd had his hands free he would have punched the chair he was in. He hated Fritz.

"What was the bargain?" Starla urged him on.

Danny huffed and continued. "Chaos would relinquish his soul to the Dark Mystics upon his death and they could do with him as they like. Remove it," he insisted, his eyes glued to her bulging breasts, begging to be released.

It took her several minutes and Danny was sure she was going to chicken out and do her vest back up. Then she grabbed hold of the front on each side. He watched with pure rapture as she slipped the vest away, revealing two of the most beautiful things he'd ever seen in his entire life. Sure, he'd seen his fair share of tits in his life, but none as beautiful as the ones revealed to him now. They were perfectly round, lush and milky with dark red areolas and sharp, erect nipples. They sat on her chest like regal goddesses and if he'd had mobility he would have eagerly dropped to his knees in reverence.

"Hot damn," he murmured.

"How can the ritual be broken?"

Imagination was not always the best. Wanting to feel those mounds in his hands and in his mouth was all he could think about. "I want to touch them."

"How can the ritual be broken?" she reiterated.

"Chaos has to die."

"In any particular manner?"

"Nope. My turn." He just had to feel them. Much to his delight, she stepped forward, took his hand in hers, and lifted it to her breast. When she laid his palm against her flesh he felt as if he'd died and gone to heaven. Her skin was so soft. "Jesus!"

"Where is Chaos?"

"I don't know." He wished with all his might that he could give it a squeeze.

She backed off, letting his hand drop.

"Hey!"

"You don't tell me what I want to know so you don't get to touch."

"I did tell you what I know. I told you everything." He could still feel her breast in his palm. Damn, he wanted more.

"You didn't tell me where Chaos is."

"Because I don't know."

She chewed her bottom lip while staring at him. "You're serious?"

"Perfectly. Now bring that baby back here." She knelt down and grabbed her vest, much to his dismay. "What are you doing? No, no, take it off," he pleaded as she slipped back into the vest. "Come on!" He wasn't ready to give them up just yet.

"I need to find Choas." She began buttoning the vest.

"Good luck with that. Aw, come on! Don't do them all the way up." But she ignored him and did every single button up hiding those gorgeous mounds of flesh. "Damn it!"

"Any idea where he might be?"

"None. Fritz has him locked away somewhere. How about a sneak peak of what's below?"

She sat on the sofa, crossing her legs. "Why does Fritz have him locked away?"

"I gave you all I'm going to give you. If you want to start revealing the lower part of your body I'd be more than willing to share more information with you."

"It's not important." She stood up, dusting her hands. "I'm starved."

"What? No way. Get back here," he demanded as she left the room. "Starla! Jesus Christ, woman, I'm throbbing like a bitch here." But all his pleas didn't make her turn around and satisfy him.

"Great! Just fucking great!"

He stared down at his hard-on and was helpless to do anything about it.

CHAPTER 10

Trinity waddled down the stairs, one hand resting on the small of her back, the other holding onto the rail along the wall. Her belly was so large she couldn't see the steps below her as she walked. But it didn't bother her one bit because she knew it meant her daughter was growing inside of her.

Her daughter.

She was still getting used to that. She was going to be a mom and her child was a girl. She couldn't wait to dress her up in pretty red dresses. No pink for her girl. Red was the color of passion, of the blood that fueled them, and also happened to be Trinity's favorite color. Her daughter was going to be the prettiest little girl in the world.

And right now her pretty little daughter was pushing down on her mommy's bladder. Thank God there was a washroom on the main level because Trinity wasn't sure she'd make it back up the stairs before peeing herself. Since becoming pregnant, Trinity had decided not to teleport herself. None of them, Cooper especially, knew what it would do to the baby. Why chance it, Trinity decided. It wasn't like she needed to beam herself anywhere. Although at times, she wished she could just to escape the home she'd been hold up in for the past five months.

She did her business and, stepping out of the washroom, nearly ran Cooper down.

"So sorry." He laid a hand on her belly which had bumped into him as she'd stepped out of the washroom. "I was just about to clean up in there."

She backed off, glancing at the room behind her. It didn't look like it needed a cleaning to her. "You know, Coop, you don't have to do the cleaning here. We are capable of cleaning up after ourselves."

"It keeps me busy," he said simply, running a hand through his sable hair.

It amazed her how dapper he always managed to look. His short brown hair was always in place and always shone like silk. Even when he was cleaning a toilet he looked good. Not many people wore a suit and tie to scrub mold and mildew, but Cooper did. And every suit he wore, no matter what style or color, made him look incredibly handsome. He had the wrinkles at the side of his eyes of a man who should be in his forties, and she really didn't know exactly how old he was. But for a man of whatever age he was, he looked damn good. He had that dignified middle aged man look and if he knew her thoughts right now he would surely be blushing.

She'd noticed his restlessness as of late. The Digital Domain was far from the huge mansion of a home he'd been used to taking care of. She figured he was probably bored out of his mind. Something they had in common. "We should be back home in a few weeks," she reassured him.

He nodded, yet she could tell it did little to reassure him.

"And just think. In a few weeks you'll have your hands full, helping me take care of this little one here." She rubbed a circle over her belly, then cringed at the pain that suddenly shot into her. "Whoa!"

"Are you all right?"

She panted through the cramp, or whatever it was, and nodded. "Just a weird twinge." She rubbed her belly a little more, hoping to ease the pain. "Do you know if Jonah's in his office?"

Cooper nodded, his eyes ever watchful. "He seems to be a little preoccupied with something on his computer. He was a little gruff with me when I went in there earlier."

"Oh, Coop, you didn't try to clean his office again?" The last time Cooper had attempted to clean Jonah's office it had resulted in a near breakdown on Jonah's part. Everyone knew not to touch his stuff but Cooper being Cooper couldn't handle the messy office and had at-

tempted to tidy it up. It had taken her an hour to calm Jonah down and to bring some peace between him and Cooper. She didn't want to go there again.

"Well, the bloody room is in shambles. It is beyond me how any civilized human being could stand to work under such horrifying conditions."

"Jonah likes his stuff in its place," she explained.

"His place is horrendously messy." He threw up his hands.

"That's why the sign says, 'Stay out unless you want to die'," Jonah informed him, stepping out of his office, pointing to the metal engraved sigh on his door. "And you keep forgetting, vampire hearing now." He narrowed his eyes at Cooper, tapping his ears while the cane dangled from his wrist.

It was still a sight to get used to, seeing Jonah hobbling along with a cane. In the months since his accident that resulted in his wife and unborn child's death and rendering him paralyzed from waist down, Jonah had come a long way. His days of wheeling around in a chair were over as were the crutches he'd come to rely on. Now all he needed to assist him in walking was a silver cane. It was amazing.

"Please, will the two of you not start again. Youch!" This time the pain had her buckling.

"Trinity?" Jonah rushed to her side, as did Cooper. "What's up?"

"I keep getting these weird crampy like pains. Feels like my whole belly is tightening up. Man..." She blew out a breath and straightened as the pain subsided.

"Contractions," Cooper supplied as he glanced at his watch. "We'll need to start timing them."

"What? Already? Isn't it early?" She was *so* not ready to have the baby now. She had so much to do to get ready.

"I've explained to you that you could give birth anytime after your twenty-fifth week. You're at twenty-six."

"You should sit down." Jonah hooked his arm under her to help her to his office.

"The child will not be born in that squalor." Cooper waved his hand in the direction of Jonah's office. "It's best to get you to your suite." He slipped his arm around her, nudging Jonah's hand out of the way.

"Watch what you call my office, buddy," Jonah warned him, shoving his hand around Trinity, bumping Coopers out of the way.

The two of them were acting like children.

"Oh, shut up, the both of you! Christ, you're worse than children. And now I have to pee again. Damn it!"

"You're water could break at any time," Cooper informed her.

She slammed the bathroom door in his face.

"Tell me if you experience another contraction," he called out to her through the door.

"Blow off and let me pee, Cooper." *Give a girl some privacy. Sheesh.*

"My office is clean. It may not be organized to your standards but it's clean," Jonah grumbled.

Trinity rolled her eyes. Would the two of them ever stop?

"Not clean enough for a birth."

She washed her hands, dried them off, then yanked the door open.

"Are you two going to bicker like this while I'm squirting my kid out? Because, if that's the case, neither of you are allowed in the room." She took the stairs up, annoyed with the both of them.

"I need to time your contractions," Cooper said, following her up.

"I'm more than capable of timing them myself." Huffing a little as she came to the last step up, Trinity turned to her suite. "Just leave me alone." She slammed her apartment door and heard Jonah speak from the other side.

"Way to piss her off, Cooper."

She growled, threw her hands in the air, and went to her room.

They were going to drive her nuts.



Had she gone too far? Scooping a spoonful of tuna, Starla slopped it into Killer's bowl. The cat dove in as if he'd been starved a week and devoured the smelly cat food in no time.

"I needed information," she spoke softly as she knelt down to the cat. "Every man's vulnerable spot is seeing a naked woman. I figured since Danny wanted to see mine, and I wanted to get information from him, I could work with it. They're only boobs, after all, and they are mine. What I do with them is my business. Right?"

Killer lifted his fuzzy head, licked his mouth, blinked at her then proceeded to go back to his mushy food.

She'd gotten plenty of information from Danny in the process, so it was worth it, wasn't it? And it wasn't like she'd had sex with him for information. That was a whole different kettle she wasn't willing to set to boil.

Yet.

Her stomach rumbled, reminding her why she'd come into the kitchen in the first place. Standing up, she rummaged through the nearly empty cupboards, not overly thrilled with the contents. She settled for a can of vegetable soup and set it to boil. While the cat finished off his dinner, she stirred hers.

Now all she needed to do was find Chaos and the ritual and she was set. She could take the ritual to High Priestess Essema and she could end the darkness.

Starla scooped two bowls full of soup, then, carrying them to the living room, saw Danny scowl at her as she entered. "What?"

"You're a cruel bitch."

She was appalled. "How am I cruel?" She set both bowls on the coffee table then took a seat on the sofa.

"You get me all hot and bothered then leave me with a raging hard-on and nothing to do about it. Cock tease," he blurted out. "That's what you are. A cock tease."

"I am not!" Her jaw dropped in response. Okay, so she could understand his point, but she was not...wait...maybe she was. Hell, she had teased him then left him to suffer. He was right. "I'm sorry."

"What?"

Resting her hands on her lap, she looked up solemnly at Danny. "You're right. That was mean and I'm sorry."

He stared at her for a few moments before responding. "And that's supposed to make it better?"

Sighing, she got up to pace. "It's just...you got me thinking when you said the innocent didn't have time for me to wait to get information from you."

"I don't think that was exactly what I said."

"Close enough. I knew you wanted me. I knew what you wanted, so I decided to play on it. That was mean of me and I'm sorry."

"Well if you were really sorry you'd release me from this frozen state already."

She turned to him, knowing that he was absolutely right. "*Sabotily.*"

And she knew when he jumped out of the chair and ran at her, just what to expect.

"You are going to pay for that now."

CHAPTER 11

Danny had her pinned to the wall, his body pressed tightly against hers, and he could feel her heart pounding against his chest. With each intake of nervous breath her breasts sunk in and then pressed against his chest. He could smell her fear and hear her blood rushing through her veins.

He wanted both body and blood so badly he ached. He wondered why she hadn't frozen him yet. "You think it's funny, toying with me, making me hard and not give me the relief I need?"

"No, I never thought it was funny." Her eyes were steady on his.

"You enjoyed it!"

"I did what I had to in order to get what I wanted."

"And now I'm going to do what I have to in order to get what I need." He spun her around, tossing her onto the sofa, pouncing on her before she could get away, and pinned her to cushions.

She didn't stop him in any way, which completely baffled him. So he continued.

"You flash these gorgeous tits at me, even give me a tiny sample, then pull them away without a care. Well, you can't pull away now." With one quick tug he tore her vest open. Buttons flew across the room to ping off of walls and whatever got in their way.

"You're right," she panted beneath him.

"Damn straight I'm right. Women think it's so fucking funny to tease a man, get him hard and horny, then refuse to satisfy him. Let's see who's laughing now." He pried her legs apart with his knee and shoved his hand beneath those flirty shorts she wore. When his hand found her damp and hot he took great pride in knowing he made her that way.

Then she whimpered and reality slapped him hard in the balls.

What the hell was he doing?

Pulling his hand free, he scrambled to his feet, taking a deep breath to calm himself. His dick was throbbing and he could still feel her juices on his finger tips but he wasn't going to step over that line. He never had before and he sure as hell wasn't now.

"Fuck!"

"Why'd you stop?"

He made the mistake of looking over at her. She was still on her back, her vest lay under her armpits, her breasts exposed and her legs were spread. She was ripe for the picking.

So go for it.

"Fuck it!" He pounced again, pinning her but just as he was about to take what he so desperately needed his damn conscience kicked in. "Fuck! Fuck!" He jumped off of her and began pacing the living room floor.

"What's the problem?"

"I can't believe this. I can't believe what I was going to do."

"Have sex with me?"

He turned to her and regretted it instantly. She was still half naked. "I don't rape women."

She sat up, her brow furrowing. "What are you talking about, rape?"

"I was going to rape you."

The door flew open, making Starla scream and Danny instantly came to her defense. Fists ready, he jumped in front of her.

"Well, looky here, Sam. We got us a party."

The rather large looking vampire stepped aside, allowing four more of his equally large friends to enter the house. Danny knew there was no way in hell he was going to be able to defend himself and Starla against the five of them.

Grabbing Starla's arm, he yanked her up and darted from the room. He scooped Killer up as he ran through the kitchen. They tore out of the back door and kept running.

He could hear the vampires laughing at him in the distance.

"My purse!"

"Leave it!"

"But it has all my stuff in it. Danny, stop! I can't run as fast as you. Stop!" she shouted, tugging at his hand.

He slowed down, glancing behind him and was grateful to see no one had come after them. He came to a stop, holding Killer tight to his chest. Great, now he was out of a house.

Again!

"Why did you do that?" Starla hurried to button up her vest with the scant few buttons that hadn't come off when he'd ripped it open.

"Didn't you see those guys?" he panted, trying to catch his breath.

"Well, yeah, still... Why didn't you try and fight them off?"

He stroked the cat as he spoke, soothing not only Killer but himself as well. "Five of them against two of us, one of which is a girl. Yeah, taking them on would have been a bright idea."

"Well, you don't have to get snippy about it. I was just wondering."

"Look at me, Starla. Do I look like I could take even one of them on in a fight?" Despite being in his thirties, he had the body of a seventeen year old. He was no match for a big, burly vampire looking to have some fun.

"I thought vampires had super human strength?"

"We do, I do, and so do his friends. He had at least a hundred pounds on me. He would have taken me out in one jab to the gut then what do you think would have happened to you." Exactly what he'd been planning to do to her.

His gut rolled with sickness.

"I can take care of myself, Danny. All I would have done is freeze them just like I did with you."

"You wouldn't have been able to freeze them. You'd have been too scared to use your powers just like you were when I attacked you earlier."

"I wasn't afraid of you earlier and I can use my powers anytime, especially when I'm afraid or have you forgotten what happened when I first woke up after you hit me."

"You hit me!"

"Right, sorry. All I'm saying is, I can defend myself."

"Then why the hell didn't you stop me when I was about to...to... rape you."

"It's not rape if the party is willing and I was willing."

His jaw dropped in shock. "You were not willing."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I could smell your fear. I heard you whimper when I shoved my hand down your shorts."

"Sure I was a little scared, but mostly I was turned on. That wasn't a whimper of fear but more like one of anticipation."

"Anticipation? You wanted me to fuck you?" She was out of her friggin' mind.

"Well, I might have liked it a little gentler and maybe not right at that moment, but after what I did to you, I had it coming."

"Are you saying you deserved to be raped?"

"I already told you, it's not rape if the party is willing and I was willing."

"Are you for real?"

"Completely."

Danny paced a few feet before turning back. "In that same reasoning you could say then that any woman that enticed a man is asking for rape."

"No, that's not what I'm saying." She took Killer from him when the cat began to push away. "But if that woman purposely tries to turn a man on she'd better expect him to act on it. Right, Killer?" She stroked his tiny head.

"Leave him out of it. He hasn't even reached puberty yet. I can't believe what I'm hearing." He ran his hands through his hair. "You were willing to let me rape—"

"Have sex with me," she corrected with a raised index finger.

He shook his head in disbelief. "Woman, you're killing me." Taking his cat from her, he brushed against her breast and deeply regretted it. He strolled away still baffled.

"Where are you going?"

"Well, I guess I need a new home since mine was just invaded."

She hurried to catch up to him. "All of my stuff is there. My car is still there."

"Don't count on it." With those brutes he was betting they'd take her car the first chance they got.

"We can't just let them take our stuff."

"Looks like we can and are. Fuck, I'll need blood."

"You're not getting it from me," she piped in defensively.

He stopped abruptly causing her to stop a few inches ahead of him. "You'd be willing to let me fuck you but you won't let me drink from you?"

She nodded. "Well, yeah. I don't want to become a vampire."

"Who says I'd turn you? I might just drink you dry and leave you to die."

She stepped right up to him and stroked the cat in his arms. "I'm betting you wouldn't do that."

"Then you'd lose. Evil, remember?"

"If you're as evil as you claim to be you wouldn't have stopped yourself from raping me."

"It's not rape if the party is willing," he reminded her.

She smiled and he felt his heart skip a few beats. "You're not such a tough guy, Danny, and we both know it. Where can we get you some blood? And, no, not from me," she warned, holding up her hand.

He let out a long breath. "The blood bank, though the last time I was there they were running low. Since every vamp and his dog came to town, the blood supply has been dwindling. We need to seek shelter first, before someone else decides to pick a fight with us."

"And how do we seek shelter?"

"We find a house that's not occupied." Stroking his friend's head, Danny headed forward. He just hoped they didn't get caught in the meantime.

CHAPTER 12

Trinity looked up at the ceiling over her bed and thought how desperately it needed a fresh coat of paint. It was looking a little dingy. Maybe she could get Cooper to paint it. That should keep him occupied and out of Jonah's hair. And hers, for that matter.

At least they'd stopped arguing after she threatened to rip both their arms off and shove the limbs up the other's ass. And they'd stopped banging on her bedroom door after she's sent them both a nasty electrical zap. She didn't like hurting her friends, but damn it, they were giving her a headache.

She nearly jumped out of her skin when Basil materialized in the room. "Sweet God, Basil, are you trying to give me a heart attack?"

He came up right beside her on the bed, taking her hand in his. Pure worry was etched like a painting on his face. "Cooper said you were in labor."

"I'm not in labor. At least I don't think I am. The contractions stopped." Which was of great relief to her. She dreaded when the real thing started. She prided herself in being able to handle pain, but those contractions had been something else. It had felt like her gut was being wrung tight.

He laid his hand on her belly, smiled when the baby kicked. "When was the last one?"

"Twenty minutes ago. My water hasn't broken yet either. I think it was those false labor thingies."

"Still, we should keep watch. It could just be the beginning."

And that was what terrified her. "I'm scared," she laughed at her own fear, feeling silly for it. "Listen to me. But, hell, I'm terrified of delivering this baby. Delivering, her." She stroked her belly lovingly. "I can't wait for her to be here but I terrified of her coming out. It's going to hurt."

Basil smiled giving her face a gentle stroke with his fingers. "Yes, but it will be worth it in the end."

"Says the man who doesn't have to squeeze a watermelon out of his penis."

"I'll be right at your side, my love." He kissed her hand reassuringly.

"What if I can't do it?" She hated admitting that she was worried she couldn't handle it.

He rested her hand on his cheek. "I've never known you to not be able to handle anything. You'll deal with this just as you deal with everything in your life. Head on."

Leaning against him, she wished she was as confident as he was.



After walking for the better part of an hour, Danny finally found a house he thought would work for them to hide out in. It had a high fence surrounding the property with a gate he was sure he would hear opening and closing if anyone entered through it. The house itself was a tall two-story with brick on the front and siding on the top. If no one was already occupying it, it would serve them well enough.

"Wait here while I go check it out."

"I could cast a protection spell on us so we can't be harmed inside the house. That way both of us could go in and look." She held up her hands when he gave her a look. "It's better than having you get the pulp beaten out of you."

"Thanks for the confidence. Fine, cast away." He held his hand out for her to go ahead.

"Done." She spread her lips in a wide grin.

"Just like that? You didn't even say anything."

"I don't have to. All I need to do is think it. I was born with my abilities so they come naturally. Do you want to go first or should I?"

Grumbling under his breath, he moved past her and headed for the front doors. Despite her claim to have cast a protection spell on

them, he was still wary upon entry. Pushing the door open, he entered, keeping his eyes peeled for anyone or anything that might jump out at him.

"Doesn't look like anyone's here."

"We've only stepped inside. We haven't checked the upper floor. Wait here."

"If anyone is here they can't hurt us. Stop trying to protect me, Mr. Not-So-Evil." She gave his face a squeeze as she passed by him to head up the stairs.

Sending her a nasty look, which he knew she couldn't see but made him feel better anyway, Danny let her have the upper floor while he examined the main level. "What do you think, Killer? Will this place do?"

Killer made his usual squeak in response that Danny took as a yes.

"We'll need to get you a new litter box and some litter and food. Might as well do it all in one trip while I'm out getting blood. Right?"

The cat acknowledged his comment by clawing up his chest and coming to a rest on his shoulders.

"Not a soul upstairs," Starla announced upon entering the kitchen where Danny and Killer had ended up. "And it doesn't look like anyone's been here for a while. Smells like it too." She scrunched up her nose.

He'd smelled it too and opening the refrigerator saw what the cause of the rancid smell was. Rotten food.

"Oh yuck!" Starla pinched her nose shut and backed away from the fridge.

"Oh, get over it! It's just rotten food. Could be worse." And it seemed that Killer wasn't too fond of the smell either. He jumped from Danny's arms and rushed from the room.

"How could it be worse?"

He closed the fridge door and went to the cupboards. "We could have found a dead body."

"Ew!"

"Hey, it happened to me in the first house I decided to live in. Ooh, potato chips." Grabbing the bag of salt and vinegar chips, he headed for the living room to relax and found Killer taking a nap on the sofa. "Looks like you're at home." He plunked down beside him and dug into the bag of chips.

"How can you eat with that stench?" Starla mumbled through her plugged nose.

"Like I said, I've smelled worse. Want some? They're not even stale."

She shook her head. "Not with that smell in the air. We should clean it up."

"Feel free." Lifting his feet onto the coffee table, Danny relaxed while he munched on his chips.

"You're not going to help?"

Sensing the food that was being consumed, Killer woke from his slumber to saunter over to Danny in hopes of receiving a few scraps. "In the past four months since I've been on my own I've cleaned up enough crap to last me a lifetime. But if you want some advice I can tell you that you'd be better off just tossing the fridge out the door rather than attempt to clean it."

"Advice taken and rejected." Twirling around, Starla headed back for the kitchen.

Looking at his watch, Danny figured he'd give her five minutes before she started vomiting. He broke off tiny pieces of the chips he was eating and fed them to Killer. He heard Starla muttering to herself, heard what sounded like the garbage can being dragged across the floor, and continued to eat his chips.

"Not bad, huh, Killer? But you shouldn't eat too many or you'll end up with a tummy ache. I don't need to be cleaning up puke. Remember when you got into my bag of Cheez' It's?" Still, he broke up a few more pieces and fed them to the cat.

"Oh sweet Goddess!"

Danny checked his watch, saw that it was only approaching a minute and wondered if his calculation of five minutes was a bit generous. Better make it three.

"Oh yuck, there are maggots."

Maybe two minutes was more accurate.

Then he heard her gagging. She wasn't even going to make the two minute mark. Poor girl. He continued munching on his potato chips, feeding bits and pieces to the cat.

"Breathe through your mouth," he supplied, then stuffed his face with chips. He could use a beer to wash them down. Add stopping off at the liquor store to the list of places he needed to go.

"Thanks!" she barked back, gagging.

Checking his watch, Danny saw she'd gone past the two minute mark. She might make five after all.

She flew through the room and up the stairs like a flash of lightning.

Or...maybe not.

Setting the bag on the sofa, he stood up, gave the cat's head a rub then headed upstairs. He found her face down over the toilet, her hair falling forward to cover her face. Casually, he moved toward her and scooped her hair out of the way. When she lifted her head, he handed her the towel that was hanging beside the sink.

"Thanks." She took it and wiped her mouth.

"Wanna toss the bitch outside now?"

"I think the smell is stained inside my nose." She plopped down on her butt and looked up at him. "Toss it."

"If you'd have taken my advice in the first place you wouldn't have blown chucks into the toilet."

"I hate you," she said with absolute calmness.

"Aw, now is that a nice thing to say to the guy who held your hair while you puked?" He gave her a tsk tsk before leaving her in the washroom, scowling at him.

"Stay out of the bag," he warned Killer as he came down the stairs, spotting the cat pawing at it. Entering the kitchen, he gagged a little himself at the sight and the smell but pushed it aside to do what had to be done. First, he took the garbage can and tossed it out the back door. There was a nice wooden deck attached to the house and he imagined at one time the owners had stood outside in front of a roaring barbeque, grilling burgers.

He missed barbeques.

Heading back to the fridge, he closed the door then unplugged it. Grabbing hold of the front and back, he began to swivel it through the room. When it suddenly slid forward on its own, he nearly did a face plant on the floor. Baffled, he looked to his right and saw Starla standing by the doorway. "You do that?"

She nodded. "I thought you could use some help."

"Why didn't you just do that in the first place?"

"Because I didn't think cleaning it would be so bad."

"Lesson learned. I'll get the door and you woo hoo it outside."

Laughing, she waved her hand and the refrigerator slid toward the open doorway.

Danny gave it its final shove, then closed the door. "Out of sight, out of mind."

"Only, now what do we do for a cooler?"

"We steal a portable one."

"What?" she gasped.

"We steal a portable one. What's the big deal?"

"It's called stealing."

"And?" Her jaw dropped. "Well, it's not like anyone's here to stop me."

"I'm stopping you."

"Do you have any idea how many things I've stolen from shops or other houses since the darkness began?"

"Well, you're not doing it now. Not anymore. We'll purchase one."

Now his jaw dropped. "Okay, who do you plan to purchase it from? All the shop owners are gone."

Her lips pursed in thought. "It's not right to just take it. We can leave some cash behind."

"Oh sure, so the next person who goes in there to steal something will also get a nice chunk of change. Good idea." He rolled his eyes.

"I can't just take something without paying for it."

"That's fine. I can. But first, I need a car." He headed for the front door, preferring to avoid going out the back way if at all possible.

CHAPTER 13

What was he doing? Instead of trying to steal a cooler of some sort, he should be getting his butt out of Jacob's Cove like he'd planned. Maybe once he'd helped Starla get settled he'd head out. Then again... he couldn't really leave her here to fend for herself in a city filled with monsters.

Okay, so the motivation to stay was purely selfish. Danny was hoping to get laid. Since Starla had given him a full frontal view of those scrumptious tits of hers and he'd felt the slick juices of a woman aroused, he was determined to have more.

"You think maybe after we get the cooler we could have sex?"

"What?" She stopped abruptly in her stride.

Danny stopped a few seconds after her which put him directly in front of her. Facing her now, he could see the shock etched on her face at his question. Maybe he should have put it a little smoother. "I'm just wondering because, well...I'm still a little keyed up from your sex show."

"It wasn't a sex show."

"Sorry. Your attempt to seduce answers out of me. What's your answer?"

"Way to romance a girl, Danny. Very smooth." She marched ahead of him in quick clomps of her feet.

"Hey, you weren't exactly thinking romance when you were stripping for me earlier," he reminded her as he hurried to catch up.

"You still don't just blurt something like that out to a girl."

Why not? He had before and had gotten what he wanted. "Okay." Apparently she preferred something more. "Is there a possibility you and I could get horizontal sometime soon?"

She threw her hands in the air and huffed.

"What? I'm horny."

"Instead of blurting that out to me, you could show me how you feel."

He could do that, no problem. Grabbing her arm, he pulled her into his arms and sunk into her mouth with as much hunger as if he were starved for a year. With his free hand, he shoved into her shorts only to have her stop him with her hand. She gave him a good solid shove back.

"What?" He was completely baffled. "You said you wanted me to show you how I felt. I want your body and I'm horny so I showed you what I wanted."

"That wasn't what I meant."

She was trying his patience. "For Christ's sake, will you just tell me what you mean already? I'm getting a headache."

"Romance me. Seduce me. Hold my hand, caress my skin, kiss me softly. That sort of thing."

"You want intimacy. I want to be satisfied." Two completely different things.

"What's wrong with combining the two?"

"Hey, Danny."

Their conversation was momentarily halted when his brother, Dante interrupted them. "Hey, bro."

"Bro?" Starla inquired, looking from Danny to Dante.

"This is my twin brother, Dante." Danny introduced with very little enthusiasm. He was still on the fence about his feelings towards his brother. On one hand, they'd had some decent conversations in the past few months. Still...his brother had locked him up and had left him locked up when the house he was in went up in flames.

"This is your twin? Interesting. Then you're not a vampire?" she asked Dante.

"He's all human."

"So this is what you should look like. Not bad." She smiled charmingly at Dante and had Danny's nerves prickling.

"Keep your eyes to yourself. He's seeing someone," Danny informed her, suddenly feeling very possessive of her. "Dante, this is Starla. She's new to Jacob's Cove."

"I'm here researching the spell that's surrounding Jacob's Cove in darkness." She held her hand out to him. "Pleased to meet you, Dante."

Dante took it, gave it a short shake. "Pleasure's mine. It's pretty risky for you here."

"I can take care of myself."

"She's a witch," Danny supplied, shoving his hands in his jean pockets.

"For real?" Dante asked in a shocked tone.

Starla nodded. "You two sound the same. Well, your voice is a little deeper than Danny's, but I suppose that's because you're older where he's still maturing. It's fascinating, really," she stated, looking from one of them to the other in amusement.

"Yeah, thrilling. We were just heading—"

"For a stroll. Danny was showing me around," Starla interrupted boldly. "You wouldn't happen to know anything about the ritual?"

"I know enough," Dante added with a curl of his brow. "Why do you want to know about the ritual?"

Danny let out a long breath and decided to lean up against the fence along the sidewalk that led to someone's house. This could take a while.

"My mother and High Priestess Essema tried to break the ritual but were unsuccessful. They even tried contacting the Dark Mystics but were denied by them as well. I thought if I came to the actual place where the spell was cast I might be able to find out who did it and how it was done. Danny's been kind enough to help me out."

"Not by choice," he muttered, examining his torn sneakers. Maybe while he was stealing a cooler he could lift a new pair of shoes too.

"So you want to end the darkness?" Dante inquired.

"Yes. There have been too many lost lives due to it already. It's time to end it."

"I couldn't agree with you more. As it so happens, we're looking to break the darkness too."

Starla cocked her head to the side, tucked her hair behind her ears. "We?"

"He belongs to Trinity and Basil's little gang," Danny supplied, still bored. He started chewing on his nails for a lack of anything else to do.

"Who is Trinity?"

"She's the queen and ruler of all vampires," Danny added nonchalantly.

Starla stepped back. "So you guys are evil?"

Dante's brow furrowed and Danny burst out with laughter. "My bro here doesn't have an evil bone in his body...well...unless you count locking me in a dungeon and leaving me to burn to death."

"What?" Starla gapped, her head snapping from Danny to Dante.

"I thought we'd gotten past that," Dante said.

Danny shrugged. "Still working on it on my end. Hey, it's not an easy thing to get over."

"You locked him in a dungeon and set it on fire?"

"No!"

"Lies," Danny piped in.

"Well, okay. I locked him in Basil's dungeon but I didn't set it on fire," Dante justified. "His old buddies did that by blowing up Basil's house."

Starla turned to Danny now, her eyes wide. "Your friends blew up a house?"

"Hey, I was locked up and had no part of it. Starla, why don't you ask my bro there why he had me locked up in the first place?"

"I did it for your own good," Dante snapped.

"For my own good? You were hoping to turn me to the good side."

"I just wanted you away from Chaos," Dante expressed vehemently.

"In hopes to turn me to your side."

"And what was wrong with that?"

Danny shook his head as he pulled his hands from his pockets and took Starla's hand in his. "You're always trying to make me into something I'm not, bro. When are you going to accept me for who I am? Come on, Starla. We have things to do." He walked off, taking Starla with him.

"Your brother can't accept you being a vampire I take it?"

"He hates what I am."

"You would think after all these years he would accept you for who you are."

"Before the darkness he thought I was dead." She stopped abruptly causing him to stop. "What's up?"

"He thought you were dead?"

"Yeah."

"How horrible. Why would he think you were dead?"

With a heavy sigh, Danny decided just to give her a rundown of his life and get it over with. "I never felt like I belonged in my family. I always felt like I was meant for something else, so when Chaos approached me when I was thirteen and asked if I wanted something else, I said yes. Dante happened to witness Chaos turning me into a vampire. My family suspected I'd been killed and I let them believe it."

She tugged her hand free of his grasp and backed up one step. "How cruel of you to let them believe such a thing for all these years!"

"Hey, Chaos made me believe my family didn't want me."

Her mouth gaped open. "He did? How cruel of him. Why on earth did you stay with him?"

"Well, I didn't know better until recently. For twenty years I thought my family was glad I was gone."

"What changed your mind?"

He slipped his hands in his pockets and glanced around the area they'd stopped in. He was surprised they hadn't been approached by some night creature yet. "Dante locked me up and told me differently."

She tilted her head to the side. "Locked you in that Basil guy's dungeon?"

"Yeah."

"So why are the two of you mad at each other then?"

"How would you like it if your brother locked you up and left you there when the house was on fire?"

"I don't have a brother. But I can understand why you'd be upset by that."

"Thank you. At least someone understands."

"Still..." Starla began, "you two should work it out and put it behind you."

"Yeah, easier said than done. Look, we need to keep moving. No telling when someone's going to come out and want a snack or more."

"More?"

He took her hand in his only because he'd liked the way it had felt in his earlier. "Rape. You're a tasty number in more than one way, Starla. These animals have had the same blood and pussy for months. Having someone fresh on both accounts is mighty tempting. There's a truck up ahead. Let's give it a try."

"You're holding my hand."

"Huh?"

She stopped them both and took his other hand in hers. "You're holding my hand. That's sweet."

His brow lifted and his lips curved up. "Yeah? Does that mean you want to have sex with me now?"

"Oh, Danny." Shaking her head, she dropped his hands and walked off.

"What? What?" he asked repeatedly as she walked away. He had no idea what the problem was.

CHAPTER 14

Trinity was in the middle of explaining to Raven and Basil why she'd frozen Jonah and Cooper and refused to release them when Dante entered the room.

"I was minding trying to get some rest, as Cooper had ordered which, okay, pissed me of. No one orders me to do anything. When I hear these two going at it again down here. Jonah was arguing with Cooper about his vacuuming while Jonah was trying to work. Cooper went into his usual, "if you didn't make such a mess I wouldn't have to clean up after you," and Jonah retaliated. I had to do it to spare my sanity."

Basil tilted his head to the side and let out a long breath. "Darling, far be it from me to tell you what to do, but —"

"Then don't," she warned Basil with a hand held up in his face.

"But..." he continued despite her warning. "this can't be healthy for either of them."

"And Jonah is still healing," Raven supplied, looking worried as she stuck close to Jonah.

"But it's so quiet without them bickering. Stress isn't good for the baby, remember?" Trinity thought nothing of using her daughter in defense.

Basil, however wasn't going for it.

"Release them, Trinity."

She shot him a nasty look before doing as he'd insisted. "Oh fine, but do something to keep Cooper occupied. He's driving everyone insane, cleaning this and picking up that. Make him stop before I have to do something drastic."

"I'll take him to the house and have him tidy up the construction mess." Basil kissed her cheek, gave her belly a rub. "Now let them go."

Trinity sighed, rolled her eyes to the ceiling, then released them. And then she waited for the backlash.

"Stop doing that!" Jonah warned her with a raised fist while Cooper gave his jacket a stiff yank.

"Stop giving me a reason to."

"It wasn't my fault. Mr. Clean there should know by now to leave my stuff alone." Jonah sent Cooper one hell of a heated look.

"Um...mind if I break in here with some interesting news," Dante interrupted, stepping in the middle of the arising argument.

"Anything you have to say right now is a blessing," Basil sighed, granting Dante a sunny smile.

"I hear you." He cleared his throat when Trinity sent him a snarl. "We have a new player in town," Dante informed them.

"What do you mean?" Trinity asked, rubbing a circle on her belly. Her daughter seemed to be restless these past few days.

"I ran into Danny and a friend of his who just came to town to find out anything she can about the Ritual of Darkness. She claims she wants to end it."

"Get out!" Jonah chimed in.

Dante shrugged his shoulders. "That's what she says."

"You doubt it?"

Dante turned his attention to Basil and replied. "No...well, maybe."

"Because she's with your brother?"

Dante turned furious eyes to Cooper. "No, because she's new to the city and she could just be saying she wants to end it. We don't know her, now do we?"

"So how'd she get to hanging around with your brother?" Jonah asked, shifting his weight from one foot to the other while resting on his cane.

"I never asked. It didn't come up," he explained when Basil gave him a look. "She just said that Danny was helping her."

"Your brother, helping her?" Basil asked with a suspicious undertone.

"Don't start on him again, Basil," Dante warned, moving right into Basil's face.

To save both men from getting their handsome faces pummeled, Trinity stepped between the two. It seemed everyone was on edge these days. "I think we should look into this a bit more," Trinity added.

"The next time I run into my brother, I'll ask more questions."

"If we've concluded our business, I would like to return to my vacuuming," Cooper spouted, receive a nasty look from Jonah.

Trinity held up one hand, stopping what she knew would end up as another round of arguments. She just didn't have it in her to deal with another round. "Either of you start this up again and I'm freezing you indefinitely."

"I'll get my guy out of your hair, love." Basil kissed Trinity on the cheek, then escorted Cooper from the room.

"He started it," Jonah added under his breath but not so quietly that Trinity hadn't heard it. She shot him a nasty glare.

"I think it might be best if you came with me, Jonah." Hooking her arm through Jonah's, Raven shoved him from the room.

"I could duct tape their mouths for you, if you'd like," Dante offered.

"It's tempting, but they'd only rip it off. The sooner we get back to our place the better." She let out a long breath, trying to ease her tense nerves. "You getting along any better with your brother?"

Dante picked up a glass globe sitting on the front desk in the main entrance of the Digital Domain and tossed it up and down while catching it seamlessly. "Every day he talks to me is a good day." He shrugged, setting the globe back on the desk. "All I can do is keep trying."

She laid her hand on his shoulder and gave it a squeeze. "For your sake, I hope it works out."



"I don't like stealing," Starla informed Danny as he drove them back to the house they were now calling home.

"You'll get used to it."

"I don't think so. I need to give back for what I've taken. I could plant a tree when the darkness is gone."

"Yeah...you do that." Danny smirked. A tree. She was a riot. Had she noticed there was no sun? "So, I got a question for you. How do you plan on breaking the spell of darkness?"

"I need to find Chaos, I guess."

He tapped his fingers on the steering wheel to the beat of the music playing softly in the CD player. Whoever this vehicle belonged to had good taste in music. "And how do you plan to do that?"

"I could do a locator spell."

"A what?"

"It's a spell used to find something or someone. But I need something of his in order to do it properly. I don't suppose you have anything of his kicking around?"

He had nothing of Chaos' but the scar from Chaos' ring. "Sorry, can't help you there. Okay, so let's say you find him. Then what?"

She scratched her leg, drawing Danny's eyes to her sexy long legs. What he wouldn't give to run his tongue along her thigh. "I do what needs to be done to break the spell." She turned her head to look at him. "Can you handle that?"

He shrugged but didn't give her a definite answer. He wasn't sure how he felt about it. Breaking the spell involved killing Chaos. As much as he was hurt over Chaos shunning him, he wasn't sure he wanted him dead.

Or did he?

"You have incredible legs."

When smiled at him, her entire face softened. "Thank you."

"The rest of your body's pretty hot too."

She let out a long heavy sigh.

"What?"

"You should have stopped at the compliment on my legs." He turned the corner of the street they were staying on.

"What's wrong with telling you your body's hot?"

"It's the way you said it."

He pulled into the driveway, then decided that wasn't such a good idea and parked on the street a few houses down. He didn't want to draw any unnecessary attention to them by announcing the house was occupied. "All I said was that you have a hot bod. What's wrong with that?"

She threw her hands up and groaned.

He had no idea why she was so annoyed this time. "I'm at a loss with you."

Her only response was a shrug. "Why'd you park all the way over here?" Starla asked as she climbed from the vehicle, grabbing a few grocery bags.

"So the vamps and werewolves don't see someone living here and decide to invade, hoping to find humans. Which they would...one at least." He hoisted the three foot mini fridge from the back of the truck and carried it to the house.

"Oh...I never thought of that. Smart. Maybe we should keep the lights off then too. I should have picked up some candles while we were shopping."

"See, stealing's not so bad after all, is it?"

She grunted in response, then shifting her bags, held the door open for him.

With an applicative nod, Danny carried the cooler into the house and was greeted by an anxious Killer. "I got you litter and a box so just hold it a little longer, 'kay?"

"How do you know what he's saying?" Starla wanted to know, bending to give the cat a scratch on his head.

"Didn't you know? Vampires can communicate with animals."

Her eyes shot up to his, wide. "For real?"

He burst out laughing that not even her narrowed look could stop. "Man, you are gullible."

"That's not very nice."

"Yeah, well. He either wants one of two things. Food or a place to piss. It's not hard to figure out." He really should have kept her going. Might have been fun letting her believe he could communicate with his best pal.

"And how do you know he hasn't peed or pooped somewhere already?" She set her bags on the counter while Danny set the fridge down on the floor.

"I don't. I'll get the other bags and you can unpack."

"Gee, thanks." She scooped the cat up, gave him a kiss, then proceeded to unpack.

It only took one trip to grab the rest of their supplies and the first thing Danny went for was the blood. He ripped it open with his teeth while grabbing a cup from the cupboard. Starla kept herself busy while he poured a full cup and downed it.

"What does it taste like?"

He set the empty cup down, licked his lips before replying. "Like blood. You ever sampled some maybe when you cut yourself?"

She nodded. "Occasionally. But I don't drink it. It's different licking the blood from a wound or sucking on your finger if you prick it."

"I suppose so. I've drank it for so long I never really think about it." He poured another half cup and drank it with the sole purpose

of just tasting it. "It has a bit of a copper taste to it, and a sweetness. Each blood type has its own taste and each person it came from has their own taste. This person is B positive and I would have to say had a cholesterol problem."

"How can you tell that?" she asked with amazement in her voice.

"It has a bad after taste. Kinda muddy. I can usually tell if the person was healthy or not after drinking their blood."

"Did you drink from a lot of humans before the darkness?" she asked cautiously as she put the food they'd picked up away in the cupboards.

Danny smiled to himself, dipping his fingers in the empty cup of blood then sucking it dry before responding. "I had my share of humans in the day."

"Willing or non?"

"Scared?"

"No." She held her chin out.

Bullshit! "Both," he informed her, purposely putting a deeper edge to his voice.

"Have you ever killed a human?"

He could tell that was a tough one to ask. "Yes."

She stayed silent for what seemed like an eternity before she finally spoke. "How many?"

He touched her arm and was both surprised and disappointed when she didn't flinch. "Why do you want to know how many?"

"Just curious."

He lifted her chin with his fingers and kept his eyes focused on hers. "Curiosity killed the cat."

As if he understood, Killer meowed and pawed up at Danny's leg.

"Right, I was supposed to set up your litter box." He released Starla's chin and grabbed the box and bag of litter. "Come on, Killer."

"Danny,"

He angled his head as he ripped open the bag of litter. "What?"

"I think I'd like to have sex now."

CHAPTER 15

With a proclamation like that, was it any wonder he was drooling? Dropping the bag of litter, Danny stood up and gave his head a shake. "Did I just hear you right?"

Starla set the cans she held in her hand down on the counter and walked to him. "You heard me correctly."

"Now? For real?"

She laughed. "Don't spoil it. Just kiss me." Taking his face in her hands, she drew him to her mouth.

She was warm and soft and wet and that was only her mouth. He couldn't wait to get into her shorts.

"Not here. One of the bedrooms," she urged, nudging him back.

"Sure...okay." He could handle that. Horizontal was good too. Taking her hand in his, he led her to the first bedroom at the top of the stairs. Seeing the kiddie race car for a bed and the mess of toys on the floor changed his mind pretty quickly. "Next one."

With a girlish giggle, Starla hurried along with him to the next bedroom.

"Much better." It had a queen-sized bed in dark brown satin, surrounded by some sort of flimsy material draped from ceiling to floor. He pulled her through the opening and pushed her towards the bed.

Starla held her hand up, stopping him from going any further. "Condom."

"Seriously?"

Her brow lifted in response. "Yes."

"Fine. Fine." He pulled the wallet out of his back pocket and leafed through it for the condoms he kept tucked inside. "Got one," he announced, holding it up for her to see. He tossed it on the bed and went right for the buttons on the wooly sweater she'd picked up on their shopping trip.

"I don't want it fast."

"What?" he gasped, his hand urgently opening what felt like a dozen buttons on her sweater.

"Ever heard of foreplay?"

"Honey, most of the women I was with it was put it in, get it off, then pull it out. Foreplay was not an option"

"If you want this to continue you'll slow down." She took hold of his hands in hers and pulled him down to her for a kiss.

He was rock hard and, as it was, he probably wouldn't last two minutes with her and she wanted it slow. She was going to kill him. Since he had no other choice, he obliged. She rolled onto her side, taking him down with her. Danny liked the way she kissed. It was a slow movement of lips and tongue that sent electrical surges of need jumping through his body. He just couldn't resist touching her.

Continuing to release the buttons on her shirt, Danny contemplated just ripping the damn thing open and taking what he so desperately needed. But he had a feeling if he did that, she'd push him away and that was the last thing he wanted. If he wasn't able to get inside her now and relieve the throbbing in his loins he knew he'd go mad.

So he took it slow.

Her breasts were so soft and her nipples were so hard. He cupped one full breast in his hand and gave it a squeeze. The moan she emitted vibrated inside his mouth driving him crazy. Wanting more, he began twirling her nipple between his forefinger and thumb, and when she moaned a little louder and the vibration increased he decided going slow wasn't so bad after all.

He wondered what else he could do to make her moan.

Sliding his hand down her chest to her shorts, he made quick work of undoing the snap and lowering the zipper. Her tongue twirled in his mouth, toying with his own while her lips melted against his in a kiss so arousing he thought he might blow a load here and now.

Biting down on his arousal, he slid his hand beneath the silk of her panties, feeling the soft, silky swatch of hair just above the apex of her core. As he dipped his fingers lower, she parted her legs. *That's right, baby, you know you want more.*

Her hands slipped from his hair to his chest, undoing the buttons on his shirt in a quick, fluid motion. The sensation of her nails scraping along his chest was one he'd never felt before. And he was damn certain he wanted more. Diving between her legs, he stroked the damp folds of skin that eagerly awaited his touch.

She moaned, his mouth vibrated, and his dick twitched. Sweet God, he wanted inside of her now.

Then her hand slid to his jeans and, with a quick tug, she had the snap opening and the zipper sliding down. The instant she touched his cock his eyes rolled back and he shoved his fingers deep into her slippery invitation.

"Oh...yes..." Her head flew back in her joy and her body arched off the bed. Her hand gripped him so tightly he thought she might pop him.

He pumped her pussy with his fingers, enjoying the way her body writhed against his hand and the pure excitement etched on her face.

She was truly beautiful when she came.

He needed her now!

Pulling his hand away, regretfully, he yanked his jeans down, tore open the condom and slid it on his engorged cock. Her shorts came next.

"Slow," she reminded him.

"I have to have you now, Starla, or I'll go mad."

"Slow," she repeated softly, her eyes never leaving his.

"Damn it, woman." Taking a deep breath, he grabbed his dick and guided it to her opening. She was glistening with moisture and all he wanted was to pound himself deep into her core. Instead, he pressed only the tip inside. Her eyes softened in a dreamy look that he found absolutely spectacular.

"A little more," she prodded him.

He was happy to oblige and slid in just a little more. He could feel the heat she emanated scorch him through the latex and the moisture that coated him was simply erotic.

"Yes, yes, that's it. Kiss me, Danny."

He had never been with a woman like Starla before. He'd always been the one in charge when it came to sex. And he found he rather

liked this change of pace. Doing as she asked, he nipped her lips with his, teasing her with a kiss he knew she so desperately wanted. Using his tongue, he slid it over her swollen lips and when she opened her mouth he was more than happy to dip it deep inside of her.

Again her moan sent vibrations throughout his body.

She arched her back, indicating she wanted more and he wanted so desperately to give it to her, but teasing her, making her beg was even more appealing. He pulled back, barely entering her.

"Put it back inside," she begged, panting against his lips.

"You want it?"

"Yes, yes, now, Danny, now."

"How's this?" He pressed inside just a tiny bit and her reaction was typical. Her back arched, her legs spread wider and she began to gyrate.

"Yes, more. Give me more."

"Like this?" He found tormenting her to be a great pleasure to himself.

"More!" she demanded, grabbing his arms and trying desperately to press him further inside of her.

"How's this?" He barely pressed anything inside of her.

"Damn it, Danny. Give it to me, now!"

"You got it, toots." Grabbing her knees, he pressed them onto her chest and spread them even wider. While her eyes were on his, he plunged himself all the way in.

"Yes! Yes!"

He felt her clamp onto him, wrapping moist, silky lips around his shaft as he pumped himself inside of her. She wrapped her legs around his waist, lifting her hips even higher and he gave her even more.

She grunted, panting, squirming as he gave her what they both needed.

Her breasts taunted him, bouncing up and down as he thrust himself into her. He was unable to resist them and took one taut nipple into his mouth.

"Oh, Danny! Oh, Danny! Yes, I love that. More, more, more!"

He felt his release pressing closer and taking hold of her free breast, he took turns flicking the nipples on each breast with his tongue, driving them both wild.

"I'm...coming..."

He felt it gush over him in a waterfall of contractions sucking him in, stroking out his own release. Grabbing her hips, he lifted her higher and let himself go.

"You didn't bite me," she stated quietly when he'd collapsed over her, catching her breath.

He let her legs go as he pulled out. "What?"

"You didn't bite me."

"Would you like me to?" He peeled his lips back in a wide smile revealing his fangs.

Her smile absolutely lit up her face.

"No. I just wasn't sure if you would while we did it."

Stripping the condom away, he searched for a trash can. "I've been known to restrain myself from biting every woman I'm with." Finally spotting a small metal trash can beside the nightstand, he dropped the used condom inside, and that was when it hit him. "You got turned on by the danger."

"What?" She sat up and searched for her shorts and underwear.

Seeing them on the floor, he picked them up and handed them to her. "We were talking about me drinking blood and you were asking me about killing people right before you told me you wanted to fuck me. You got turned on by the danger." And using that to his advantage, he ran his sharp incisors over his bottom lips then slowly slid his tongue over his teeth.

"That's appalling! I was not turned on by the danger." Obviously annoyed by his accusation, Starla drew on her clothing in a rush.

"Bullshit! It got you hot." She pulled her leg away when he touched her knee.

"It wasn't the danger that turned me on, Danny." She stood up and snapped her shorts shut. "It was the soft, romantic tone in your voice when you spoke to me."

"What soft romantic tone?" He didn't have a soft, romantic tone in his voice.

She took his chin in her hand as she spoke. "The one you used when you touched me like this and told me *curiosity killed the cat*." She kissed his mouth, then slunk past him and out of the room.

Well, damn! If he'd know that was all it took to get her in the sack he would have done it long ago.



What did he know about being a leader? He'd never been a leader at anything in his life, but Fritz knew what his kind needed and wanted and had the brains to get it or show them how to get what they needed. He wasn't the sort of person that demanded his followers bring him this or cater to his every whim, the way Chaos had. But

he did demand respect and anyone who didn't show him respect was promptly asked to leave.

They usually went one way or another.

The ruckus outside caught his attention and upon checking it out saw a group of newcomers, vamps, werewolves, and demons tossing back a few beers and lighting some flares. At least they weren't inside causing a ruckus this time. Some of the newcomers had left after being told to leave, but there were a few stragglers that refused to go. Fritz figured that if they kept themselves occupied out of doors he couldn't really complain and as long as they kept their mitts and teeth off of the prisoners, everything would be fine.

With no humans around and the blood supply nearly gone, he figured the newcomers wouldn't stick around much longer anyway. As it was, some of his people were fleeing the city for more prosperous places. Truth was, he couldn't blame them. There really wasn't much left in the city to entice them to stick around. Even the threat of sunlight didn't deter them away from finding home elsewhere. What he needed was a way to keep his people here.

It was fine, sending them out onto the highways to gather people, but it wasn't enough. They needed to think bigger.

He just had to figure out what.

CHAPTER 16

Since relieving his libido of its tension, Danny's head was a little clearer. Not that he wouldn't mind going another round with Starla, but for now he was somewhat satisfied. What he was thinking about was Chaos, and finding him. Since Starla had proclaimed to him that she would do what had to be done to end the darkness he'd thought a lot about Chaos. When he wasn't thinking of Starla's ripe gorgeous tits and soft, wet pussy, that was. Could he stand by and let Chaos be killed? He wasn't entirely sure. But he did know one thing. If Starla could find Chaos, Danny wanted five minutes alone with him to get some answers.

One of which was why he'd pushed Danny away so easily.

Chaos had become like a father to Danny in the twenty years since he'd been turned. Sure, in the first few months after becoming a vampire, Danny had gone a little crazy. But who could blame him? Sure he'd been interested in Chaos being a vampire, and yes, he thought it was what he'd wanted at the time simply because he always felt like he didn't belong in the family he'd been born into. Still...having it a reality was far different than it being a fantasy. That very first moment he'd woken, alone, in a strange room had been terrifying. Thirteen was an awkward age as it was. Most teenage boys had some sort of

rebellious streak in them and Danny had made up for the ones who hadn't. But waking up to find out your fantasy was now reality had been a hard pill for him to swallow.

And finding himself locked in the room tipped him right over the edge.

He'd screamed, he'd cried, and he'd pounded his fists so hard on the door that they'd cracked open and bled. And the scent of his own blood had aroused something primal inside of him. His first taste of blood had been his own and if one of Chaos' men hadn't come in when he had, Danny was sure he wouldn't be standing here now. No, he'd gone at the blood on his hands like a rabid dog.

Lifting his palms, Danny saw only smooth skin and no scars from his past. If he were human...well, he never would have nearly gnawed his own hands off if he was a human. He'd had to be tied to the bed after that and remained tied down for nearly two months.

Chaos had visited him infrequently, and Danny had longed for the mentor he'd come to know and love. And when he'd finally come to Danny, he'd soothed him with his blood and with calm reassurance that everything would be fine.

Danny had just wanted to go home to his family.

Chaos had taken him that very night, back to his parents' home to show him that he was no longer needed. What Danny saw set the wheels in motion for him deserting his family.

They'd been eating Thanksgiving dinner, laughing and enjoying the day as if nothing had happened. As if their son and brother wasn't missing. At that moment, Danny had felt his world crumble.

Chaos had taken him into his arms and had kept him at his side for months afterwards, reassuring him that his family wasn't worth his worry or tears and that his new family of vampires was all he would ever need.

And as time went on, Danny came to believe that.

Until Dante reentered his life and turned it all upside down.

He'd gone to the house that had been his family home before the darkness had settled in and now belonged to his sister Lexi. He'd seen with his own eyes just how much his family had missed him. Still missed him now.

His bedroom, which had also once been Dante's bedroom in their youth, was now a shrine devoted to himself. There were pictures Danny had created in his lifetime with them. Pictures drawn with crayon as a child and pictures painted as a youth and then teenager. His base-

ball jersey had been hanging on the wall encased in glass as were his ball glove and bat. Newspaper clippings littered the wall, statements of his disappearance and the cops' desperate search to find him.

They never had because Chaos kept him underground for two years after his abduction, telling him it was for his own good. And Danny had believed him. Until he'd seen the shrine created for him by his family.

It had been hard for Danny then to decipher his feelings. Sure, Chaos had booted him out of his life, yet Danny still loved him. But seeing that his family had missed and loved him had made Danny question Chaos and everything Chaos had told him.

At the time of the ritual, Danny hadn't questioned Chaos' plan to sacrifice five young girls. They were anonymous beings to him. What did he care? He rarely ever questioned Chaos. But in the months since he'd first been on his own he'd done a lot of thinking. And seeing Chaos in a whole new light.

He had questions, so many questions, and Danny knew until they were answered, he wouldn't be able to move on.

Maybe, if he were to find Chaos, he could get the answers that had been plaguing him for months now. But in order to get those answers, he needed to find Chaos first.

For that, he needed Starla.

He found her lounging on the fluffy cream sofa in the living room, munching on dry cereal, and watching something on the TV while Killer slept on her lap. They looked good together. Natural.

"What sort of stuff would you need of Chaos' in order to do this locator spell?"

She finished what was in her mouth before replying. "Anything that was his. A book he read often, a piece of clothing, something he kept with him on a regular basis. I need to pick up on his vibe, so to speak, in order to locate him."

Walking to her he rubbed the cat's head before scooping a handful of cereal from the bowl she held in her hand. "Does it have to be something he had on him recently?"

"The more recent the better." She tilted her head to look up at him. "Why do you ask?"

He shrugged, then decided to sit at her feet. Lifting her legs, he slipped beneath them and plopped down on the sofa. He really did like her legs. They were probably the sexiest legs he'd seen in a long time. They weren't stick thin and bony like so many women's legs these days. Hers had form, shape, and little muscle and her skin was lightly

bronzed and very smooth. He couldn't resist touching them. "Curious is all. The last two places I know he was at were the police station and the underground tunnels. That was nearly five months ago though."

"Hm..."

He stroked her legs as his mind wandered to Chaos. "I could try breaking into the compound again, but...well...the last time I did it didn't go so well."

"Oh? What happened?"

He rather liked her feet too, he decided, giving them a little rub. "Let's just say I woke up two days later with very limited vision and tied to a tree." He really didn't want to go into the details of his humiliation. He certainly wasn't going to tell her he'd been stark naked with graffiti spray painted on his body and his dick painted a brilliant red. Nor was he going to tell her what woke him was the teeth of a very hungry dog.

"Oh my Goddess! They beat you up and tied you to a tree? How sick."

Her hand touching his arm sent a ray of warmth cascading throughout his body, aided by the sentiment in her voice. He couldn't remember the last time someone had been concerned for him, or felt pity towards him. He wasn't sure how to deal with it.

"Yeah...well...shit happens. Anyway—" His lips were sealed with a warm, soft kiss that made his vision blur. She was gentle with him, sweet and told Danny she genuinely cared that he'd been hurt. His body suddenly felt very tight and the urge to cry rose up to stick in his throat.

Thankfully, Killer decided he didn't like being in between the two and made his dislike obvious by digging his claws into Danny's leg as he pulled himself out from the middle. "Jesus, Killer," Danny gasped, pulling his mouth free. "Watch the claws."

"You might think about clipping them." Then Starla touched his face with her hand and looked into his eyes with a soft dreamy look that zapped everything negative inside of him. "We'll find a way to locate Chaos that doesn't involve you getting hurt. Okay?"

"Kiss me like that again," he pleaded softly, so unlike himself that he almost didn't recognize his own voice.

She smiled, cupped his face in her hand and drew him to her mouth.

She took the kiss slowly, filling his mouth and his thoughts with softness, with...he didn't want to think love but it was damn close. Her

fingers ran through his hair as she tilted his head and took the kiss a little deeper. He felt his entire body warm from inside out. He wanted to touch her everywhere, feel all of her, have it all but it wasn't a sexual drive that was pushing at him. He wanted...intimacy.

She broke the kiss and he wished he could live with her mouth on his forever. "Have you never been kissed like that before?"

He shook his head, still feeling the warmth of her lips on his.

"Well, I'm more than happy to give you more if you like." But instead of kissing him again, she drew him down onto her chest and stroked his hair.

He was lying on her breast, the softest pillow he had ever rested his head on and sex was the last thing on his mind.

Her fingers paused on his neck.

"What's this?"

He didn't need to touch the spot to know what she felt. He'd had it for twenty years now. "Chaos' mark. He brands all his conquests."

"Seriously?"

He shrugged, continued to nuzzle against her breasts.

She let out a long sigh, then continued stroking his hair. "Tell me about your life before you were turned into a vampire."

Her hand was soothing on his head as she stroked his hair. "It was your typical life. Both parents worked. Dad was a lawyer, Mom a physiotherapist. My sister Lexi, my brother Dante, and I were very close, had to be since my parents weren't home often. Lexi babysat for us but she never made us feel like we were beneath her. We were equals." He rested his hand on Starla's belly and was more than content to stay like this forever.

"Sounds like the three of you were close."

"We were. Still...I always felt...off. Like I was different or something."

"How so?" she asked, stroking his hair with slow soothing motions.

He'd never felt so relaxed in all his life. "Dante and I were identical in looks, some mannerisms, and we had similar likes and dislikes. But it stopped there. Dante was content to sit home and watch TV or hang with his friends in the basement. I hated being cooped up. I liked being outside, doing stuff. I wanted to hang out with the big kids rather than kids my own age. Dante never understood that." There were lots of things Dante never understood about him, and still didn't.

"A lot of kids are that way."

He snuggled into her breasts a little more. "It annoyed Dante that I wasn't more like him. I think that's one of the reasons why we're both having such a hard time accepting each other now. He wants me to be like him, still, and I can't understand why he can't accept me for who I am."

"That must be very hard for both of you. Probably more so because you're twins. How does your sister feel about you being a vampire?"

"As far as I know, she and my parents don't even know I'm alive." She stopped caressing his hair much to his regret.

"What? Are you serious?"

He shrugged, snuggled closer hoping she'd carry on with her caressing fingers. "I haven't told them and I have no idea if Dante has. If he has, they certainly aren't running home to see me." And there was the resentment he'd been dealing with for months now. If his family had loved him and missed him as much as that bedroom shrine indicated, how come they weren't here now, trying to see him, and if they didn't know about him, why hadn't Dante told them yet?

Because he can't accept you for who you are.

"You should tell them, Danny. They need to know you're alive."

His eyes were getting really heavy. "And what if they don't care? I don't think I could handle that." He gave in to the sleepiness he felt and drifted off.

CHAPTER 17

Standing in her tiny kitchen, Trinity prepared a sandwich while Raven and Gypsy watched from the dining room table. She knew Raven was here to keep an eye on her while Cooper and Basil were at the castle, overseeing the reconstruction. Everyone was watching her like a hawk these days, waiting for her to announce she was in labor. She just wished everyone would give her some breathing space. As it was, the tiny kitchen and dining room seemed smaller than usual with her big belly taking up most of the space.

"You're seriously going to eat that?" Gypsy inquired with a great deal of worry in her voice.

Trinity shrugged as she carried her plate to the table. "What's wrong with it?"

"Well, for starters, strawberries and sardines? And let's not mention the bean sprouts." Gypsy shuddered.

"Okay, we won't mention them." Pulling up a chair, Trinity set her wide frame down, then lifted her sandwich and bit in. "Mm."

"Gross! If I ever get pregnant I am so not eating that crap."

Trinity simply smiled at Gypsy and took another bite out of her sandwich.

"It's natural for a pregnant woman to crave certain foods. Trinity's seem to be seafood and sweets," Raven supplied, handing Trinity a paper napkin.

"I've always had a sweet tooth," Trinity informed her, taking another bite.

"Still...if I ever get pregnant, I'm not eating like that." Gypsy waved a hand at the sandwich.

"We'll see." Raven smirked.

"So, I gotta ask. What's up with Cooper these days? Why is he so...antsy?"

Trinity wiped her mouth before responding to Gypsy. "I think he's getting cabin fever. He's used to running a monstrosity of a house and for the past few months he's been cooped up here, sleeping on a cot in my living room." Which was a little awkward at times, especially when she had to get up and pee late at night and forgot to slip into a robe to cover her nudity.

"Well, Jonah did need his office back," Raven stated with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Oh, I know, which is part of the problem. Cooper has no real space of his own to go and get away from all of us."

Gypsy nodded. "Yeah, I suppose that's gotta be tough. I caught him mumbling to himself the other day. Something about, 'he should have discovered it by now'. When I asked him if he'd lost something he got all flustered and stammered his response of no. Weird."

"He's been mumbling a lot lately," Trinity added, then dove into her sandwich.

"What's his story? I mean, he's this hunky older guy but I never see him with a woman. Think he's gay?" Gypsy asked while grabbing a glass of blood wine from Trinity's fridge.

"He's not gay," Trinity chuckled, licking her lips clean.

"Then you've seen him with a woman?"

Trinity shook her head. "Well...no...but—"

"Then he could be gay," Gypsy restated.

Trinity had to seriously think about that. She'd known him for over seven years and never had she seen him with a woman. Or a guy for that matter. "Maybe he just doesn't need a companion," she supplied in his defense.

"Everyone needs a companion." Gypsy snorted.

"Not everyone is as horny as you are, Gypsy." Raven muttered, then as if she realized what she'd said her eyes went wide and her hand came up to her mouth. "Oh God, I am so sorry. That was rude."

Gypsy laughed it off with a wave of her hand. "I'm not offended. I'm not afraid to admit I like sex—"

"People down the block can tell how much you like sex, Gypsy," Trinity retorted humorously.

"Okay, I'm a vocal orgasmer. Sue me."

"Is that even a word?" Trinity asked, only to receive a shrug from Gypsy.

"Jonah and I resort to wearing earplugs to bed. We've been woken several times to her vocalness," Raven laughed.

"I tried a pillow over my head but it wasn't enough."

"Oh har har, you two are so fucking funny." Rolling her eyes, Gypsy sipped her wine.

"This is fun," Trinity blurted out, surprising herself. "I just mean...well, I never really had any girlfriends that I just hung with. My sister and I used to gab about things, but...well...I guess I missed it." She smiled at her new friends, then took another chomp out of her sandwich.

"Me too, on the no friends thing," Gypsy added. "It was tough to make friends when I was popped from one foster home to another."

"I was too busy going to school to get my nursing degree, then taking care of my son and working to start up any female relationships. This is nice." Raven smiled easily.

"And soon, there will be another girl in the mix." Gypsy patted Trinity's belly.

"Yeah, but there will be no sex talk around her."

"Well, not until she's old enough to understand it," Gypsy supplied.

"No, never. My daughter will not know of sex." Both Raven and Gypsy laughed.

"You're sounding like a mother already," Raven added. "Protecting your child. But trust me, she will be curious and it's better she hears it from her mother than someone on the streets."

"Or movies," Gypsy added.

"And if we're all still living together, you might want to supply her with earplugs," Raven advised, thumbing in Gypsy's direction.

Trinity narrowed her eyes and pointed a finger at Gypsy. "No having sex around my daughter."

Laughing, Gypsy stood to refill her glass. "If things work out, Dante and I will be living at his office after the darkness is gone."

"Jonah and I plan on living here afterwards," Raven said.

Trinity's eyes watered with the thought. "What? No. No, you all can't leave me. I like this girlfriend thing." She sniffled.

"Aw, we like it too. Group hug." Gypsy waved Raven on then wrapped her arms around Trinity.

When Raven did the same, Trinity pulled them both into her arms. Sniffing back her tears. "Damn hormones."

They all laughed.



Danny woke to a harsh sandpaper feeling scraping across his cheek. Peering through tired eyes he saw his cat sitting in front of him. "What did we discuss about you licking my face, Killer?" He muttered in a voice gruff from just waking up.

The cat made a tiny purring noise, then curled up under his chin.

"Great, thanks." But he stroked his fur despite his displeasure at having hair in his face. "What time is it?"

"If you expect the cat to answer you, then you need therapy."

He tilted his head back to look at Starla, standing in the doorway leading to the dining room. "I knew you were there. I could smell you."

"Hm, not sure how to take that. Did you have a nice nap?" she asked, leaning down to stroke the cat's fur.

"Every human has their own distinctive scent. Yours happens to be soft, like a whisper of a scent only meant to tease the observer."

She tilted her head and her eyes took on that dreamy look again. "Aw...that's so sweet."

"Yeah. Did it turn you on?"

She sighed heavily. "And the sweetness is gone. Are you hungry?" she inquired, standing up.

"Only for you. Why don't you come here and give me a taste of your honey." He reached out for her only to have her pull her hand away.

"Gee, how romantic."

He jumped up off the sofa, which annoyed Killer who hissed his protest before scrambling away. "Romance is nice. Sex is better." He managed to catch her hand this time and yanked her towards him.

"Romance and sex can go hand in hand, you know." She made like she was trying to pull away but he knew better.

"Sure, like peanut butter and jelly. Now give me a kiss."

Laughing, she did as he asked.

He loved her mouth but, mostly, he wanted to get inside of her. Releasing her, he pushed her towards the sofa. "You demanded slow last time, now I demand quick."

"I didn't demand," her voice quivered slightly.

He gave her a smug look. "Oh yes, you did." He spun her around and pushed her to the sofa. "You have a nice ass." He gave it a smart little snap of his hand, which made her squeal. "Let's see it naked."

"Danny, you can't just expect me to be ready just like that?"

"Oh, I'm betting by time I get you out of these shorts you'll be ready."

She angled her head over her shoulder. "You're pretty smug."

"Damn straight. Now bend over, babe."

"What happened to romantic?"

He undid her shorts then yanked them down her waist. "I already told you, Sex is better. Oh yeah, look at that ass. Mm, very nice." And he just couldn't resist giving it a little nip with his teeth.

"Hey...oh..." She moaned when his tongue slid out over her cheek.

Smiling, Danny straightened up and undid his fly.

"Condom."

He rolled his eyes, but obliged. "I'm on my last one." He told her as he slipped it on his stiff hard-on.

"Guess you'll have to get more."

"Oh yeah." He leaned over her, sliding his member between her wet thighs and grabbing hold of both breasts. "Ever had it from behind before, Starla?"

"Well, sure. I'm not a virgin," she snickered.

"You are when it comes to taking it from behind by a vampire." She wiggled her hips, sliding all that moisture over his dick "Told you you'd be ready." He slipped back, grabbed hold of himself, then positioned it at her opening. "Ready?"

"Bring it on, baby."

He thrust inside, she gasped, he paused, she started gyrating. Smiling, Danny took hold of her hips and began to pump her.

"Oh yes...yes...yes," she chanted, gripping the back of the sofa tightly in her hands.

She was tight but she was *so* wet. She clamped onto him, stroking him with each penetrating thrust. He was so deep inside of her that he felt buried by her. And, God, what a glorious feeling it was.

Then she slipped her hand between her thighs and began to manipulate her clit.

He felt her clamp onto him tightly right before she began to convulse with her orgasm.

"Harder. Harder," she demanded, rubbing herself faster.

He was more than happy to oblige and when he felt his own orgasm rising, he slid his hand around her waist and helped her. The sensation shot him right over the edge.

"Yes," he grunted as he spilled into the condom. He wished he was spilling it into her.

She collapsed on the sofa, panting, and Danny stood there, his legs weak, feeling like a million bucks.

"Okay, fast is good too."

"Fast is the best."

She shifted onto her back and smiled up at him. "I didn't hear you complaining earlier when we did it nice and slow. As a matter of fact, you really liked it."

His face felt hot and he knew he was blushing. "It's always nice to have a variety in your sex life. Speaking of which. Wanna go at it again?"

She laughed as she sat up and pulled her shorts back up. "As tempting as that is...I'm starved. I need food and so does Killer." She stood up, zipped up, and kissed him right on the lips before swaggering out of the room.

Danny fell down onto the sofa with a huge smile on his face.

He'd never felt this good in all of his life.

CHAPTER 18

Danny sat at the kitchen table, watching Starla polish off her second bowl of soup and was mesmerized by her tongue as it slipped from her mouth to glide effortlessly over her lips. He wondered if she knew just how sexy she really was.

"I think I might end up hating soup by the time I go home."

Her voice broke his stare and, looking up at her, he wondered how soon he could convince her into the sack. "I miss steak."

She set the spoon in the bowl and leaned back in her seat. "Let me guess, you like your steak rare?"

"Medium rare actually. Shit, it must be close to three months or more since I last had a steak. At this point, I might even eat it raw," he laughed, leaning back in his seat.

"I never really thought about it before I headed out here. I guess I just assumed everything would still be running, like grocery stores and malls and so forth. That was rather silly of me."

"Yeah," Danny sighed. "We lost most of that within weeks after the sun disappeared. The National Guard hustled most everyone out of the city when they figured out they couldn't control the vamps."

"I'm surprised they haven't set up patrols or kept the guard up in the city to control the vamps."

Danny pushed his chair back to allow Killer onto his lap. "I think maybe they're thinking its best to let the vamps have control over their own city and hopefully they'll leave the rest of the population alone."

"Right, like that'll happen." She rolled her eyes.

"From what I've heard, Fritz has his men scoping out the highways and scooping humans up like candy. He's got his own blood bank now."

Her face scrunched up. "That is just sick."

Danny shrugged while scratching the cat's head. "A vamp's gotta do what he's gotta do."

"So why haven't you done that?"

Danny lifted his shoulders in a careless gesture. "Too much work."

She chortled, shaking her head. "I doubt that's the real reason. You've been on your own for how long now?"

"Four months."

"And all that time you never once thought about going out and grabbing a human for a snack?"

"We don't snack on humans, we live off of their blood. And it's not just human blood, we need blood in general but humans' blood has more of what we crave in it. And no, I never once thought about grabbing a human off the highway or anywhere else for that matter."

She tilted her head as she spoke. "How about before the darkness settled in?"

He folded his arms across his chest and grinned. "I had my share."

"You just walked up to a human and took what you wanted?"

"I am a vampire after all."

She shook her head. "Yet you haven't scooped one up in the past four months? That seems odd."

"I told you, it's too much work."

"No, I don't believe that. I think there's something else there that you're not willing to tell me."

He leaned forward in his seat, placing his elbows on the table and narrowing his eyes. "You're trying to put me in a golden light, making me less evil when, in reality, I was a nasty bastard that even you would have been afraid of." Her laughter caught him off guard and annoyed him.

"You sound like those schoolyard bullies boasting about how mean they are." She leaned forward in much the same manner as him. "Yet here you are, with a cat on your lap from whom you swear you've never sampled and a woman across from you who you've never bitten. Not such a bad guy I'm guessing."

"I turned my brother's girlfriend into a vampire and had plans of making her my blood slave," he remarked snidely, giving her a cocky look as he leaned back in his seat.

Her eyes narrowed. "You did that to your brother?"

"Well, it was before he met her, but that's not the point. It's what I had planned to do with her that counts."

She held her hand up. "It was before they met? Well, that's different."

"How is that different? I turned an innocent young girl into a vampire with designs of making her my slave. If that doesn't spell evil, I don't know what does."

"So why isn't she your slave now?"

Danny looked down at the cat on his lap who was busy cleaning his face, swiping one furry paw over his mouth then over his cheek. "She got away."

"She got away?"

"My point is that I am not a good guy, Starla." She was failing to see that.

She smiled as she leaned back in her chair. "Okay, Mr. Evil Vampire Guy, so why haven't you attempted to do that with someone else now? You could just as easily head out to the highway, grab another victim, and make her your blood slave."

"Too much work," he reiterated.

"Bullshit!"

He let out a heavy breath and decided to change the subject. "If I were to take you to Chaos' underground hideout, do you think you might be able to pick up his trail?"

"I think you're a tough guy wannabe, Danny. But I'm willing to let you have your delusions. We could try," she answered, standing up to put her bowl in the dishwasher along with the empty pot. "How soon do you want to give it a try?"

"No time like the present." He stood up, cat in his arms. It annoyed him that she saw through his ruse. Sure he'd been bad, but not as bad as he was trying to make her believe. In reality, he'd needed someone's help more times than not to get him food. He just wasn't skilled, or strong enough, to wrestle down his own food.

And that pissed him off.

"Then we'll get started." She walked up to him, stroking a hand along the cat's head as she leaned in and kissed him softly. "Tough guy." She smiled as she turned away.

He dropped the cat and grabbed Starla by the arm, spinning her back to him. With a hard yank, he pulled her into his arms and plastered a hard kiss over her soft lips. The gasp she emitted gave him a momentary thrill. When he released her, he was smiling. "Let's get rolling."



To admit to herself that Danny did frighten her a little was fine, but there was no way in hell she was telling him that. But despite his darker side, she found herself drawn to him. She wasn't foolish enough to lie to herself and say it wasn't that dark side that aroused her, but it was more than just that. She could see something more lying beneath the surface. A side of him she saw briefly when he'd speak in a soft tone, or in the way he sometimes looked, or when he'd laid on her breast and spoke of his life before becoming a vampire. He hadn't attempted to make a move on her but had simply lain there content as a baby in its mamma's arms. There was a boy inside that man who longed for love.

Maybe she could be the one to give it to him.

"How far is this place?" Starla asked, curious when they'd been driving for nearly half an hour.

"We passed it a few blocks back."

She curled her brow in confusion. "Then why didn't we stop?"

"Because we're being tailed."

She spun in her seat to have a look. Sure enough, there was a car behind them. "How do you know it's tailing us and not just driving around like we are?"

"Because it's been with us since we left the house. Oh hell!" He slammed on the breaks sending her careening forward.

"What?" Bracing her hands on the dashboard, Starla was more than baffled. And when Danny raced out of the truck, her confusion escalated. Throwing her door open, she ran after him. "What is going on, Danny?"

"You following me now, bro?"

Now she understood. The guy who was following them was Danny's brother. "Just calm down, Danny, and let him explain."

"I saw you pull out of the driveway and thought I'd see where you were heading. Starla, right?" Dante asked, holding out his hand.

"Yes, but I'm sorry to say I've forgotten your name."

"Dante." He smiled and she saw the same charm in his smile as in Danny's.

"Why the hell are you following me?" Danny asked

"Calm down, Danny," Starla tried to sooth him with the calmness of her voice.

"Okay, look, here it is," Dante began. "I was driving around, scoping out the city, checking for any trouble when I saw you come out of a house. To be honest, I wanted to talk to you." Dante's eyes shifted to Starla.

"Me? Why?"

"She's mine," Danny piped in sternly.

"Oh, put your macho away." She laid a hand on Danny's chest, keeping him back.

"After our last conversation I was curious if you'd found anything out about where Chaos is being held."

She relaxed her hand. "We were just about to go see if I could find him. I plan on doing a locator spell."

"Yeah? Think I could tag along?"

"No!" Danny blurted out, stepping in front of Starla.

"Why are you still trying to defend him, Danny?" Dante began. "After what Chaos did I would think you would want nothing to do with him."

"What I decide to do about Chaos is my business," Danny growled back.

"And protecting the human race means nothing to you?" Dante blurted out, his face reddening with his rage.

Starla could see where this was heading and decided to break it up before it got ugly. "I'll tell you what, Dante," she stepped between the two angry men, "why don't you give me your phone number or address where I can reach you and when we figure out where Chaos is, I'll contact you. After Danny has a chance to deal with him. Okay?" She turned first to Danny, who simply shrugged his shoulders, then to Dante who nodded.

"That'll work." He handed her a card.

Taking it, Starla slipped it in her pocket. "Promise me you won't follow us?"

Danny snorted.

"I won't follow you," Dante promised.

"Oh yeah, that was convincing," Danny snarled.

Starla let out a long breath, then decided the best solution was to prevent Dante from following them. "*Dia Badora.*"

There was a loud pop, then a sizzle as the tires on Dante's car began to deflate.

"What the hell?"

She took Danny by the arm and led him to their truck, leaving Dante to scramble towards his now useless car. "That work for you?"

Danny kissed her right on the lips. "Sweetheart, you're the best."

CHAPTER 19

Danny was impressed at the lengths Starla went to in order to prevent Dante from following them. He'd been worried she'd believed Dante when he'd proclaimed his promise not to follow them, but he knew better. Dante had never been good at lying and even now in his adulthood, his left eyebrow twitched when he lied. Some things never changed.

He parked several blocks away from the entry way to the sewer tunnels for obvious reasons. If Dante got his pals to come get him and go in search of Danny's truck, he didn't want them finding them. Despite the fact that he didn't like walking around this particular part of town with Starla at his side, it was better than being tailed by his brother and his gang.

"You seem tense," Starla spoke up, startling him.

"Just keeping watch for my brother." And other creatures that would have a field day with her.

"I doubt he was able to follow us. No, something else has you all tensed up. What is it?"

The simple gesture of her hand stroking over his hair was enough to make him melt. "I'm worried we'll be spotted by some freak looking for some fun with you."

"Oh..."

He wasn't the least bit surprised when she reached out for his hand. "I'll protect you." And just as he said it a wolf jumped out from behind a bush to snarl at them. She screamed, making him jump.

He pulled her behind him and hoped to God he didn't wet himself. "It's a werewolf."

"For real?" She peered over his shoulder.

"In living color. The question is, how are we going to get away from him?" With their lives.

"Like this. *Calda Estara.*"

Before his eyes, the wolf fell down onto the ground, eyes closed and docile. "Did you kill it?"

She came up to his side, then slowly walked to the wolf, before kneeling down to the animal. "No! I put him to sleep. Oh wow, his fur is so soft."

He pulled her to her feet, not feeling a bit safe even if it was asleep. "Yeah, pretty puppy who wanted to rip your throat open and have you as a midnight snack."

She hurried along with him, looking behind her. "Is it really midnight?"

"How the hell should I know? It was a figure of speech. We're here. Be prepared to get a little dirty." He popped the manhole lid then held his hand out to her. "Ladies first."

"You expect me to go down there, alone?"

"I'll be right behind you," he promised.

"Why don't you go first and I can follow you?"

"Because I need to make sure no one sees us going down here. Now hurry your butt."

With a mutter under her breath and a deep frown, Starla inched into the hole.

"Just take the stairs one at a time and you'll be fine."

"It's too dark."

Damn, he forgot she couldn't see in the dark like him. He should have thought to bring a flashlight. "You're doing fine. I'm right behind you." He started down the steps, closing the lid as he inched down the hole.

"There are going to be rats down here aren't there?"

He heard her take the last step down and followed. Jumping down in front of her and startling her—okay, he rather liked that he'd scared her. "And snakes," he added and watched her head flip around, searching the darkness she couldn't see through.

He could and, so far, there were no rats or snakes nearby. He took her hand in his and pulled her into his arms. "Don't worry, baby, I'll protect you."

"You had better or I'll turn your sorry ass into a rat or snake."

That had him pausing. "You can do that?"

"Wanna find out? Don't piss me off."

"Check, no pissing the witch off." Smiling, he led her along the sewer tunnel towards the connection to the underground lair where Chaos had been staying. He knew it like the back of his hand, given the fact that he'd chosen the spot for Chaos. Truth was, in his younger days, he'd found the place while escaping some of the bullies in Chaos' gang who'd been trying to see how long Danny could stay underwater before he begged to be let up. If he hadn't bit the brute who'd held him down, he might have been down there for days. After he'd gotten away, he'd come down here and had stayed for nearly two weeks.

No one had even missed him.

Including Chaos.

Why did he care about what happened to Chaos?

Answers. He needed them.

"You should have told me it would be pitch black. I would have brought a flashlight."

"Sorry. Hey, why don't whip up some light source with those witchy powers of yours. Rat, to your left." She screamed, jumped up and into his arms. His laughter bounced off the walls surrounding them.

"That was not funny." She slugged his chest good and hard.

He squinted in defense when a bright light appeared ahead of them. "What the hell is that?"

She jumped out of his arms. "A light. Oh wow, maybe it would be better not to have the light."

He would agree with that since having the path illuminated showed just how filthy the sewer was, not to mention lighting up the little slimy creatures and the four and eight legged creepers making the place its home. "I could carry you if you like?"

"I can manage, thank you. It's so hideous down here."

"Well, yeah, hello, we are in the sewer. Here we are." He stopped them by the metal door and gave it a shove, opening it. "This section isn't as bad." He led her through the maze of tunnels that led to the secret hide out where Chaos had stayed.

"How much further?"

"Getting tired? I can still carry you," he teased.

"I'm not getting tired, just curious."

"We're here." He stopped her by the door that was slightly ajar. As he pushed it open, he saw the cot still in its place where it had been the last time he'd seen Chaos here.

"This is where he stayed?"

"It's not the Plaza but he was safe while he was here and if he'd taken me back into the fold he might not be locked away somewhere."

She stopped and turned to him with a curious look on her face. "You sound bitter. Is it with Chaos or with the guy who has him locked up?"

Danny gave that a moment's thought. "Both, I guess."

"It's obvious why you're bitter about the guy who has him locked up, but I'm curious to know why you're bitter about Chaos."

Danny sat on the cot, remembered how antsy Chaos had been while staying here and how he hated it. But he also remembered the closed off look in Chaos' eyes when he'd told Danny he no longer wanted him in his life. "How could he just shove me out of his life like that? Just tell me I wasn't welcome anymore after twenty years in his service. Twenty years!" he emphasized and got up to pace. "I mean, all I did was see my brother. Okay, it was against his orders but others had disobeyed him before and were still welcomed back into his fold. And sure, I was captured and held by Basil and Trinity and my brother but still..."

He didn't know why he was spilling his guts but damn it felt good. "I knew he could be cold but I thought it would be different with me. I've been thinking back, since he rejected me, and I've seen things I didn't see at the time. Like why the hell did he pursue me so vehemently, then lock me up for months and only visit me once? Why did he tell me my family was glad to be rid of me when they weren't? Why did he try so hard to keep me in his fold, then push me out over something as silly as seeing my brother and being captured? I just don't get it."

"Perhaps the reason he told you that about your family was to make sure you wouldn't go back to them. Think about it, you were thirteen, young, impressionable, but still a baby. Of course he would have to keep you locked up for months. He couldn't risk the cops or your family finding you or you going back to them. It's just like an abductor that convinces their victim that their family doesn't want them and brainwashes them, essentially, to believe he or she is better

off with the abductor. It's mind control, and now that you've been away from him, you have all these questions and you're able to think clearly because he isn't controlling you. Do you know what I mean?"

He did and that was another thing that had him thinking. "He told me that if my family found out I was a vampire they would kill me without a thought. That they would never accept me back into their life because I was an animal." He turned towards her. "And I believed him."

"And that's why you never contacted them."

He nodded. "It just added to what I already felt. Like I didn't belong, that I was different."

"That's classic of an abductor. They play on your weaknesses." She walked to him, taking his chin in her hand. "You were a victim, Danny, and I think you're just now starting to see that."

It wasn't just now, but she was right. He was seeing more clearly. "Is there anything here you can use to find him?"

She released his chin but stayed close by. "Let's give it a try." She scoped out the room, walking about, touching the bed, the walls, then spotting a piece of clothing on the floor, stopped.

Danny watched as she closed her eyes, as she drew the shirt to her face and breathed it in.

"Is he a rather big man?"

"Yeah. He's over six feet and broad in the shoulders and chest."

"I can see him. He's sleeping...or...unconscious. I can't read him so I'm leaning more to the unconscious part."

"You can do that? Read a person?" Had she been reading him all along?"

Her eyes opened and still she clutched the shirt to her face. "It's a technique, like a spell but harder. I have to really focus, close my mind to everything around me and draw energy from the item I'm holding in order to pick anything up from the person. Like this shirt."

"You ever...um...do that with me?"

Her lips curved up in a sly smile. "I don't read minds. It's different and, no, I have never done it to you. It's more like picking up a person's energy. When you sleep, you still have energy coursing through your body, your brain is active, but when a person is unconscious the brain is dulled and shuts down. It's that way with Chaos. I detect him, I can even get a mental picture of him, but I can't read his energy."

"Will you still be able to locate him?"

She held the shirt out, looking at it. "This should help, but I need some things to help me along. I left most of my spells and charms and incantations in my truck." She sighed heavily. "All I really need is some candles. White. And I should be able to do the spell."

"Perfect. Let's go shopping."

CHAPTER 20

Who would have thought Jacob's Cove had a mystical shop? Danny certainly had never known about it, or seen it for that matter. Then again, he rarely did any real shopping, and if he'd driven past it at any time in his life it hadn't caught his attention. But with a quick glance in the phonebook, Starla had it picked out in seconds.

She wasn't as fast, however, in the shop. Danny had been amused when he'd first entered the shop, with its glittering stones and bright colored candles and such. But ten minutes into it he was bored shitless.

Starla had examined everything, cooed over some things and sighed over others. And Danny had wished she would just get what she needed and be done with it. An hour later, they finally left the store.

"I need to cleanse my aura tonight and ask the Goddess for forgiveness."

"Forgiveness for what?" Danny inquired as he drove them back to the house they were staying at.

"For taking so much and not giving back."

"They're just a few candles and doodads."

"These crystals are not just doodads. They have powerful energies and help with a great many spells. And it's not the fact that I only took six candles and four crystals, it's the fact that I took. Period!"

"I don't get it." He swung into the driveway and saw Killer sitting in the windowsill obviously waiting for their return. He should have picked him up a cat toy or something while he was out.

"It is the Wicca belief that whatever you do will come back to you threefold. We also have a Rede stating, 'An in harm none, do what ye will'."

"Huh?" She'd just managed to scramble his brain.

"Which part are you confused with?"

He exited the truck, grabbing her bags from the back seat. "All of it."

"Okay. We, as Wicca, believe strongly that whatever we do must be done for the greater good and must never harm another being or thing. So if I were to cast a spell that brings me truck loads of money, without giving back for my gift, bad things can happen to me, such as I may be robbed, I could be taxed out the wazoo and end up with nothing, that sort of thing. Now, if I gave half to charity and did good with the money, I would be blessed with good fortune, providing I didn't attain the riches by illegal means."

"Okay." He held the front door for her, and the instant it was opened Killer ran to greet them.

"We take a vow not to harm anyone for our own gain. Hi, Killer." She scooped the cat up in her arms and nuzzled her face into his fur.

"Yet you kept me frozen for days. Hm..." He gave her a wry glance before setting her bags on the coffee table.

"Technically, you weren't harmed and I was doing it to protect myself."

"Yeah...right."

"You weren't harmed. I fed you, made sure you were comfortable."

"And kept me against my will. I would have to say that would classify being harmful. But you believe whatever you like to get you by. So how do we do this spell?"

She frowned at him as she went to the bags. "I've already asked the Goddess for forgiveness for holding you against your will."

"And that makes it all better. Okay." He grinned slyly when she narrowed her eyes at him.

"I'm not liking you very much right now."

Laughing, he took the cat from her and sat on the sofa while she gathered her things. "You sure it wouldn't have been better to do this in the tunnel where Chaos stayed?"

"As long as I have something of his, I'm good."

He watched her sprinkle a salty powder in a circle around her, then grab the candles and set them up just outside the ring. She took the shirt, laid it out on the floor inside the circle, and lit the candles before sitting on the floor, crossing her legs. She closed her eyes, and just sat there for what seemed like forever, just deep breathing. When she opened her eyes, she looked directly up as she spoke.

"Goddess of discovery, I ask your charity, lend me your focus and your clarity., Bring me to Chaos at this time, restoring me that and my peace of mind. With harm to none, this spell be done. Let it be not reversed, or placed unto me as any curse. May all astrological correspondences be correct for this working. As I will it, so mote it be."

Like Danny, Killer sat in silence while Starla remained quiet in her spot, head up, hands on her bended knees. And like himself, Killer flinched when the flames on the candles shot up in the air once, then dimmed and burnt out.

Starla tipped her head down at the shirt on the floor and that was when he noticed the lines and dots splattered on the material.

"Thank you, Goddess, for granting me this wish." She stood up, taking the shirt with her and turned to Danny. "This is where Chaos is being held."



"Checking your cell phone repeatedly will not make it ring," Trinity stated rather sharply, annoyed with Dante for not paying closer attention to what she was saying. "It would be nice if you paid attention to me for more than two minutes at a time."

"I am paying attention to you. I can do both because I can multi-task," Dante responded with a clip to his voice.

"Don't get snotty with me, Dante, or I'll—"

"What? Freeze me to my spot...no, wait, maybe you'll hang me up in mid air and leave me dangling for an hour," he snapped back. "Stop making threats you have no intention of fulfilling."

"Okay!" Basil stepped in front of Trinity when he recognized that look on her face as potentially dangerous. "We're all a little snippy these days because we've been cooped up together for so long. That is about to change." He kissed her snarling lips and knew it did very little to calm her down. "We'll be in our own home within days. But in the meantime, we need to not kill each other over little things. Instead, can we continue our discussion as to what we should do about Fritz taking humans out on the highway?"

"I agree—and I can't believe I am saying this—with Basil," Jonah added, leaning against the wall, bracing himself with his cane. "Something has to be done about Fritz."

Trinity huffed, then waddled over to a chair and eased her large frame into it. "I'm up for suggestions and, damn it, Dante, she isn't going to call."

Dante looked up from his cell phone, his eyes slanted. "What makes you so sure she won't?"

Basil stepped in behind Trinity and massaged her shoulders. She'd been overly tense the past day and a half and it was worrying him. This was the first time he'd seen her sit for more than a few seconds as well. She seemed to have ants in her pants lately. "Well, let's see, Dante. The woman did slash your tires to prevent you from following them. I wouldn't hold her to her word after that." And if the woman was hanging with Danny, odds were she wasn't going to be very reliable.

"Back to our problem," Trinity piped in, running circles over her belly. "Stopping Fritz from capturing more humans."

"Why don't you just capture Fritz and throw him in your dungeon, Basil?" Gypsy questioned, taking Dante's cell phone in her hand and his hand in her other one.

"Sure, we'll just knock on the compound door, ask to speak to Fritz, then nab him and cart him off." Basil shook his head as he rubbed Trinity's shoulders. If it was that simple, wouldn't they have done it long ago?

"It was just a suggestion," Gypsy barked.

"Perhaps doing highway patrols ourselves would help?" Cooper added casually while he dusted the many computer parts piled up near the back wall of Jonah's office.

"I've already considered that, but we need more manpower to keep it up on a daily basis." As it was, more of his so called friends had deserted him to head to fresher ground where blood was still warm in the human's bodies. He couldn't really blame them. Even he was getting tired of drinking stale blood and never seeing daylight.

"Oh!" Trinity winced, clutching her belly.

"What?" Basil was right there at her feet, taking her hands in his. "Is it a contraction?"

"Yeah. I'm okay." She waved him off and stood. "I'll just walk it off like I have the other ones."

"These Braxton Hicks contractions are becoming more frequent. I think your time is nearing."

She eyed Cooper with a look that might make anyone back off. Cooper didn't. "You make it sound like I'm dying," Trinity snarled.

"What I meant was—"

"It's okay, Cooper." Basil rested a hand on his shoulder in a reassuring manner. "I think it's best if we leave Trinity alone for a while and let her rest."

"I don't need to rest," she growled between her teeth.

"Some alone time, then," Basil suggested. She really was in a mood.

"That I can handle. Let me know what you all decided to do about Fritz."

Basil waited until Trinity was gone and the office door closed before he turned to Cooper with worry in his voice. "I think you're right. She's getting close."

"It could be any day now," Cooper said, now resting his hand on Basil's shoulder. "We need to step up the progress on the repairs to our home."

"I agree." Basil turned to Dante and Jonah. "For now, we put Fritz on the back burner and concentrate on fixing the house for Trinity's return. I want someone with her all the time, but don't crowd her. Jonah, you take the first watch."

"Sure, stick the cripple with the potentially volatile pregnant woman." He gave a nod, smiling when Basil shot him a nasty glare. "Happy to do it!"

"Great. The rest of us better get busy."

CHAPTER 21

Danny found himself unable to move. His eyes were transfixed on Chaos' shirt and the map that had been etched onto it. He knew practically nothing about magic but, having seen what just transpired before him, he was damn sure he wanted to know more.

"If we get a map of the city I could mark it out and we could go from there."

He heard her voice like an echo in his mind but his brain was completely fixated on the shirt.

Then she snapped her fingers in his face, drawing him back.

"That was fucking cool!"

Her face glowed with the smile lifting her lips. "Thanks. That's a basic spell I can do in my sleep. Do you know where we could get a map?"

He shook his thoughts clear and set Killer on the floor as he stood. "Might be one here. The phonebook has a map of the city in it but it's not very in depth. Any gas station will have one." He drew his eyes away from the shirt. "I can't believe how easy that was."

"I always feel a little high after performing spells. Juiced," she giggled, giving her arms and shake. "That's why so many witches end up overusing their powers. It gives them such a rush that they want to feel it all the time."

"But not you. Right?" She struck him as the by-the-books kind of witch, though he was still wondering how if she abided by her Wicca laws of not harming anyone for their own gain, could she have kept him frozen for days.

"I've been tempted, but I always pull myself back. A friend of mine didn't and she nearly got her family killed. That was enough of a wake-up call for me. Okay, let's roll."

He'd never thought much about witches or the powers they held, even after Trinity had been granted a new life and new powers and Chaos was all freaked out about it. But hearing Starla talk about how deadly it could become, Danny wondered more about it. It was on his mind as they drove to the nearest gas station for a map and flashlights and it was on his mind as they looked on the map for the area etched into Chaos' shirt. So when he sent them rolling again, he decided to just ask.

"How did she almost kill her family?"

"Huh?"

He bit the nails on one hand while he drove casually with the other. "Your friend. How did she almost kill her family?"

Starla shifted in her seat, pulling one leg up under her. "She let the magic control her."

"Specifically," he insisted. "Did she attack them...what?"

"No, she got drunk on the power, became a whole different person. Mean, greedy, vicious. When her parents threatened to send her to rehab she became angry and called upon the fire gods, setting the house in flames, preventing her parents from leaving. She stood outside while the house began to burn and did nothing even when the firemen showed up. They had to shoot her with tranquilizers from across the street in order to get her to back down so they could put the fire out. She was in rehab for nearly a year."

"Jesus," he gasped, then instantly shoved a finger in his mouth to gnaw on the nail.

"You shouldn't bite your nails."

He dropped his hand. "Nervous habit. So...um...you ever go overboard with your powers?" She touched his arm and he actually flinched.

"Oh my Goddess, are you worried I'll do something to hurt you?"

He shrugged, not really wanting to admit she scared him a little. "Just curious."

"I would never. I know how to control myself and my powers. I work with a spiritualist who helps me meditate and calm my inner self. I started doing that right after my friend was hospitalized."

"That's reassuring. So, you ever make yourself win a lottery or anything like that?"

"No," she chortled. "That would be against the laws of the Wicca faith."

"Never once have you used it for your own gain?"

"Never. And no, I will not help you get money that way either. I'm appalled you would even think to ask me that."

"I didn't ask you anything," he reminded her with a quick glance her way. "I can get my own money."

"How? By stealing it?"

He shrugged again, glancing at the map laid out on the dashboard. "Whatever means necessary."

"Ever thought of finding a job and working for a living?"

He snorted. "Vampire, remember? Not many people will hire my kind." Not that he'd ever tried to get a job. He'd had no need when money wasn't a priority for him. Whenever he wanted something, he took it.

"You could wear contacts," she suggested.

"And the teeth?"

"Um...some people have longer incisors than others."

He laughed, startling her. "That's stretching it. What about daylight? Kinda hard to do a day job when the sunlight boils my skin."

"Okay, so it would be hard for you to get a job, but there are things you could do for a living."

"Like?" He checked the map again, then turned to the left and continued driving. He knew the location was past the city limits but he'd never been to the area before.

"I don't know. Gravedigger?"

"Sure...I could use a snack while I work." Her jaw dropped and he couldn't help laughing.

"That's sick."

"I just said it for shock value. There's no blood left in a human when they're buried."

She slugged his arm. "That wasn't very nice."

Laughing, he asked, "Got anything else?"

"I'm thinking."

They sat in silence while they drove.

"What does your brother do for a living?"

"He's a private investigator. Has his own company."

"Really?" She turned to face him, her face lit with excitement.

"That's so cool."

He shrugged. "He's always been interested in police work. Even when we were kids. He used to be the cop and I was the robber," he laughed. "Funny how life works out." Dante was the cop now and Danny had become a thief in the night.

"Do you ever wonder what you're life would have been like if Chaos hadn't turned you into a vampire?"

Danny headed out onto the highway, glancing to the right as they passed Chaos' compound. Fritz's compound now, he supposed. "Sometimes. More so when I was younger than now."

"What did you picture?"

Danny rolled his window all the way down, loving the feel of the fresh breeze in his hair. "Mostly fighting with my parents. Being held down. Not being allowed to be myself. I didn't like it much so I rarely pictured it."

"And you never once thought that maybe you might have been better off not being a vampire?"

He shook his head as he turned onto the dirt road. "Never. This is who I was meant to be."

"Interesting. Okay, here's another one for you."

"What is this? Analyze Danny Vega time?"

Starla laughed and continued on. "If Chaos hadn't told you your family didn't want you and that they were glad you were gone, do you think you would have went to them and told them what you'd become?"

"Yes."

"Well, that came out fast. Explain?"

He's never had anyone to talk to about his feelings or his life before. It felt kind of nice. "These past few months away from Chaos and my kind has given me plenty of thinking time. And seeing my brother more often makes me feel...hm..."

"Homesick?"

He angled his head to her, nodding. "I guess so. My first instinct after waking up as a vampire was to cry for my mother and beg to be allowed to go home. Had they let me, I would have run straight home and blubbered my brains out about what had happened to me."

"But Chaos kept you locked up, knowing that would be exactly what you would do."

"Yeah." He slowed them down, enjoying the conversation. "But spending twenty years believing your family didn't want you does a number on your brain. So when I was finally released, I didn't go home."

"Did you check up on them?"

"Oh yeah. Throughout the years, and I saw how happy they were, how they carried on with their lives. Without me."

"Which only reinforced what Chaos had told you?"

"Yep."

"Do you think your family would have accepted you? As a vampire?"

"They never understood why I was the way I was when I was human. I doubt they'd have accepted me."

"You talk as if you have no intention of seeing them and letting them know you're alive."

"I don't."

"I would want to know." She shifted in her seat, facing forward now. "I would want to at least let my family know I was alive."

"Well, that's what makes us different. We're here." He slowed even more, glancing at the area and saw only trees. "Are you sure this is right?"

Starla lifted the shirt, examined the map, and nodded. "According to the map on the shirt, he should be in this area."

"Well," Danny shut off the car, "I guess we start walking."

"It's kind of spooky out here."

He took her hand in his and lifted it to his lips. "Don't worry, sweetheart, I'll protect you." Her eyes took on that dreamy look again and went straight to his heart.

"I love it when you're romantic."

Baffled, he tilted his head. "Yeah? This is romantic to you?" He lifted her hand and kissed it again.

"Oh yeah." She grinned from ear to ear.

"Well..." Now he had fuel. "Shall we?"

"After you."

"Chicken." Laughing, he slipped out of the truck and walked to her door, opening it. Then he held his hand out to her, experimenting. She took it and, sure enough, she got that dreamy look again. Oh yeah, he was going to work this for all it was worth.

Linking Starla's fingers with his, Danny walked with her through the open field.

"I think you need to talk to your parents."

"Think you could do a little spell and find out what we're looking for, specifically?" He avoided her question.

"No. What harm would it be to just talk to them?"

"Leave it alone, Starla."

"You talk to your brother. Maybe he told them."

"We already discussed this and, no, he hasn't. You look left, I'll look right." He wished he'd fed off of Chaos more often, but he hadn't since those first few months after being turned. At least if he had fed off of him recently he would be able to detect him. Chaos' blood would call to him.

"Have you asked your brother why he hasn't?"

"I really don't think this is the time for a discussion. It might be a good idea to stay quiet in case Fritz has guards set up." Not that he believed that was the case. He'd heard enough rumors on the streets to believe no one but Fritz knew where Chaos was.

When Starla's fingers tightened on his, he smiled.

"You date a lot of bad boys?" he asked quietly, keeping his eyes out for anything that might look like a spot Chaos would be held at.

"Never," she mumbled in returned.

"So I'm your first?"

"You're not a bad boy, Danny."

"No? Hm, most would disagree with you. What's that?" He stopped them, trying to focus on a bunch of dead tree limbs and brush that looked out of place.

"What?" Starla turned her flashlight in the direction Danny aimed his. "Looks like a bunch of dead trees."

"Right. But look how they're positioned. They're not in the ground and just sort of scattered in one spot. Let's check it out." He led her towards the bushes, keeping his flashlight aimed at the spot.

"I don't understand why those trees are fascinating you so much."

He pulled some of the larger limbs aside revealing a metal door.

"Oh..."

"Bingo!"

CHAPTER 22

"I know what you're doing."

Jonah looked up at her from his workstation with a baffled look on his face. "Um...sure you do, because it's what we always do. It's called work."

Trinity pushed up from her spot across from his desk, leaving the laptop open and running the diagnostics Jonah insisted on running. "Right. But we don't need to be doing this together."

He gave her a genuine pouty look that might have worked if she was a complete moron. "You don't want to work with me? That hurts, Trin. It really hurts."

She rolled her eyes. "I could have done this up in my apartment, and all you would have had to have done was set it up, get it rolling, and go about your own business. In your office. Basil told you to watch me, didn't he?"

Jonah's jaw dropped. "I am appalled. When have you ever known me to do anything Basil asked? I don't answer to him—"

"Jonah—"

"And I never will," he finished. "Did it ever occur to you that I miss being with my friend, miss working with you?"

"I wasn't born yesterday, Jonah. And I'm a big girl who does not need to be watched. Got it?" The nerve of Basil—and she knew damn

well he'd asked Jonah to watch her. What did Basil think, she couldn't handle being alone, couldn't manage to call out to him if she needed him? He'd be here in a flash if she... The thought brought a smile to her lips.

"Why are you smiling? You're scaring me, Trinity."

She only stared at Jonah while calling out to Basil in a frantic voice inside her mind. He would no doubt pick up on her nervousness and worry and be here in no time. When he appeared in the room with her and Jonah, she held out her hands. "And that is why I don't need a sitter." Dusting her hands, she marched from the room.

"She's on to us." Jonah stated.

"You think." Basil snarled, then sent himself away.

Trinity stood by the closed door, laughing to herself. That would teach them. She was more than capable of taking care of herself and all she needed to do was call out to her lover and he would be here in the blink of an eye.

Panting as she took the stairs up pissed Trinity off. She'd been fit before becoming pregnant and couldn't understand why she was so out of breath after taking a few stairs. Then again, she hadn't been doing her usual exercises for obvious reasons and it wasn't like she could get out of the house and go for a walk.

The last thing she or Basil wanted was for the outsiders to know she was pregnant.

Rubbing a circle over her belly, she felt her daughter moving about. Trinity knew perfectly well if anyone found out she was pregnant they'd try everything in their power to harm her and the baby.

Especially Chaos.

Though he had been incommunicado the past few months, she didn't believe for a moment he was gone for good. Call her a skeptic, but until Chaos was dead and the sun was back, she was not going to feel safe.

And until her daughter was safely in her arms, she wasn't going to do anything to jeopardize either of them.



Anticipation fueling him, Danny shoved the bush aside, eager to find out what was beneath the metal door.

It had to be Chaos.

"It's locked," Starla pointed out, holding up the padlock.

Taking it from her, Danny gave it one hard yank, cracking it open, and tossed it aside. "Not anymore." Grabbing the handle, he pulled

the door open and saw a decaying rock stairwell leading down. "Could be a truck load of creepy crawlies down there. Maybe you want to stay up here?"

"As long as I have this baby, I'm fine." She taped the flashlight against her palm.

"Okay." But to be safe, he decided it was best he went first. Shoving his light in his pants' pocket, he took the stairs down. "Careful coming down," he warned her. At the bottom of the stairs he followed the thin rock and dirt path and when he saw it, his heart actually sped up.

Dead ahead was a plastic bubble and inside was Chaos.

"Hot damn!" He couldn't contain his excitement and ran to the bubble.

"Interesting setup," Starla commented as she came up beside him.

"Fritz is a rather odd character. Who knows what his reasoning was behind this. We need to get Chaos out of here." And not wasting any time, Danny drew the zipper down and entered the bubble. "He's hooked up to an IV." Danny figured it was probably the way Fritz kept Chaos subdued. He yanked it out of Chaos' arm and tossed it aside. Scooping his arms under Chaos, Danny lifted him up and turned to leave.

"Where are we going to take him?"

"Back to the house."

"And what if someone invades it like they did the previous house?"

He hadn't thought of that. "Hm..."

"What about the police station. We could lock him in a cell until we figure out what to do with him."

Chaos wouldn't like waking up in a cell, but... "Good idea." Shifting, Danny carried Chaos up the steps and out of the makeshift grave he'd been held in for the past four months. Danny had mixed emotions at finally finding Chaos. There was the joy of finally finding him. The giddiness of being the first face Chaos would see when he woke. Then there was the animosity he'd been feeling for months now. It was a nasty cauldron of emotions swirling thought him and he just didn't know what to do about it.

"You drive. Keys are in my front pocket."

Starla dipped her fingers into his pocket and slipped the keys out. She held the door for Danny while he set Chaos in the back seat. They drove back to town in silence, Danny watching Chaos carefully.

He was still on an emotional rollercoaster.



Dante knew it was stupid of him to think Starla would contact him when they found Chaos. If they found him. But he had to be optimistic. He couldn't think the worst of his brother, though it was so hard not to. Dante liked to believe they were making progress, but the last conversation he'd had with Danny hadn't gone that well. It was hard to tell with Danny, what he was thinking or feeling, and Dante wondered if he ever really knew his twin.

He jumped when a set of fingers were snapped in front of his face. "What the hell?" He glared at Basil.

"Less daydreaming and more working."

"I was working. And I was not daydreaming. I was thinking," Dante snapped, back then lifting his hammer, slammed it onto the head of the nail with a great deal more force than necessary.

"Well, think less and work more."

"Yes, sir." Dante saluted Basil one finger style, which only earned him a heated glare and a growl before Basil turned his back to leave. "What is his problem?" he asked of Cooper standing beside him, handing him nails.

"Pre-fatherhood jitters, I presume."

"God help us all if it continues." He hammered another nail into the wood frame that would hold the new windows Basil would have installed. "I bet you can't wait to move back into here, hey, Coop?"

He handed Dante another nail, shrugging. "I do miss my own space."

"I bet. We all do. I'm looking forward to moving back to my place, and Gypsy already has decorating ideas. It kinda scares me, what with her bold fashion sense. But if it makes her happy..." Dante shrugged, hammered the nail in place, and when Cooper said nothing in return, he decided to let the conversation go.

"You truly love each other. It's nice to see the love that's burgeoning in the midst of so much turmoil."

It caught him by surprise, not that Cooper had spoken but what he had said. "Yeah, I guess so. I never really thought of it like that."

"It's reassuring to know that even when in the face of danger, love still blooms."

Dante took the nail, giving Cooper a sideways glance. "Someone sounds lonely." When Cooper didn't reply, Dante prodded on. "Ever been in love, Cooper?"

"Yes."

"Care to expand on that?"

"No."

Dante pursed his lips. "She leave you?" he continued, not willing to give up.

"Perhaps I should see if the ladies need my services. I'm sure you can handle gathering your own nails." He set his handful on the tiny wooden table they used for supplies and walked away.

"There's a story there and if he thinks I'm giving up, the guy doesn't know me very well." He was, after all, a private investigator.

Dante yelped when Basil appeared beside him. "Damn it, Basil, stop doing that!" His heart pounding, he scowled at the man beside him. He hated when Basil just appeared beside him.

"We need to get these windows installed."

"And I'm working as fast as I can," he informed Basil sternly.

"Work faster."

"Jesus, man, I cannot wait until your kid is born and you can take a chill pill." As Basil stalked off, Dante shook his head.

If that's what pre-fatherhood did to a guy, he wasn't sure he wanted it.



Seeing the bush to the side and the steel door wide open, Fritz ran at it at a dead run. He didn't bother taking the steps down but jumped to the bottom instead. Seeing the plastic bubble open and Chaos gone enraged him.

He tore at the plastic like a mad animal, ripping it open, tossing the bedding, the IV, and finally the bed, in his fury.

Then the fear set in.

If Chaos was free, it wouldn't be long before he came looking for him. Fritz did not want to be around for that. He needed to move, somewhere safe, somewhere Chaos wouldn't find him so easily.

Running towards his car, Fritz knew he didn't have much time.

CHAPTER 23

Danny sat watching Chaos as he slept, wondering when he'd wake up. Danny had laid him on a cot in one of the police cells and insisted Starla lock them both inside. She'd argued with him about leaving Chaos in the cell alone, but Danny had finally won. He simply shoved Starla out of the cell and slammed the door shut.

Then she'd pointed out that she had no idea where the keys were.

So he sat watching Chaos sleep while Starla looked for the keys. It had been half an hour already.

Standing, Danny stretched his back and looked out the tiny barred window in the cell. He'd hate to be cooped up in this place. He felt like he couldn't breathe now as it was. And the smell was enough to make a person vomit.

The moan from Chaos caught his attention. Returning to his side, Danny pulled the chair he'd been sitting in a little closer. "Come on, Chaos, wake up now."

Chaos mumbled, his eyes blinked open and closed before sealing shut again. With a heavy sigh, Danny leaned back in his seat, stretched his legs out, and waited.

What else could he do?



With the keys to the cells in hand—at least she hoped they were the right ones—Starla pulled the card Danny's brother had given her out of her pocket. Picking up the telephone sitting on the front desk, she heard the dial tone, then dialed the number on the card.

She hoped the caller ID didn't show where she was calling from. If it did, she hoped Dante gave her and Danny the time they needed.

When the line was answered by a strong, male voice she recognized as similar to Danny's, she spoke. "Dante Vega?"

"That's right."

"This is Starla. Danny's friend."

"I remember you. How are you doing?"

She could hear the anxiety in his voice. "Fine. We found Chaos, but before you get all excited I want you to promise me you won't come looking for him until after Danny has some time with him."

"Danny won't give him up, Starla."

She sighed and pulled up a stool to sit on. "You don't know that."

"Do you?"

She paused, giving it some thought. "He'll do what he has to do for his own peace of mind."

"Chaos is his family now and Danny won't let anything happen to him."

"You're wrong about that." She wasn't sure if it was right of her to say this but she was willing to risk Danny being upset with her. "He's confused right now. Since being away from Chaos, Danny has done a lot of thinking and he's seeing Chaos in a different light."

"How so?"

Picking up a pencil on the desk, she began tapping it restlessly. "He sees that Chaos controlled him. Did you know that Chaos told him his family didn't want him?"

"Yeah, Danny told me and I told him it was bullshit."

"Danny's seeing that a little more clearly now. He has questions for Chaos, and when he's through I'll let you know."

"Chaos has to die, Starla, and Danny knows that. Do you honestly believe he'll allow us to take Chaos out even after he gets his answers?"

"I guess time will tell."

"I love my brother," Dante sighed. "I just don't know him anymore."

"He's confused and hurting. What you did by locking him up hurt him. He's having trouble getting over that."

"I know and I've tried to make him understand, but...I just don't know what to do anymore."

"Have you told your parents he's alive?" The pause told her no.

"Not yet."

"Why not?"

Again, the pause. "Because I don't want them to get their hopes up."

"Maybe he needs to see them. I have to go. I'll be in touch." She hung up and took a deep breath before grabbing the keys and heading off.



Danny bolted awake at the touch of a hand on his. When he saw it came from Chaos, and he was awake, he sat straight in his seat. "You're awake?"

"Apparently. Where am I?" Chaos sat up, looking around.

"At the police station. In a cell." He'd had all these things he'd planned to say when he found Chaos and now his mind was drawing a blank.

"Did Fritz put me in here?"

Hm...how was this going to work? "No...I did."

Chaos' face scrunched up. "You? Why you? And I thought I told you I no longer wanted to see you, Daniel."

His heart ached but he stayed strong. "What is the last thing you remember?"

His brow furrowed. "Fritz placing a cloth over my mouth."

Danny nodded. "He drugged you and has kept you drugged for the past four months in an underground hideout."

Chaos' eyes went wide. "Four months?"

Danny nodded again. "I finally found you and brought you here."

Running a hand across his face, Chaos responded. "And I suppose you think that'll put you back in my good graces?"

Danny hadn't thought his heart could hurt anymore than it already did. He was wrong. "I imagine you'll want to feed." He rolled his sleeve up past his elbow and held out his arm.

Chaos glanced at it, then up at Danny. "If you have any inkling that by feeding me I'll forgive you, then I would save your blood. I have no intentions of doing either." He stood, gave his back a stretch, and walked to the door. When he couldn't open it, he turned his attention to Danny. "Why am I locked in here?"

"I have someone looking for the keys." His jaw ached and Danny finally realized he was clenching it. "I locked us in here," he said boldly.

"You did? Why?" Chaos snarled it, his yellow eyes narrowed in on Danny.

Let it out, Danny. "I wanted to be alone with you and I wanted to make sure you wouldn't walk out on me. I have some questions for you and I need them answered before I let either of us out." He didn't stand like Chaos was but, instead, chose to remain sitting. He felt no need to show Chaos he was bowing to him in anyway. His days of standing at attention to Chaos were over. They were equals now as far as Danny was concerned.

"I have nothing to say to you, Daniel."

"It's Danny! It's always been Danny. I was born Danny Vega, not Daniel Vega," he barked and enjoyed the flash of surprise in Chaos' eyes. "I want to know why you pushed me away. What did I do that was so wrong?"

"All right, *Danny*," Chaos emphasized. "You want answers? I'll give them to you. And then I demand you release me from this retched cell. You betrayed me by seeing your brother."

Danny's brow curled in confusion. "How was that betraying you? He asked me to meet him so I went. That was it."

"Twice. You went twice."

"Big deal." He was utterly confused.

Chaos folded his arms across his chest as he glared down at Danny. "I spent twenty years conditioning you, convincing you that I was your family, that the family you were born to no longer wanted you, only to have you running back to them the instant they called you. I knew at that moment that you would return to them and forget all about me."

Now Danny did stand. "But I didn't. I came back, both times. I only went to him to see what he wanted and, yes, I was curious. I wanted to know what he would say about who I'd become."

"And the second time? Then time you were caught?"

"I told him I was on your side and that we would rule. I had no intention of returning to him after that."

"So you say, but I suspect that to be untrue. The bond was not broken between the two of you. Despite you becoming a vampire, your blood still called to one another. Don't you think I know you watched your family, that you kept an eye on them? I knew everything you

did, Danny. And each time you returned, I did my best to persuade you that they were against you, that they wouldn't want you back."

"Why? Why would you do that?" He just had to know.

"Because I could. You were an experiment for me, Danny. I'd never broken up identical twins before and when you became interested in me I saw my opportunity. Splitting you two up was my finest accomplishment. Until you returned to him."

He was speechless. His brain was trying to comprehend what he'd just learned and still come up with a retort. He was finding it virtually impossible.

"I could not trust that you would not turn me over to them after you returned, so I cut you free." He held his hands up in a careless gesture. "I was through with you in any case."

"I meant nothing to you?" Danny finally said in a voice much too quiet for his liking.

Chaos shrugged his wide shoulders as he sauntered towards the cot. "At the time I considered you a son. But I realized I could just as easily find another and, next time, be more successful in making him completely mine."

Danny stood there, dumbfounded, and when the knock sounded on the cell door he actually jumped. Looking over, he saw Starla holding up the keys.

He walked to the door, nodded at her and when she unlocked it he immediately pushed it open.

"Watch him!" Starla warned Danny.

Turning, Danny saw Chaos charging forward and knew he would do anything to break free.

Danny had other plans. Curling his hand into a tight fist, he slammed it into Chaos' face, sending him reeling backwards onto the cot. He slipped through the open door, slamming it shut behind him.

"Wow!"

"What?" He was vibrating inside. Anger was spilling out of him and he knew if he didn't do something soon, someone was going to get hurt.

"You knocked him clean out."

He looked up and saw Starla peering through the tiny window on the cell door and simply turned away. A few moments later, he heard her racing after him.

"Where are you going?"

"Away."

"Away where?"

When she grabbed his arm, he spun on her, teeth bared and ready for a fight. Then he saw the fear come into her eyes and it was all he needed to calm down. "I'm sorry." He turned away from her, lifting his fist and slamming it into the wall.

"What the hell did you do that for? Oh, now look, your hand is bleeding."

"Just leave it," he insisted when she took hold of it. "It'll be fine."

"I'm sure it will be, but still. Come here." She dragged him towards the sink near the back of the room.

"I don't need you to tend to my wounds, Starla," he grumbled as she dragged him along.

"Oh, just be quiet and let me clean this up."

"I'm more than capable of looking after myself. I've been doing it for twenty years." He tugged at his hand as she ran the water.

"All the more reason to have someone do it for you." She shoved his hand under the water and he hissed at the pain. "Even tough guys need help once and a while and it's been long enough that you've taken care of yourself. Let someone do it for you for a change."

"My mother used to say that to me," he mumbled, his mind suddenly shifting back to his youth when he'd scrape his knees or cut himself and his mother would tend to his wounds. It made his heart long for something that he hadn't had in more years than he could count. "She used to tell me that I didn't always have to be brave and that it was okay to show your pain once and a while." Off in the distance he heard Chaos banging on the cell door, demanding to be released. "I was an experiment to him."

She washed off the blood then blotted it dry with a swatch of paper towel and let him talk.

"That's all I was too him. A toy. A plaything. Something to manipulate."

"I'm sorry."

Looking up at her, he saw the sincerity in her eyes. Cupping her face in his palms, he drew her closer and touched his lips to hers in a slow, soft kiss. He just needed to feel her, to feel the emotion pouring out of her, and when she wrapped her arms around his body, he felt at home.

Safe, warm, and loved.

He hadn't felt that in far too long.

"I need you, Starla," he whispered against her mouth, breathing her in.

Taking his hand in hers, she led him through the crowd of desks and down a long corridor. When she pushed through a doorway he saw the cot against the wall and knew what she had in mind. He stopped her, taking both her hands in his. "I didn't mean like that. I don't just want to fuck."

"I know." She took his face in her hands now and kissed him softly, letting it linger for the longest time. "I want to give you what you've needed for so long. Love."

CHAPTER 24

Danny let her lead him to the cot and, as she pulled him down into her waiting arms, he eagerly went. Lying beside her, feeling her next to him was like being surrounded by warm soft blankets. And when she kissed him, he felt himself floating. Her hands were gentle as they stroked over his face, through his hair, and along his arms. It felt so soothing, and he let himself drift with the moment

Her mouth wasn't urgent but kissed with slow, sensual motions that vibrated throughout his body. He needed to feel her. Sliding his hands along her bare arm, he took in the feel of her silky skin. He threaded his fingers through her hair, loving the softness of it, and imagined how it would feel fanned out over his bare chest. She had a beautiful body, her waist thin and her hips curving just right. Pulling one of her legs up to rest over his, he tested the smoothness of her thigh with his fingers. He'd had women before, more than he could count, yet not once had he ever thought to explore their bodies. He found he wanted to do just that with Starla.

Their lips parted, touched, parted, and touched again. Over and over in a slow mating of their mouths. Her tongue would occasionally slip out to tease his, then slide back into her mouth. And when she parted his shirt and ran her nails along his bare skin he felt the sensation ripple right down into his belly and sink into his balls.

He wanted to feel her bare skin as well.

He took his time undoing the buttons on her shirt, and when it was finally open, he didn't grope like he had so many times before. No, this time he tested, he touched, he felt. The curve of her breasts were perfectly round. He tested the sides, just under her arms, and loved how soft the skin felt there. Casually he slid his fingers along the underside, and up to the part of her cleavage. He circled the outer edges of her breasts all without touching the nipples he felt pressing against his bare flesh. When he slid his fingers along her ribcage and towards her belly, he felt it quiver.

Flipping open the snap and zipper on her shorts took a bit of finessing but Danny managed it. Slowly he slid them past her hips, testing the skin there as well. She was soft everywhere.

She moaned as he slipped his fingers between her legs but he had no intention of getting her off just yet. He simply wanted to feel. And so he investigated. The part of her lips revealed a velvet lining of pure, moist temptation. She was already damp and that added to the allure of wanting to touch. Her body reacted as he stroked his fingers along her lips, sliding through the moisture. Up and down, he touched in a slow, lazy motion, enjoying the sensation of her juices on his fingers. If he took her now he knew she would give to him freely.

He wanted more.

He wanted to taste.

Releasing her lips, he sat up, smiling down at her before touching his mouth to her chin. He nibbled on it, then worked his way down her neck, onto her chest, then tested her shoulders with his lips. He slid his tongue from shoulder to shoulder before finding his way to the center of her chest, right where the peak of her cleavage rested. Slowly, he kissed his way over the top of each breast, taking his time, just enjoying the taste of her.

She arched her back in a plea to have him take her breast in his mouth. He obliged.

"Yes," she murmured, placing her hand on his head to guide him to her nipple. He suckled slowly, enjoying the feel of each nipple in his mouth, flicking the tip with his tongue. She was so ripe and he found her simply delectable.

But he wanted more.

Using his tongue, he slid his way over the swell of her breasts to her quivering belly. He kissed his way over her hips and down her thigh as he pushed her shorts down past her feet. She had such cute feet and he couldn't resist a nibble.

"Ooh..."

He kissed her toes, nibbled on them, then worked his way up her foot, along her ankle to her knee then her thigh. He parted her legs, kissing his way to her core. The instant he touched his mouth to her she moaned.

He parted her lips and drank her in.

She writhed against him, bucking as his tongue twirled, dipped inside, then flicked.

"You're going to make me come," she panted, arching her back as an invitation to give her more.

He dove inside and let her wash over him. She convulsed, quivered, and cried out as it took her over. And when it was through, she dropped her butt down on the cot and panted with her release.

Her orgasm fulfilled him so completely and it was a feeling he'd never felt before.

"More." She smiled up at him and he felt his heart trip over.

He'd never been in love before but he was pretty damn sure he was now.

Drawing his pants down, he slipped in between her parted thighs and just held himself over her. He wanted to say those three little words to her but was afraid to. He hadn't recited those words in more years than he could remember.

Instead, he showed her. Taking her mouth, he caressed her lips with his, slowly kissing her as he hovered above her. Her hips began to gyrate and with the movement he could feel the tip of his dick touch the warmth of her pussy. So he began to work it. He didn't press inside but caressed her moisture with his shaft, enjoying the feel of her parted labia wrapping around his cock. She was hot, wet, and oh so slippery, and he loved it.

"I want more, Danny," she pleaded, gripping hold of his arms, urging him to press inside."

"I know," he whispered, then kissed her lips shut. He worked her up, sliding between her velvet folds while she bucked beneath him. He knew she wanted him to thrust inside but he wasn't ready for it to end just yet. So he continued to stroke her.

He felt himself nearing the end and touched the tip to her awaiting opening. Their eyes met and held as he slipped inside.

He stroked himself inside of her in a slow, erotic motion, neither taking their eyes off the other. He felt a link, a connection as they became one. He continued the slow motion of arousing them both, drinking in the love he saw in her eyes.

"Oh...Danny..." she murmured and he felt her clasp onto him.

Still he didn't speed up. He stroked her up as her body clasped onto his in a tight, contracting grip drawing out his own conclusion and when he felt the urge to come, he pressed himself deep inside and let himself go.

"Yes, oh yes. I can feel you inside of me," Starla panted, wrapping her legs around his waist as he filled her.

As the last drops spilled inside, he let himself fall. Resting on top of her, breathing heavily, he felt as if he was high.

Then she stroked his hair and he was gone.

"That was nice."

It was, it really was. Lifting off of her, he rolled onto his back, pulling her against his chest and kissed her head.

He held her in his arms, listening to her breathe and let himself go.

It was the first time in twenty years that he fell asleep with a smile.



Fritz hurried to pack all of his belongings into his travel bag. He'd already wasted valuable time talking to his people, informing them that he was heading out for a few days to gather supplies. He didn't feel the need to tell them the truth and a lie was so much easier in any case. The less they knew the better.

And when Chaos came looking for him, which Fritz knew he would, he would be long gone.

He hoped.

Slinging the travel bag over his left shoulder, Fritz hurried from his office. He hoped he wouldn't run into anyone who would question his need to do this alone.

As he rushed from the compound and to his car, he saw the familiar black van heading towards him. He shoved his pack into the back seat of his car, slamming the door shut before hurrying into the driver's seat. He closed himself in, starting the engine while the occupants exited the van. They waved, he waved back, then shifted the car in reverse. He turned it around and headed down the lane towards the highway that would take him away from Jacob's Cove.

In his rear view mirror, he saw them dragging several humans from the back of the van.

They'd have enough to keep them busy for a while.

Unless Chaos came in and took care of them all.

Their problem. He sped away.

CHAPTER 25

Danny came awake in a lurch to the sound of fists pounding on metal and Chaos' voice screaming at a high pitch that was sure to wake the dead. Beside him, Starla stretched.

She was completely naked, curled up at his side and looking so damn tempting. But the fists on metal convinced him she would have to wait.

He slipped out from beside her and pulled on his pants. He did them up as he left the room and headed towards Chaos' cell. "Jesus Christ! Do you think you could be any louder?"

"Let me out of this infernal room now, Daniel."

Danny stretched his arms over his head, arching his back and yawning. "You know, I was having the best sleep I've had in years when you woke me."

"Let me out of here, now!"

"Hm...let me think. Should I let you out or not?"

"Daniel, my patience wears thin."

"Not! And quit that banging or I'm finding a gun and silencing you with it." Where had that come from? It baffled him but he was mighty proud of himself.

It definitely made Chaos quit his banging, which made Danny even more proud.

"Thank you. Now, be a good boy and stay quiet so my girlfriend can catch some sleep." But to be safe, Danny decided to look for something to silence Chaos. When he came across the weapons cabinet, locked, he wasted no time. Yanking the lock off, he pulled the door open and was thrilled to find several tranquilizer guns. Grabbing one, he inserted the darts and headed back to Chaos' cell. Once again he was banging like no tomorrow. "I warned you." Chaos backed off as he lifted the gun up, and aimed through the cell window. Centering on Chaos's upper body, Danny hoped he hit his mark.

He pulled the trigger and fired.

The dart hit Chaos in the shoulder and he instantly pulled it out. Danny aimed and fired three more times before Chaos finally dropped. Resting the gun on the floor at his side, Danny watched Chaos for a few moments to make sure he was really out. Satisfied that he was, Danny set the gun on the desk, wrote a note to Starla, informing her to use the tranq on Chaos if need be and that he would be right back.

He left the police station, whistling.



Danny had no idea what sort of flowers Starla liked, so he decided just to grab a wide variety of them. He wished he could bring her real flowers, but since the sun had gone away, nothing was blooming or growing and all the floral shops bouquets had long since died off. So she would have to settle for the fake variety.

And while he was grabbing the flowers, Danny decided to pick up some supplies to last them however long they would be holed up at the police station. He was really getting tired of canned food. What he wouldn't give for a juicy steak or a thick, greasy burger smothered in onions and mayo. His mouth watered just thinking about it.

Tossing the bags into the cab of the truck, Danny couldn't wait to get back to Starla. And as soon as he checked on Killer, he was going to go straight to her. He had to be in love. There was no other explanation to how he was feeling. His body felt alive for the first time in years and he knew if he looked in a mirror now, he'd be sporting a wide sloppy grin.

"Hey."

He shoved the door closed and turned to find his brother. He was looking paler than he had before and Danny figured the lack of sunlight must be playing havoc on his system. "Hey," he retorted.

"Just out for supplies?"

"More or less. You?"

"Needed some fresh air. We've been working on getting Basil's place back up and ready to live in for the past few hours. I think I have hammers cramp." Dante lifted his right hand, gave it a shake. "Where's your girl?"

"Not here." He wasn't ready to tell him, yet, where he was staying.

"I'm surprised you'd leave her alone with Chaos."

Danny tried to hide his surprise but he was sure it showed on his face.

"Yeah, she called me and I take it she didn't tell you."

They hadn't done much talking after she'd unlocked the cell door to let him out, but he wasn't going to tell his brother why. "So you know I have Chaos?"

Shoving his hands in his jeans pocket, Dante nodded. "She told me and, no, she didn't tell me where you are hiding. Look, I understand you wanting to keep it dark—"

"I'm sick of the darkness," Danny answered. "I miss seeing the trees in full bloom and the pleasant aroma of the flowers."

"Then let us take Chaos out and bring back the sun."

Danny leaned against the truck, crossing his feet at the ankles. "I'm not ready to give him up yet."

"Danny—"

"Look, I know what he did to me was wrong. I know he took me only because he wanted to experiment with me, breaking us up and seeing if he could keep us apart. He told me everything after he woke up and, yeah, it hurts but..." He let out a long breath. "Imagine if you suddenly found out Mom and Dad kidnapped you from your real parents, your real family, and all these years they've been your family. Could you just walk away from them and go back to your natural family?"

"It's not the same. You knew about us, you knew you had family."

"And I believed all of you were glad I was gone. Yes, Chaos brainwashed me into believing that, but for twenty years I thought of him as family. Even now, knowing what he did to me, knowing I mean nothing to him I still can't give him up so you can kill him."

"Hearing you say that breaks my heart. I love you, Danny."

"You love the memory of who I was. You don't even know who I am now."

"Only because you haven't given me the chance to get to know you. I want to." Dante ran a hand through his hair restlessly.

"You kill my kind."

"I protect my city."

"By killing my kind," Danny reminded him. "How are we supposed to be friends, let alone family, when you kill what I am?"

"My best friends are vampires, Danny, so don't give me that shit. I don't have a problem with vampires, unless they give me a reason."

"I can't give him up, Dante. So I guess I'm one of those vampires you have a problem with. Catch you around, bro." Yanking the driver's side door open, Danny slipped behind the wheel, started the truck, and drove away.

In the rearview mirror he saw his brother watching him drive away.



It was disheartening enough to wake up alone after such glorious lovemaking but to find the man who'd given you so much pleasure gone, was even worse. Starla wandered through the hallway from the back office where she'd been sleeping, calling out to Danny, only to receive no response. She couldn't imagine where he could be, but she wished he was with her now while she was feeling so mushy.

She was in love. With a vampire, no less.

What would her parents say when she told them?

Entering the office area that overlooked the cells, Starla saw the large rifle lying across one of the desks. Baffled, she walked towards it and saw the note. She lifted it and was in the midst of reading it when Danny walked in.

"You stepped out?" She glanced up at him and saw his arms full of bags. In one hand he held a huge bouquet of artificial flowers in every form and color. He had the widest grin on his face she had ever seen. "What's that?"

"Flowers. Okay, so they're fake and plastic, but it was the best I could do. Not sure what you like so I got a variety. Hope you like them?"

Her heart simply swelled with love. He'd gone out to find her flowers. Wasn't he the sweetest? She blinked back her tears as she walked up to him. She didn't take the flowers but instead leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the lips. "That...is romantic."

"I was going for romantic."

"You achieved it." She kissed him again, then finally took the huge bouquet. "And you know what's best about these? They'll never die."

"There's that. I got you something else." He set the bags on a desk

and began scrambling through them until he came up with a small package. "Seeds. It says they're a small flowering shrub that grows hardy in partial shade and blooms in late summer. I figured you could get one of those sunlamps and maybe plant it somewhere inside and watch it grow. Kinda makes up for you taking stuff." He shrugged, grinning like a fool.

Could she love him anymore? "Or I could plant it when the sun comes back after we hand Chaos over to your brother. This is so sweet." She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him long and slow but felt nothing in return. Pulling away, she saw the frown on his brow. "What?"

"Who says I'm handing him over to my brother. Oh, and by the way, thanks for telling me you talked to him. I met up with him after getting my supplies," he said when she tilted her head in confusion.

"I was going to tell you when I let you out of the cell but we kind of got side tracked." She smiled, hoping to bring back the happiness she'd seen on his face moments before. "And what do you mean you're not handing Chaos over to your brother?"

"Just what I said." He broke away from her and began unloading the groceries.

"But I thought after you talked with him, after he told you how he truly felt about you, that you'd be more than eager to turn him over?"

"Well, you thought wrong."

"How can you want to keep him alive after what he told you?"

"I haven't decided what to do with Chaos yet. Twinkie?"

She shook her head and he ripped open the package and helped himself. "So you didn't tell your brother where you have Chaos?"

He shook his head, swallowing what was in his mouth before speaking. "Nope."

"Did you at least make amends with your brother?"

Danny's brow furrowed. "Why would I make amends with Dante?"

"Because you know now that Chaos used you. He kidnapped you, brainwashed you, and used you as an experiment. He kept you away from your family. I would think that would make you want to welcome your real family back."

He set the half eaten Twinkie on the desk and licked his fingers. "Just because I know the truth about Chaos doesn't make what Dante did to me any better. He locked me up and left me to die when the house caught on fire."

"But it's easier to forgive Chaos for kidnapping you, brainwashing you, and making you a vampire?" He was truly confusing her now. "Look inside of yourself, Danny. You know deep inside what's right."

"Quit pushing at me, Starla."

"I'm trying to make you see what's right."

"And why is killing Chaos right?" he demanded sternly.

"Because he's a killer."

"So am I," he blurted out.

"I refuse to believe that."

"I drank blood from humans and I didn't give a damn if they lived or died as long as I got what I wanted."

She refused to cry and bit the inside of her cheek to prevent it. "That was then, this is now, and you're not the same."

"And maybe Chaos can be reformed."

She drew in a deep breath. "So you'll let the city wither away on the off chance that you can rehabilitate a madman?"

"It's just one city."

Her heart was breaking. "And what about your brother?"

"He'll manage."

Her throat was threatening to close up. "I can't believe what I'm hearing. He's your blood; doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"He left me to die," Danny yelled at her, startling her.

"And Chaos killed you," she blurted back.

"I'm not doing this." He threw his arms in the air and spun around to leave.

She sniffled back her tears and fought with the words she was about to say. "I won't be here when you get back."

He turned around, his face gruff. "What the hell does that mean?"

"I'm leaving. I can't stay here knowing you're willing to put the life of someone as callus, as cruel as Chaos who murders innocent children for his own gain in higher regard than your own blood relatives."

"Starla—"

"I love you, Danny. But I'd rather suffer a broken heart than stay here and watch you throw your life away." She dropped the flowers as she ran from the room.

Chapter 26

Danny stood where he was, staring blankly at the space Starla had just vacated. What the hell had just happened? Then his brain began to register what she'd said.

She was leaving.

In a dead run, Danny raced for the front doors. She wouldn't leave him. She couldn't leave him. She was all he had.

Pushing the doors open, he watched as she sped off in the truck. She was leaving him.

Furious and hurting, Danny sulked back to the cells. Damn it, why did she have to push him? Why was it everyone always wanted him to do things he wasn't ready or willing to do? He hadn't made up his mind what he was going to do. All he'd wanted was some time to think, to plan, to spend some quality time in the arms of the girl he loved. He wished now he hadn't mentioned his brother and had simply swept Starla off her feet and carried her to bed. Damn it, he didn't want to lose her.

The sound of laughter coming from Chaos' cell caught his attention. As he moved closer, the laughter grew louder. "What the fuck are you laughing about?"

"You've got no one now." Chaos continued to laugh.

"Shut up!" Danny kicked the cell door good and hard, rattling it.

"Your family doesn't want you, your kind doesn't want you, I don't want you, and now your girl doesn't want you. What a pathetic excuse of a man you are."

"Shut up!" Danny ran at the door, ready to rip it open and beat the living pulp out of Chaos. Then he realized it was exactly what Chaos wanted. He was on to his game now and, this time, Danny was smarter.

He backed off and took a deep breath.

"It won't work this time, Chaos. I won't let you ruin me a second time." And everything Starla said to him came full circle. She was right. Why was he keeping Chaos safe when Chaos had done nothing to deserve it?

"I don't have to do anything, my boy. You're doing it all on your own," Chaos laughed hardily.

Turning his back, Danny saw the flowers Starla had dropped on the floor. Picking one long stemmed rose up, he held it against his cheek, remembering the smile on Starla's face when he'd handed them

to her. He popped the head off and shoved it in his pocket, then ran from the room. He had to find Starla, and the only way he knew how was to ask for help.

From the very people he'd turned his back on.



Starla drove with tears clouding her eyes and a pain in her heart so great she thought it might do her in. Her knuckles were white with the grip she held the steering wheel with. She sped through the city, heading for the exit, and refused to look back.

She'd thought Danny had changed, she was sure he'd wanted to end Chaos' life after finding out the truth, yet he hadn't. She didn't understand how he could turn his back on his family and protect a man as evil as Chaos. But now that she knew how to find Chaos, she was going to make sure he paid. Even if it meant Danny would never speak to her again.

She just couldn't sit by and let Danny ruin his life.

She drove out onto the highway, heading for the nearest city where she would take a bus back home. Starla knew she could keep the truck and just drive it all the way home, but it was wrong. The truck didn't belong to her and since she wasn't willing to risk looking for her vehicle, she decided just to use the one she had until she got to another city.

She would leave a note indicating where the vehicle belonged and hopefully someone would return it or look for the owners.

Sniffling back her tears, Starla knew what she was doing was right. Still, her heart ached for the man she loved.

Once High Priestess Essema took care of Chaos, Danny would be better off.

She hoped.



His chest aching, Danny slowed his run as he came up to the Digital Domain. He hadn't stopped once since he'd left the police station, knowing time was crucial in finding Starla. He took a moment to catch his breath before stepping up to the front doors. Trying the doorknob, he found it locked and contemplated breaking in. Deciding against it, he hammered his fists on the door instead, hoping someone would hear him.

"Dante, Dante, I need to come in. I need help," he screamed as loud as he could. When the door thrust open and his brother stood on

the other side, Danny was reminded of the time in their youth when he'd had snuck out of the house late at night and had thought no one had noticed. Until Dante opened the door as Danny had been about to and scowled at his twin in that all too familiar annoyed look.

This time however, Dante didn't have that look on his face. Instead, Danny saw concern.

"What's going on? Someone after you?" Dante asked, grabbing Danny by the shirtfront and yanking him inside.

Dante had always been the protector. "No, no one's after me. I need help finding Starla. We had a fight, it was stupid, I was stupid, and she left me. I can't lose her, bro. I'm in love with her."

Dante shut the door, hit a few buttons on a keypad by the door, then turned to his brother. "Do you know where she went?"

"She said she was leaving town. I can't lose her, Dante."

"Where does she live?"

Danny stood there a moment, trying to think. "I don't know. She never told me. Damn it." He punched the wall beside him. Why hadn't he asked her where she was from? He didn't even know if she had a middle name and what it was. When was her birthday? What was her favorite color? He knew so little about her. But one thing he did know was that he was in love with her and didn't want to live the rest of his life without her.

"Trinity," he blurted out. "Trinity has all these neat powers now. Maybe she could help me find Starla. Where is she? I need to see Trinity."

"Danny, stop."

Racing through the shop, Danny came to an abrupt halt when Basil stepped down from the steps.

"What is the problem?" he asked in a stern, dark voice, his icy blue eyes narrowing in on Danny.

"I need to see Trinity. She has to help me find Starla." Precious time was being wasted. "I know where Chaos is," Danny blurted out. "If Trinity helps me, I'll tell you where Chaos is."

"Why should we trust you?" Basil snarled, blocking the stairway up.

They had no reason to trust him, Danny knew that. Swallowing, Danny decided in order to get what he needed, he had to give first. "Chaos is at the police station, locked in a cell on the main floor. Now can I see Trinity?" He caught her standing at the top of the stairs and instantly pushed Basil aside and made a run for her. "You have to help

me find— whoa...you're pregnant!"

Then Basil appeared before him, lifting him off his feet.

"It's okay, Basil." Trinity laid her hand on his shoulder and slowly, Basil lowered Danny to his feet. "He's telling the truth."

"You can read my mind?" Danny asked, straightening his shirt out and giving Basil a heated look.

"When it's screaming at me, yeah." She looked over at Basil. "Go, get Chaos. Do what you have to do to stop the darkness."

Basil cupped her face in his hands, kissed her once on the lips, then turned to Dante. "Grab the others and let's roll."

"Come with me," Trinity said to Danny and motioned for him to follow her.

He did, and as they entered a small apartment he couldn't stop the questions. "That's why no one has seen you for months. You've been hiding because you're pregnant?"

"Do you have anything of your girlfriend's that I could use to find her?" Trinity asked, avoiding his questions.

Remembering the flower in his pocket, Danny pulled it out and handed it to Trinity. "This was the last thing she touched. Can you pick her up from this?"

Trinity took the bud, holding it in her hand. She closed her eyes, drew in a deep breath. "It's faint." She drew in another deep breath. "I only get a sense of her. She's driving...fast...on Highway...Forty-five. Oh—" She buckled over, grabbing her belly and dropped the rose.

"You okay?"

Trinity nodded. "Just a twinge." She looked up at Danny. "If you hurry, you might be able to catch up to her."

"Thank you. Thank you so much." He picked up the rose, ready to tuck it back in his pocket when he thought otherwise. "You should keep this. Maybe you'll be able to sense her a little more when I'm gone. Do you have a cell phone I could borrow? In case I need more help."

"Table." She winced, then started panting.

"You sure you're okay?"

She nodded, then pointed to the door. "Take my car. Keys are by the door. White car in the parking lot."

"Thank you," he said again, then grabbed the keys and ran. He had to find Starla.



"We take him out here and now," Basil stated as he stood before the entrance to the police headquarters. Dante stood at his right and he could feel his energy vibrating inside of him. Dante had a stake in wanting to take Chaos out just as much as Basil did, and Basil knew it was going to be a fight as to who would be the one to actually shove the dagger into Chaos' heart.

But Basil also knew he had the advantage. He proved it by vanishing and sending himself into the office area where the cells were kept.

He instantly knew it to be a mistake.

Before him were twenty beasts in a variety of shape and form, including vampire and werewolf.

He heard Dante coming up behind him and before he could tell him to turn around and leave, he was attacked by two vampires. He saw the werewolves protecting Chaos and before the vamps could approach him, he vanished and reappeared in front of Chaos.

His eyes met Chaos' and he was ready to end the sorry bastard's life when he was sent flying. He slammed into the wall, falling onto the floor in a hard thump. He had no idea what had hit him but whatever it was, he wasn't about to let his guard down again. Getting to his feet he saw Dante surrounded by four vamps, teeth bared. "Get out of here, Dante," Basil screamed at him, running to his rescue.

Fists flew, on Dante's part and the vamps, before Basil could reach him. Grabbing the shirt of one, he flung him aside only to be attacked by another.

He was torn between helping his friend and going after Chaos.

He heard the sounds of fists hammering into flesh, grunts and groans and knew some of them came from Dante and some from his enemies.

"Basil." He heard Trinity's voice in his head as clearly as if she stood next to him. "*I need you now. It's time.*" The fist slammed into his jaw, knocking him back and dazing him momentarily. He had to get to her, now! "Retreat," he screamed at Dante.

"Basil."

Looking over, Basil saw Dante clutching his belly, blood seeping through his fingers right before he dropped to his knees.

Fury fueling him, he created a wind so strong it knocked everyone back, including Dante. Racing towards him, he scooped him in his arms, saw the gaping wound in his belly and drew in a deep breath. "This is going to hurt." He sent them both out of the police station and back to the Digital Domain.



Danny knew he was driving at a speed well past the dangerous zone. He didn't give a damn. What could happen to him? If he crashed, it wasn't like he would die from it. All he wanted was to find Starla and tell her how much he loved her. Seeing the truck in the distance, Danny thanked his enhanced vision and pressed the gas a little more. He wailed on his horn as he approached her truck, hoping she would hear him. Coming up beside her, he motioned for her to pull over and when she slowed her speed, he did as well.

He pulled in behind her when she came to a stop at the side of the road. Rushing from his vehicle, he couldn't wait to hold her.

"Danny? What the hell are you doing?"

"Trying to get you back. Oh, Starla, I was such an ass."

"Finally, you're seeing it." But she didn't smile when she said it.

"You're right, about everything. I was stupid, and I'm an idiot but when you pushed me my first instinct was to push back. I've never been good with confrontation. I love you," he blurted out, his heart on his sleeve.

She simply stared at him but didn't speak.

He felt his heart crack. "Did you hear that I said? I love you."

"I heard you."

It cracked a little more. "I've never told a woman I love her before." Still she said nothing. "Damn it, Starla! I already said I was wrong, what more do you want from me? Oh—I told my brother, Trinity and Basil where Chaos is. They should have him by now."

"Danny—"

"He means nothing to me. I realize that now, well, after you left. I don't care what happens to him—"

"Danny—"

"Let me finish. The thought of losing you tore me up. I can't lose you, Starla. You're the only person who has cared for me in twenty years, the only person who understood me, who showed me what life could really be like."

"Danny—"

"I'll do anything you ask just please, don't leave me."

"Your skin is boiling," she shouted at him, then grabbed his shirt and yanked him towards the truck.

It was then that he felt it, that he noticed the sun was burning his skin. He'd driven past the darkness barrier and hadn't given one

thought to what would happen to him if he stepped out into the sun. All he'd wanted was Starla.

"Jesus, look at you. Your skin is covered in blisters."

And boy did they sting. "I don't care." He took her face in his burning hand and smiled at her. "I love you."

She laughed, shook her head and shoved him into the truck. "I love you too, you damn fool. We need to get you back before you burn up."

"I love you," he said again, letting the words cool his burns and filling him with love.

Laughing, Starla started them rolling back towards Jacob's Cove. "You are insane. You know that?"

"I know. Tell me, tell me again."

She stopped the truck and turned to face him. "I love you, Danny. With all my heart and soul."

Grabbing her face in his hands, he plastered his mouth over hers. Wincing with the pain.

"Fool," she laughed again, then shifted into gear and drove off.

The cell phone in his pocket startled him and he remembered he'd taken Trinity's before he left. Carefully, he slipped it from his pocket, bursting a few of the blisters on his hand as he answered it. "Hello?"

"Danny Vega?"

"Yeah. Who is this?"

"Jonah Moore. I'm a friend of your brother's. Trinity told me how I could get a hold of you. Dante's been hurt. He's not doing well. You need to come back."

"What?" he sat a little straighter. "What do you mean hurt?"

"He and Basil were attacked trying to get Chaos and one of the attackers stabbed Dante in the gut. It doesn't look good. We're at the hospital. He's asked for you. I don't know if you care or not but—"

He disconnected the phone and turned to Starla. "Dante's dying. We have to hurry."

CHAPTER 27

Basil held Trinity's hand as she panted through her contraction. They'd wasted no time getting both her and Dante to the hospital, and while he was sitting with Trinity, Cooper and Raven were tending to Dante beside them on another bed.

It didn't look good for him.

Dante had a massive wound in his gut that Cooper said perforated his kidney, and spleen. He was losing massive amounts of blood and Cooper had no hope of saving him.

Basil could hear Gypsy weeping in the sitting area where Jonah was trying to comfort her.

He was going to lose his best man all because of Chaos. And he'd still gotten away.

Basil was tired of losing.

"Oh God, my water just broke!" Trinity exclaimed.

"Cooper!" Basil called out and had Raven racing to them instead. She had blood on her hands and clothing.

"I can't be in two places, Basil," Cooper shouted back from the next bed where he worked on Dante. "Raven can help you better than I can. I've never delivered a baby in my life."

"You're a doctor!" Basil proclaimed, holding Trinity's hand while Raven washed up behind him.

"I was a medical examiner. Raven can help you." Cooper retorted while busily trying to contain the blood loss from Dante. "I need help. Gypsy, Jonah. I need you now!"

"Okay, Trinity, I'm going to have a look and see how you're progressing," Raven reassured Trinity as she set her feet in the stirrups.

"How many babies have you helped deliver?" Basil wanted to know, keeping an eye on everything she did.

"More than I can count. I did part of my internship in the maternity ward. Oh boy," she gasped as she looked up from between Trinity's legs. "The baby is crowning."

"What does that mean?" Basil asked, clutching Trinity's hand.

"The baby is coming," Trinity cried out, bearing down.

"Don't push just yet, Trinity. Breathe through the next contraction okay."

"I...can't..."

"Yes, you can. Basil, help her breathe. I need to get supplies." Raven rushed from the room just as Jonah and Gypsy rushed in.

"Dante! Oh God! There's so much blood," Gypsy gasped, clutching onto Dante's hand.

"Jesus," Jonah said and swiped a hand across his mouth.

"I need you to apply pressure to the wound," Cooper instructed of Gypsy.

"I need to push," Trinity grunted, sitting up and bearing down.

"No, no, just breathe, love. Just breathe. Like this." Basil panted in the way Raven had instructed them when she'd taught them natural delivery techniques. "Just breathe."

"Trin?" Jonah took her hand in his, gave it a squeeze. "You're doing great. Just do what Basil say's. Okay?"

"It hurts," Trinity sobbed, falling back against the pillow.

"I know, my love. I know." Feeling her pain, Basil stroked the cool cloth over her forehead wishing he could take the pain for her.

"I'm losing him," Cooper shouted and Gypsy began to wail even more.



Starla came to an abrupt stop at the entrance of the hospital and before she'd shut the truck off, Danny leapt from the vehicle and ran for the front entrance. Throwing the doors open he heard the screams. He darted in the area they came from, following the scent of blood in the air.

It was Dante's blood.

"Just breathe, Trinity."

"I am breathing."

Danny burst through the curtains and stopped short at seeing his twin lying on the white hospital bed, red blood covering his body. From the corner of his eye he saw Trinity and Basil to his left.

"I can't save him," Cooper exclaimed, wiping his brow with his forearm. "He's lost too much blood."

"Get away from him." Danny raced to his brother's side, pushing Cooper out of the way. "Dante, oh Jesus, Dante. What the hell happened?"

"We were ambushed when we arrived at the police station. You set us up," Basil shouted at Danny and if Trinity hadn't cried out just then, Danny knew Basil would have attacked him.

"I didn't set you up. He was alone when I left. Damn it, Dante. Do not leave me." He heard Starla come up beside him and turned to her, tears clouding his eyes. "I can't lose him. I won't lose him."

"I'm sorry, Danny. I really am." She stroked his arm with her hand giving him a sympathetic look.

He'd fucked so much up in his life and when he'd had the opportunity to change things, he hadn't...and now it was going to be too late.

Or was it.

A dark haired woman raced into the room, startling him.

"Okay, Trinity, I need you to bear down and push. Take a deep breath, then push real hard. Basil will count to ten and then release your breath, Trinity and relax. Okay?"

Danny looked at his brother, looked over at the commotion going on beside him, and to Gypsy who was weeping horribly, and knew what he had to do.

"I have to do this. It's not his time yet." He felt Starla clamp on to his arm and looking over at her, she nodded.

Taking a deep breath, Danny bore his fangs...then sunk them into his brother's neck. He heard the gasps as he drank the blood of his twin, taking him into his body and feeling their blood mix. They had once lived off of the same blood inside their mother's womb and, now, in life, they would forever be eternally linked. When he felt Dante's heart slow he pulled his teeth away, ripped open the vein on his wrist and shoved it to Dante's mouth.

"It's coming!" He heard shouted from beside him.

He felt his brother's teeth clamp in as the blood slid down his throat, and when Dante began to pull at his vein, Danny didn't care if Dante drank him dry.

He heard Trinity screaming, heard the dark haired woman exclaim the baby was out, and Basil began to cry. Danny watched with blurry eyes while his brother drank from his vein.

"Your daughter is beautiful, Trinity." He heard someone say.

"Look at her, Basil. She is beautiful."

The baby cried and Danny felt his legs give.

"Danny." Catching him, Starla held him up, and tried to pry Dante's mouth from Danny's arm. "You can't give him more."

"He needs more," Danny spoke softly, feeling as if everything inside of him was drained.

"You gave him plenty."

"Let's get you three to a private room." He heard the woman say and vaguely saw Basil and Cooper wheel Trinity's bed out of the room, Jonah following.

"Dante? He's waking up!" Gypsy laughed. "Dante, come back to me."

Danny pushed to his feet, and saw his brothers eyes open.

They were slowly turning yellow.

"You're alive," Danny laughed, stroking a hand over his brother's brow. "I had to do it, bro. I couldn't lose you. There's been enough loss because of Chaos. I couldn't lose you now, not when I finally got you back."

"Danny?"

"Yeah, it's me, bro."

"I feel...weird."

Danny drew in a deep breath and went for it. "I know. It'll pass. I had to turn you, bro. You were dying. I couldn't let you go. I'm sorry, but you need to be here. You're too good of a man to die. You always knew what you wanted and you knew just how to get it. You saved countless numbers of people in your life, you deserve to live."

"I'm...a vamp?" Dante mumbled, glancing from Gypsy to Danny.

"Yeah."

"Okay." He closed his eyes and drifted off.

"If he hates me for what I did, I can deal with it. But he deserves to be here, more than I do. I had to do it."

Gypsy walked up to him and, taking him in her arms, hugged him. "Thank you."

He felt awkward as he gave her a pat on the back. And when she released him, he left the room and headed outside. He needed some air.

"That was a tough decision for you to make."

He turned as Starla came up beside him. "The hardest. I couldn't lose him, but mostly, the world couldn't lose him. Dante is a good man, the type of man to walk into a burning building to save a cat—oh crap, Killer! We have to go back for him."

"We will." She took Danny's face in her hands. "I don't know how Dante will feel when he wakes up and realizes what he is, but I know you'll be there to help him through this. You are a good man, Danny, and I truly love you. Any man that befriends a mangy cat can't be all bad," she laughed, then touched her lips to his.

He hissed with the burning sensation of the blisters popping on his face.

She pulled away, let out a long breath. Come on, let's get you fixed up. You damn fool."

Laughing, Danny pulled her into his arms.

Finally, his life was where it was supposed to be.

"He's awake," Gypsy called out to them.

He hoped.

CHAPTER 28

He'd never been so nervous before in his life. Not even when he'd given his life to Chaos. Sure, he'd been scared, but nervousness didn't play a part. He'd known what he was doing and was a willing party. Right now, standing outside the curtain that led to his brother's room, Danny had no idea what to expect. Would Dante reject him now, after he'd turned him? Would he hate him? Danny was pretty sure he would.

"Go on now." Starla gave him a tiny shove forward.

"Are you sure you won't come in with me?" They'd been through this argument already and he knew what the outcome of his question would be this time.

"This is between you and your brother, but I'll be right here when you need me." She planted a kiss to his lips hard enough to make a smacking noise before shoving him through the curtain.

Danny stood there, staring at his brother and was unable to move any closer. Fear had him frozen to his spot.

"I'll leave the two of you alone." Leaning down, Gypsy kissed Dante once, then once more, before sending Danny a grin as she left the room.

Why was everyone deserting him?

"What happened to your face?"

Having forgotten the blisters, Danny reached up, felt the burn and frowned. "I thought I would try sun tanning." *What a lame thing to say.*

"You do know that's bad for vampires, right?"

Swallowing the lump in his throat all Danny did was nod.

"Cat got your tongue?"

Danny flicked his head from side to side in a nervous reply. Still he said nothing.

Dante sat up a little more in the bed, keeping his eyes on Danny. "Seriously. What happened to you?"

Talk you fool. "I went after Starla. I couldn't lose her, you know. She loves me and...I love her." He laughed awkwardly. "She'd made it past the darkness barrier when I caught up to her. I never thought about the sun when I climbed out of my car to run to her."

"Love will do that. Scramble our brains." Smiling, Dante showed off his freshly attained fangs.

It looked odd, seeing his twin with fangs and the yellow eyes. It was going to take some getting used to. "Yeah." And he wondered if the scrambled brain comment was reflective of what Danny had done to Dante to save him. "You were going to die," Danny blurted out, then let the air out he'd been holding. "I couldn't let you die."

"So you turned me?"

Danny's chin came up, his defenses ready. "Yeah I turned you and I'm sorry if that pisses you off but, what was I supposed to do, let you die. It was my fault you got hurt in the first place."

"How do you figure that?"

Danny shoved both hands into the pockets of his jeans. "I told you where Chaos was staying."

"Did you know he had help? That his buddies had let him out of jail?"

"Hell no! You think I set you up? I told you before it wasn't. I had no idea they would find him. He was alone when I left him."

"Then why are you to blame?"

Danny opened his mouth, then closed it.

"Exactly. Remember when we were ten and you got into the fight with Richie Arbuckle? He beat the snot out of you but you held your own. When I found out what you were doing, I tried to help and you wouldn't let me."

"Because it would have made me look like a wimp, needing my brother to fight my fights."

"Right. Do you remember what I did after the fight was broken up?"

Danny thought back to that day. Richie had been teasing him all day, mocking him because Danny couldn't remember the state he lived in. So when school was over, Danny had ran after Richie and had shoved him hard enough to make him fall to his knees on the cement sidewalk. Richie had been pissed and he'd shown Danny by using his fists on his face. And...he remembered what Dante had done when the fight had been over. He'd walked up to Richie and with utter calmness, plowed his fist into Richie's face. In turn, Richie had done the same to Dante. When Dante had escaped, he'd caught up with Danny and had insisted they lie to their parents and say the two of them got into a fight. Because Dante knew if their parents knew Danny had been fighting, again, he would be severely grounded.

"Yeah, I remember."

"That's what brothers do. They protect each other. I know what you did you did for me. To save me, and for that, I am eternally grateful."

Stunned, Danny stared at his brother. He wasn't mad. "I couldn't let you die."

"I know."

"You deserved to live. More than me and if I could have given my life—"

"Whoa there. Back up a step. What do you mean I deserve to live more than you?"

Danny looked down at his worn sneakers as he spoke. "You've always been the good son, the good brother. And when you grew up, you became the cop you always said you wanted to be and you helped people. All I ever did was cause trouble and get into fights."

"And you think because of that I have more of a reason to live than you?"

Danny looked up. "Well...yeah."

"You're a butthead."

Danny's temper spiked. "Screw you!"

Dante slipped his feet from over the edge of the bed and stood to meet his brother's eyes. "We're equal, Danny, in every way. You don't think I got into trouble in my youth? Did you forget that mom and dad were always on my case about my grades? I hated school."

"Well, who doesn't?" Danny shrugged.

"After you left, I was trouble. I was rebellious, angry and a down-right handful to deal with. I'm no better than you and if you ever say differently again I'll knock your head off your shoulders."

Danny's brow lifted and he fought the grin threatening to slip free. Then Dante held his hand out and Danny took it.

"We're equal." Dante pulled Danny in for a super bear hug. "We always have been." Releasing Danny, Dante slugged his arm. "Remember that."

Danny rubbed his arm, smiling. "What do you think mom and dad will say?"

Dante sat back down on the bed, shrugging. "It's going to be a tough one to explain but we'll manage."

"I suppose so." Danny could only hope their parents didn't disown them both.

"You know Lexi will never let us live this down. She's going to have some snide comment about us always doing things together and not having a mind of our own."

"Yeah..." he sighed, hoping his sister would talk to him after twenty years of believing him to be dead.

"Not to worry. If she gets out of hand we'll just turn her into a vamp and be done with it." Danny's eyes flew open wide and Dante laughed. "I'm just kidding. So, are we cool?"

"We're cool." Now everything was right in his world.



Trinity looked down at the tiny bundle in her arms and into the pink face of her daughter and felt her heart swell with love. Beside her, Basil rested his head on her shoulder and had one hand resting on their daughter's tiny body.

"She is perfect, isn't she?"

"She truly is." He lifted his head and kissed her softly on the mouth. "You're perfect."

"That was the hardest thing I have ever done," Trinity said, then kissed her daughter's tiny head covered in a thick sheen of black hair. "But it was all worth it. Welcome to the world, Felicity Rose."

"My only wish for her is that she will grow to see the sunlight."

She glanced over at Basil and felt his sorrow. "You did what had to be done, Basil. If you'd have gone after Chaos, Dante would have died."

"And now he's one of us. What do you think he'll think of that when he wakes?"

"Danny did it out of love and I think Dante will feel that. Danny's one of us now. His connection to Chaos has been broken."

Basil tilted his head. "You sound like you actually like the kid."

Trinity smiled. "He has his charm. Love always changes a person, and Danny finally found what he needed. He and Starla be good for each other."

"Life is pretty good right now, despite Chaos being free again."

"We'll get him." She kissed her daughter's head. "Right now I want to bask in the joy of being a mom. Wow!" She blew out a long breath.

"You're a mommy." Basil tucked her hair behind her ear and kissed her forehead.

"And you're a daddy." She touched a hand to his face.

Both were startled when a flash of light illuminated the room. As their heads turned to the direction it came from, they saw the queen as she stood before them.

"Mother!" Basil smiled a wide grin. "Come to see your grand-child?"

"I've come for my granddaughter."

"Pardon me?"

Trinity clasped her daughter tightly in her arms. "What did you say?"

Then queen stepped up to the bed, and a thin piece of paper floated from the ceiling to land on Trinity's legs. "Per our agreement and your signed statement, I have come for what is mine."

She clutched Felicity a little tighter. "No, no this is not happening."

Basil stood, putting a protective arm over his daughter. "Do not come near her."

Trinity gasped as Basil was hurled aside, falling hard against the wall a few feet away. "No, no, this wasn't what I agreed to. I said you could have—"

"Everything, Take it all, you told me, and so I shall."

Trinity felt her arms being pride apart despite her effort to cling to her child. "No, no, please, stop, stop. Basil!" she cried out for help.

He lunged at his mother only to be knocked back by an invisible force.

"I will care for her and love as if she were my own."

Trinity sat helplessly as her child was pulled from her arms and into the queen's. "Please, take my powers, I don't want them. I don't need them. Just please, don't take my baby."

"You knew," Basil barked as he stood on wobbly legs. "When she came to you to ask for help, you knew she was with child."

"Yes," Rajana chanted. "I knew the instant she entered the sanctuary that she was with child. When she pleaded with me to save her friend, agreeing to give me everything, I seized the opportunity. I only had you for a short time, my son. This precious child is my second chance."

She vanished and Trinity screamed.

"My baby!"

She fell into Basil's arms, weeping.

Biography

Raised on a rural farm in Saskatchewan, Shiela Stewart relied on her vivid imagination to fill her days. Never did she realize that her need to tell a story would someday lead to becoming a published romance author. In the fall of two thousand and six, Shiela published her very first book and hasn't stopped since.

When not writing, Shiela spends time with the love of her life, William and their three children. She has a strong affection for animals which is evident in the five cats, one dog, three turtles and ten fish she owns. Some of her passions aside from writing are drawing and painting and proudly displays her artwork in murals in her home.

Her favorite time of day is sunset and loves to stargaze.

Other Books by Shiela Stewart

Discovery in Passion: Passion Series Book 1

Escape in Passion: Passion Series Book 2

Mercy in Passion: Passion Series Book 3

Seducing the Darkness: Darkness Series Book 1

Desiring the Darkness: Darkness Series Book 2

Embracing the Darkness: Darkness Series Book 3

Charming the Darkness: Darkness Series Book 4

Tempting the Darkness: Darkness Series Book 5

Penetrating the Darkness: Darkness Series Book 6

Consuming the Darkness: Darkness Series Book 7

Surviving the Darkness: Darkness Series Book 8